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## José Loureiro

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### O idílio habitual

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#### The usual idyll

About the star c1327kb nothing is known, other than that it casts a dim light, barely visible; like an old painting lying in a corner, waiting for an attentive interlocutor. About the cuckoo, on the other hand, it is known that it lives an enviable life, deserving of permanent record and advertising, should a detail of such an idyll go unnoticed.

As a character, the cuckoo is a classic of universal literature. As a theme, it is inexhaustible. The cuckoo is not a bird, it is a fatality.

When one says that the cuckoo is not a bird, it is implied that the words “cuckoo” and “fatality” are interchangeable. Words have different degrees of interchangeability. The word “cuckoo” is interchangeable with the word “eleven”.

Eleven thrives. Eleven does not capitulate. Eleven leaps from the heights in a nosedive to peck at the fleshiest head crown. Eleven demands its share. Eleven is lethal. The genealogy of eleven is fixed and consensual: son of ten, sets eight on the right path, and has ramifications in 1, 2, 3, 4, 1788, and 14. Eleven, taken to the guillotine in order to be decapitated, retracts its head inwards and escapes by a nose. Eleven torments the poor worm before eating it. Eleven perseveres. Eleven knows who the most important person in the room is. Eleven worships the right eleven. The right eleven varies. Eleven goes to the opposite side of the table to greet the right eleven in an obsequious manner. Sometimes, at the same table, both the right eleven and the not exactly right eleven are seated, which triggers anxiety and confusion in eleven. Eleven may never find the right eleven; but if it does, it will not leave, delineating a security perimeter with menacing eyes, a sign that no one should come closer. Eleven sits at the most plentiful table and marks the lobster with the sign of the cross. Eleven keeps a detailed and constantly updated multimedia archive of all the crustaceans it fustigated, shattered, sucked, licked and spat out. The universe of elevens follows the decimal system: cutting-edge eleven, eleven, half eleven, a quarter of eleven, eleven apprentice, awful eleven, infra-eleven, eleven bearing a suit of lights, tricky eleven, gourmet eleven; whether it increases or decreases in importance is irrelevant: an eleven is an eleven. A talented equilibrist, eleven turns around going forward and changes direction—in the convenient azimuthal directions—, without losing its footing. Eleven's case fits the Fernão Ferro syndrome: there is no way to avoid it when getting to a decent place. Eleven finds the light annoyingly dim, and the size of the letters spelling out its name unexplainably small. The past being a distant nebula it ignores, and present being naturally confusing, eleven developed a perception disorder that convinces it of being ahead of its time, despite not knowing exactly what such time is. In eleven's mind, it goes far ahead, and reality, lagging

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behind, struggles to keep pace with it. Eleven regurgitates a substance with indeterminate colouring and consistency. Such matter flows into a deep and turbid tank which no one is able to empty: because the arm is too short, or because there is no way to touch the drain. In the first pause in an anodyne conversation about peanuts, eleven seizes the opportunity to flaunt its newest tricks; which, someday, compiled and added to the older tricks, will give rise to the complete works of eleven, in several tomes and with a discount. Eleven is tiresome. Eleven's smile is a badly sealed, honey-dripping faucet. Eleven shouts "Cuckoo," but if asked what it does, it quickly raises a wing and declares to be a polyglot. Eleven learns everything by ear and is a virtuoso of the dented jingle bell. Eleven has a long résumé of accumulated trifles; therefore, eleven, the real one, never signs just eleven. There is no memory of eleven having ever formed a thought of its own about a simple stack of gravel. Eleven is a prodigious accumulator of despicable quotes on gravel. Eleven cheats the game.

Though not susceptible to the anguishes brought out by thorough introspection, the kind that grinds your guts—which it scares away like one would an intolerable spiritual weakness that dulls the energy and will necessary for great undertakings—, in the rare moments when it looks at itself on the mirror, which also befalls it, eleven is aware of its own limitations. Its beak will always articulate the same twin pair of monosyllables in a paced, monotonous, lacklustre rhythm. But the sadness it feels, which usually arises in melancholic days full of drizzle that soaks it to the bone, is quickly overcome by the finding of an irreproachable pragmatism: the fruitless time wasted perfecting its call can be spent in a cunning manner and with more substantial results. This does not mean that eleven has no principles. The first principle, the most demanding, basilar one, and in truth the only that counts and that it never neglects, is not to build its own nest; it despises the minuteness of such delicate and patient carpentry craft: if it must be done, others should do it. Eleven appropriates the nearest nest, naturally, pushing its contents with murderous efficiency. Eleven takes a liking to it, and thus hops from nest to nest, constantly seeking a better view. The young are left here and there to mature. The most tuneful ones are promised to one day become part of the great eleven choir.

It was once offered an occupation that fit its modest qualifications: when the hour stroke, it appeared through a hole to exhibit its artistry. They thought they could distract it that way, diverting it from a greater destiny which, at heart, it predicted to be possible. Excluding the silly posture it knew it was exhibiting, eleven never again allowed itself to be constrained, and, not being a fool, quite the contrary, it realised once and for all that true power lay in the antipodes of refined chant. With unusual determination and clairvoyance, which are only within the elevens' reach, it realised that constantly vocalising the cuckoo's call, with no set time or place, could not only lead it to become president of some society, but also, in the meantime, to pocket the nightingale—the never openly confessed nemesis, which, like a curse, relentlessly visits and torments it in sleepless nights. Consummate stylist of the monochordic hoot, enchanting ad nauseam, it enacted a true revolution by transposing it into an elastic elucubration, adaptable to any circumstance. Since then, eleven lives in a relative solace, only having to worry about other elevens, which is not contemptible. Knowing it better than anyone else, and perhaps for such reason, eleven lives obsessed with its place in the elevens' hierarchy, and rightly so: in such a viscous environment, coming from above or from below, the stingiest and most treacherous blows originate. It is a ceaseless toil, and eleven reaches the end of the day bloodless; and then starts all over the following day, intrepid as ever. Eleven does not go away.

A comfortable life, a legitimate aspiration of eleven's, is not guaranteed. Eleven is under pressure, a pressure which, if not well-managed, may lead it to ruin, or—a yet worse fate—back to the sombre hole from which it alacritously emerged into the world in the distant year of 1893.

Eleven, after being embalmed, is awarded the great cross of the order of the ever-lasting contemporary.

## Biography

José Loureiro was born in Mangualde in 1961.

He lives and works in Lisbon.

He highlights two literary works as key to his artistic development: the poem *Deslumbramentos* (Fascinations) from *O Livro de Cesário Verde*, by Cesário Verde; and the chapter from *War and Peace*, by Leo Tolstói, in which the battle of Borodino is narrated.

At the moment, all of his life revolves around four words: priolo, filament, rim and still synapse.