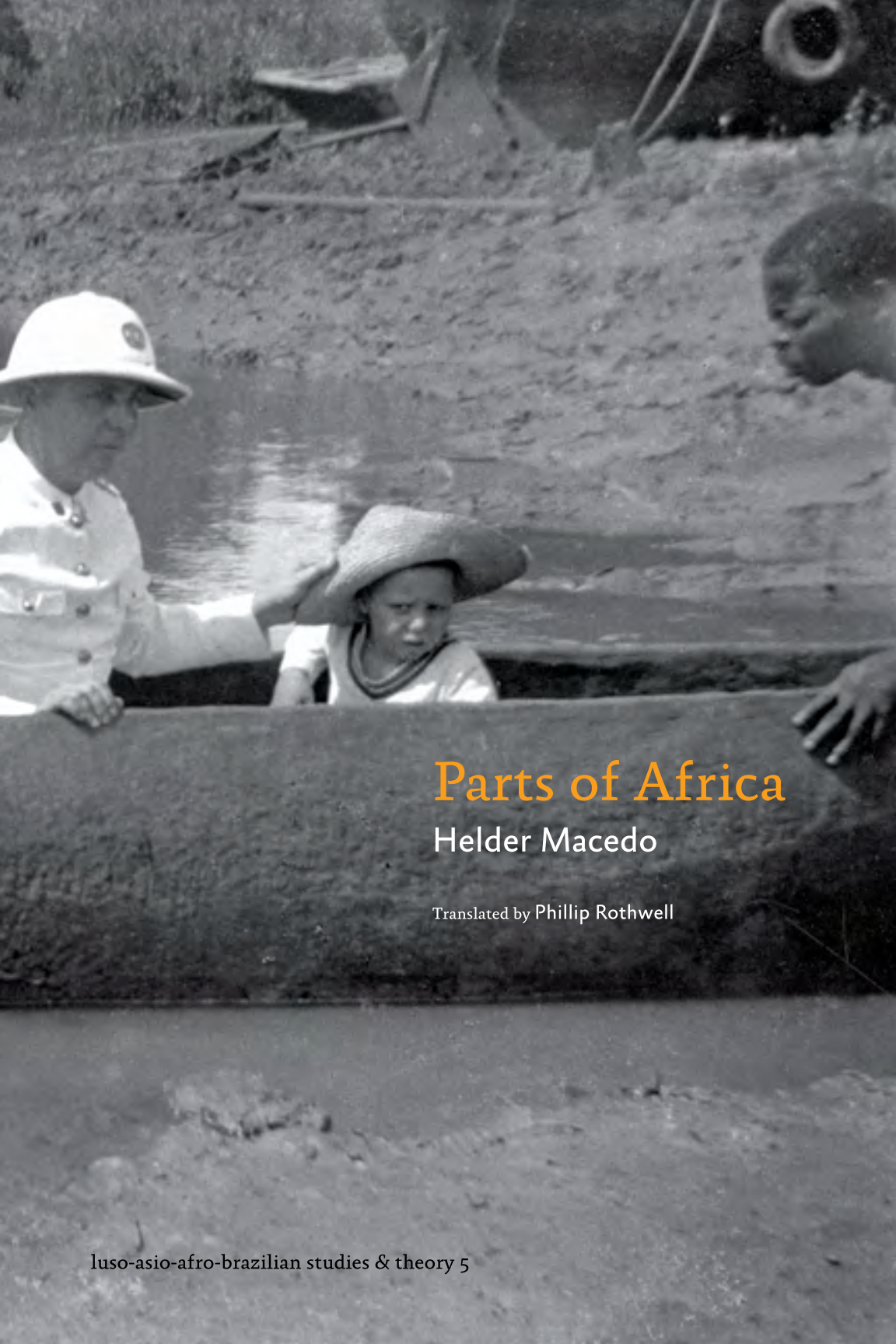




Parts of Africa

Helder Macedo

Translated by Phillip Rothwell

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Helder Macedo

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Cover photo: Helder Macedo, the infant on the right,
crossing the Zambezi River, Mozambique, with family in 1937.

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Time has its order already known.
The world does not.

Luís de Camões

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Introduction:

“Literary Legacies and Postcolonial Reconciliations”

Phillip Rothwell, University of Oxford

Of all the modern European colonial projects, the Portuguese Empire lasted the longest. Its history stretched well over five centuries. Its territory over four continents. When King John I of Portugal led the conquest of C  uta in 1415, he initiated an imperial enterprise that would only come to a definitive end in 1999, when Portugal relinquished control of Macau to the People’s Republic of China.

Throughout its history, the geographical focus of the Portuguese Empire shifted around. The fifteenth-century impetus to find a sea-route to India in order to cut the price paid for spices hitherto imported by land, culminated in Vasco da Gama’s arrival in Calicut in 1498. The East was then the imperial focus. The search for that sea route yielded Portuguese contact with various parts of Africa—initially viewed as staging posts on a gradually expanding path toward India.

Another byproduct of that path was the discovery of Brazil in 1500, by Pedro   lvares Cabral, who was blown off course as he sought to follow in da Gama’s wake and inadvertently made landfall in what would become South America. Eventually, the South American territory took from the East the mantle of being the jewel in the Portuguese imperial crown, first as a sugar plantation colony, and then for its mineral wealth. During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Brazil became the primary destination for slaves, transported by the Portuguese from their African colonies on an unprecedented scale. It developed into the increasingly important economic cornerstone of the Portuguese Empire. Brazil’s imperial primacy became a physical reality between 1808 and 1821 when, as a result of the

Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, the Portuguese royal court took up residence in Rio de Janeiro.

The declaration of Brazilian independence in 1822 left a void at the heart of the Portuguese imaginary—a void Portugal sought to fill by recalibrating its imperial focus toward Africa, no longer as a stepping stone to India or as a transatlantic source of slaves, but as colonies on which the nation's definition would somehow come to rest.

As British naval dominance in the nineteenth century rewrote the rules of European imperialism, Portugal's interests in Africa were increasingly threatened by the behavior of its "oldest ally." In 1890, Britain issued an ultimatum that curtailed Portuguese designs on African territory both empires claimed as their own. The Portuguese Crown's rapid capitulation to British demands is often read as sowing the seeds that led to the rise of the Portuguese Republic. In 1908, King Carlos I and his heir Luís Filipe were assassinated. Two and half years later, the monarchy was overthrown. Whether or not the events surrounding the ultimatum were a cause of the decline of the Most Serene House of Braganza, they certainly changed how Portugal viewed its African colonies. There was a more concerted effort to systematize what had hitherto been rather haphazard control over Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe.

In Portugal itself, the Republic would be ousted in 1926 and give way to the New State, a corporatist form of government run by one of the most unlikely and enduring dictators of the twentieth century, the economics professor, António de Oliveira Salazar. Initially heralded as a savior who overcame economic and political instability, Salazar's four decades in power froze Portugal in time. Effectively taking hold of the reigns of government in the late 1920s, he kept the Portuguese out of the Second World War and then failed to learn one of the key lessons of that war—namely that the time of direct colonialism was at an end. His intransigence in the face of a growing demand for independence in the African colonies led to the Portuguese colonial wars in the 1960s, and the subsequent toppling on April 25 1974 of the dictatorial regime in what became known as the Carnation Revolution. In the immediate aftermath of that revolution, Portugal's five African colonies gained independence and Portugal, after a period of turbulent transition, became a fully-fledged liberal democracy that looked to Europe for its future.

Throughout its history, Portugal has produced writers who bore witness to, celebrated and critiqued the nation's imperial course. The greatest among

them often lived beyond Portugal's frontiers. Their external gaze equipped them to portray a Portuguese imaginary full of overseas wonders, tensions, and contradictions. Literary works in what appeared to be Portugal's imperial heyday, like Luís de Camões's 1572 epic *The Lusiads* and Fernão Mendes Pinto's 1614 *Peregrination* drew on their authors' experiences of the empire in order to narrate what it meant to be Portuguese. The former relates Vasco da Gama's journey to India, drawing heavily and retrospectively on Camões's own military travels through the East in the subsequent century. It offers an ambivalent, while glorious portrait of a Portuguese Empire that went well beyond what was once thought imaginable but that seemed to be losing its moral compass. The posthumously published *Peregrination* was one of the most popular books in seventeenth-century Europe, and provides a very humorous view of Mendes Pinto's travels through the East, in which the Portuguese often come up short.

In the nineteenth century, Almeida Garrett, a politician and poet was another example among many who brought his experience of living abroad (in exile because of his political beliefs) to bear on his portrayal of a Portugal living in the imperial past. Likewise, Eça de Queirós spent many years in England and then Paris, where he wrote some of the greatest novels in the Portuguese language, often damning critiques of the Portuguese society of his contemporaries.

In the twentieth century, Fernando Pessoa would emerge as one of the world's greatest modernist poets, having been brought up in South Africa before he moved to Portugal, where he wrote copiously and in multiple personalities, often around the fraught issue of Portuguese national identity—an identity he insists must rest on cultural rather than military prowess. He died on November 30 1935.

As fate would have it, on the same day in South Africa, Helder Macedo was born. The son of a Portuguese colonial administrator, he would spend his infancy in Mozambique before moving round various parts of what remained of the Portuguese Empire. His maternal grandfather had been a decorated military officer, serving the Republic. As Macedo grew up and became increasingly uneasy with what colonialism meant, his opposition to the Salazar regime, which had ruled Portugal and its empire since before he was born, became more pronounced. He went into exile in London where he worked for the BBC. In 1974, the year of the Carnation Revolution, he completed at King's College, London, a doctorate on Cesário Verde—a

nineteenth-century poet whose *The Feeling of a Westerner* is also published in this laabst.net series. He began lecturing in Portuguese Studies and soon established himself as one of the world's leading scholars of Portuguese literature, with ground-breaking work on the Renaissance writers Bernadim Ribeiro and Camões. His scholarship had a profound impact on the field. In it, he invariably teases out patterns, decodes symbols, and illuminates conceptual analogies cutting across authors and epochs. He always foregrounds the texts of the writers with whom he dialogues, in a way that is subtly informed by both historical and psychoanalytical processes.

In 1979, Macedo was made Secretary of State for Culture in the short-lived transitional government of Portugal's only woman prime minister to date, Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo. The country was still learning to live as a democracy following the Carnation Revolution. While a minister, among other things, he attended the funeral of Angola's first president, Agostinho Neto.

Having tried his hand at a role in government, Macedo returned full time to academia. In 1981, he considered taking up a chair in Portuguese Studies at Harvard University where he taught for a semester, including Comparative Literature courses, before returning to King's College to take up one of the most prestigious posts in the field, the Camoens Professorship. He retired from King's in 2004. His life in London, where he still lives, is key to understanding his gaze on Portugal. A network of Portuguese writers, painters and academics have passed through or lived in the British capital since Macedo moved there. Many went at his invitation. At the same time, Macedo was part of London intellectual and cultural society with its vibrant diversity of a postcolonial node. He counted among his friends Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, as well as Alan Sillitoe and Doris Lessing.

Throughout his life, Helder Macedo has written poetry. In 1957, he published his first volume, *Vesperal*. Subsequently, he would publish seven volumes of verse and six novels. His latest work, published in November 2015, and entitled *Romance*, is a fantasmatic narrative taking the form of poetry.

Attention has repeatedly been drawn to the impossibility of distinguishing between the multiple facets of Helder Macedo—the academic, the public intellectual, and the novelist. Nowhere is that more obvious than in his first published novel, *Parts of Africa*. It might be described as a type of memoir that ties together the various currents of Macedo's life—his intellectual interests, the reminiscences of his childhood in Africa, the troubled yet loving relationship he had with his father (an agent of colonialism), and

his progressive political commitments. But most all, *Parts of Africa* reveals Macedo's passion for and deep penetration in literature. The "memories" we read, while often drawn from the author's experiences and acquaintances, are fictionalized through a narrator whose reliability, at times, is questionable. The book is not, therefore, an autobiography. It is a novel that purposefully destabilizes the demarcations between fiction and real life. The narrator describes the novel as a mosaic—with various potentially interchangeable parts that taken as a whole form the narrative. That narrative draws on a multiplicity of literary styles. It includes the dense and often elliptical philosophical reflections of a narrator who captures the various stages of his own maturing process— an innocent child, then a rebellious adolescent, through to a more nuanced fifty-year-old. It also draws heavily on operatic form. The longest chapter (the fourteenth)—supposedly the transcription of a novel by one of the narrator's long-lost friends but perhaps the vestiges of an earlier novel Macedo never published—transposes the themes and structure of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* into a fast-paced drama about the oxymoronic impotent authoritarianism of the Salazar regime in the 1950s.

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Parts of Africa was one of the first postcolonial novels to emerge that tackled Portugal's empire as something to be consigned to the past. While it acknowledges the formative role of the colonial enterprise on post-1974 Portugal, it does not allow historical experience to overpower future trajectories because it reminds us that memories are fictions that may define us, but choices can always be made. It came out in Portugal in 1991 with Presença, a publisher run by Francisco Espadinha, one of Macedo's high-school contemporaries. Its Brazilian edition (following Brazil's then different spelling system and with slightly different syntax) was published in 1999. It has subsequently been translated into Italian and German. While relating a series of apparently disparate memories starting with Macedo's childhood in Mozambique and progressing to his inaugural lecture as Camoens chair, *Parts of Africa* condenses a plethora of textual allusions from the Portuguese canon. From its opening chapter, Bernadim Ribeiro, Machado de Assis, Cesário Verde, Almeida Garrett, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, José Régio, Pessoa and, of course, Camões (among many others) are omnipresent in echoes and disguised citations that are cleverly finessed by a literary master with a story to tell. Like many of his greatest literary forefathers, Macedo reflects from beyond Portugal on a perpetually confused

Portuguese identity, defined and undermined by an experience wrought by the contradiction of being a geographically small nation with an over-determining imperial history. Particularly under the New State, a national narrative that incoherently projected the country as a humble rural backwater at the center of one of the world's greatest empires was common currency. The New State did not make Portugal's empire coterminous with national identity—prior orders had established that link. It did, however, concentrate it, refining it to ridiculous heights that *Parts of Africa* interrogates with its reflections on the feudal underdevelopment of the Portuguese rural town of Moncorvo juxtaposed with the excesses and absurdities of an empire created “against the grain” in the outer reaches of Africa.

Published sixteen years after the revolution that heralded the end of the Portuguese Empire, one of the fundamental questions the novel raises is what happens to identity after empire is over? In *Parts of Africa*, in line with Macedo's academic thought, the author suggests the possibility and necessity of reconciling what seem to be opposite sides in Portugal's colonial enterprise. The fictionalized memoir is an attempt to continue a posthumous dialogue with his father—not as a means of writing over the colonial agent's dead body and finally winning the much rehearsed arguments that had characterized their relationship—but rather as a means of understanding how much the narrator—with his self-deprecating, posturing anticolonial stance—is a product of the very cultural and political heritage he opposed. *Parts of Africa*, then, is a postcolonial attempt to reconcile with that heritage.

Notes on the Translation

Translating a masterpiece as complex as *Parts of Africa* has been a challenge. Its *legato* structure, and use of rhetorical devices as well as its many literary allusions are hard to capture fully in English. I am grateful for the unfailing help of Ana Maria Martinho Gale, Luísa Campos, Suzette Macedo, and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro in helping me to understand the text's complexities. That said, any shortcomings in the translation are entirely my own.

In the seventeenth chapter quotes from Camões's sonnet "Some things happen that aren't believed" are taken from Richard Zenith's translation, *Sonnets and Other Poems* (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth: Center for Portuguese Studies, 2009); quotes from Pedro Álvares Cabral's letter from Brazil are taken from William Brooks Greenlee's translation, *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1938); and quotes from Josiah Blackmore's translation of the "Account of the Very Remarkable Loss of the Galleon S. João" in his edition of Charles Boxer's *The Tragic History of the Sea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) are used.

Parts of Africa

WHERE THE AUTHOR DISSOCIATES FROM HIS OWN SELF AND DENIES THE AIM OF HIS BOOK

Here I am, fifty-odd years old and on a sabbatical break, two things that have never happened to me before at the same time. That's how I was able to accept the hospitality of my good friend Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos, in his beautiful house, more cherished than used, between the mountains that never change and a sea that is never still. Except that, since it's spring and the sea is so far away, you just need to wander onto the terrace to realize that it's actually the mountains of Sintra that change from day to day and the Praia Grande sea that seems forever unchanging. You should never put too much faith in second-hand metaphors. In any case, my break will reach its end as soon as I get used to it and life... well, it's no good thinking about that. Poor Yorick. At least I have the consolation of having brought enough paper to send London and the Camões Chair to hell for a few months.

My philosophical contemplation of the countryside and blank sheets of paper has occasionally been complemented by visits in what used to be my parents' home to the gallery of shadows, a large corridor with walls almost completely covered by photographs reflecting, like a minimalist family chronicle, a good part of the colonial history of Portugal's last empire. In the now badly lit, unused office that leads off the corridor, lie heaps of reports, shelves full of law books with annotations in their margins, maps of Africa with colored circles, and other remnants of my father's public contribution to several parts of that history.

He died lucid, knowing he was dying, from one of those diseases that waste away muscle after muscle. He used to have the body of an athlete and loved the pomp of physical display. S., who saw in him the image of a father she had not found in her own, tried to cheer him up shortly before he died, reminding him of the courage he'd always shown in the most difficult situations. Already finding it difficult to speak and often giving up

mid-sentence, frustrated and impatient with himself, he replied almost effortlessly, almost with his clear voice of old: “It’s easy to be brave when the danger comes from outside. When it comes from within and you’re your own enemy, it’s harder.” He wasn’t a man given to metaphors and his style, of which Stendhal would have approved, was the quickest route between noun and verb. But that metaphor, he saved for his end.

I’m well aware that no one ever came back to existence by writing or being written, but there are shadows that our memory can imagine in half-open maps. The maps have now changed, place names have switched while names have been kept for changed places. So, I can change the names of those who used to exist in these places, events, family relations and friendships, weaving together the loose ends of several real and imagined lives, with true knots of fake ties. I’m no longer the one they would recognize as me and who I later must have become, in several parts and different ways, only recognizes them foggily in the distance where they melted, along with me, before me.

And now, having defined the absent boundaries of my lofty journey—once again a poet in his prose years, having announced through the relevant literary echoes, the true non-aim of my plural novels—I can begin, as is fitting, after the beginning.

FROM HAT TO MIGRAINES AND HOW TO GIVE DESTINY A PUSH

In the beginning, it was a place without time and a time without boundaries. I'll go back there now.

The place became time and the time enclosed itself at the juncture of the hat episode. "Bia, look..." Uncle Pedro gestured rather discretely to the hat in the gentleman's hand. "Now then, put your hat back on. It's getting chilly. I've already asked you to put it on."

It was a long September dusk, it was still hot, and she hadn't asked him. But, being a young lady from Odivelas (at a time when many teachers were still in the military, and when they didn't show up for class, a revolution in Lisbon was suspected), she quickly remembered the chivalric code after almost twenty years of colonial helmets and hair refreshed in the night fog. The ancient ritual of removing one's hat in vassalage had remained intact in the pompous metropolitan respectability of the late 1940s, at the door of the Universo Hotel (where Uncle Pedro always stood), at the end of Carmo Street, with its rest rooms in the front annex.

She was Bia to my father and for those closest to her. To everyone else, she was Beatriz, or *Senhora Dona* Beatriz—"without the Maria, please"—a name chosen by my Republican grandfather in one of his phases contaminated by neoplatonism, a mason with a russet beard and, like Camões, with an eye missing, lost in the Great War. "Maria has shades of the Integralist party, my dear daughter, never let them call you Maria Beatriz, apart from anything else, it's a pleonasm!" At least, that's how the story was told as a whispered tale between smiles complicit with the First Republic, or already in disbelief during the New State. He died of cancer and revolutionary frustration, flung to the outer reaches of the Congo District, where rumors abounded of cannibalistic outbreaks.

I must have been around five years old (we were still in Zambezia), and didn't really know what these were and no one explained them to me. But the two words twinned were enough to make me feel extremely sorry for my grandpa, so far away, always sat like in his picture, his left leg slightly apart, accentuating his regal stance, silver-topped walking stick, amidst cannibalistic outbreaks. I loved words and would apply those I didn't understand to see if the context would reveal their mystery to me. "Bravo, how well you said that!" A few minutes later, sluggishly: "Mummy, what does outbreak mean?" Or "pleonasm," or "alluvium," or "migraine"?

In one of his previous districts, there were precious stones, the mines of Alto Ligonha, and, it was thought, gold deposits in the alluvium too, one of the local doctor's two main weaknesses. The other was migraines. He came as the director of Health Services and, playing his small part in the nation's destiny, he passed over a black nurse, who'd come top in the promotion exams, in favor of a white protégé. That nurse, a poor loser, resigned and went off to Tanzania. His name was Samoral Machel.

My father, the district administrator, who, like the doctor was starting out his career, probably didn't then know anything about that first weakness (and if the doctor did indeed suffer from it, geology was never a sin). Yet, four decades later, both were senior civil servants retired on the same pay grade, and my father couldn't help contrasting the proliferation of buildings and flashy Mercedes owned by "that scoundrel" with his own sobriety cautiously planned from a Peugeot and house on the wrong side of the tracks. However, the scoundrel was a good doctor and, at the time, sufficiently dedicated to have set up, with my father, a network of leper colonies that helped put an end to the nightmare of mutilated noses and limbs among Zambezia's population. My father cured the doctor's migraines with hot footbaths, his treatment for everything, to which the doctor, whose nearest colleague was four-hundred miles away, and who was almost blind and sick with the pain, could offer no alternative or resistance. The theory was it made your blood move down from your head. Since it ended up working, I came to understand the obvious and correct etymology of the word "migraine," since its treatment clearly involved migrating.

Or maybe not. I didn't yet have to distinguish between what was true because it had happened and what was true without having to happen—between dreaming at night and playing in the morning. There were things stranger than fantasy and everything remained forever tied up with the

infallible fascination of listening to my mother, a seventeen-year-old adolescent when she married, recounting stories to her two sons of what we had said or done the night before, or four months or five years previously, and then, until her memory began to fail her, thirty or forty years ago. Every day, we would spend part of our time playing “let’s pretend,” with laughter in free flight and my father, only a little older than her, being the only adult in the house and offering the three of us a childhood he had not had.

Of course, there was also Pimpão, but he was so old he’d even been a soldier in the era of the captaincies and the Maganja Revolt. He would tell me stories about the *namarrocolo*, with the pedagogical pauses of a bard, listing all the big creatures that the clever little rabbit always managed to beat: the unpredictable leopard, the righteous lion, the patient elephant, the sinister hyena, circling round and round, wanting to eat the *namarrocolo*’s mother, but realizing once it finished off its meal that the *namarrocolo* had tricked him, and he’d eaten his own mother. Pimpão would repeat each sentence several times, always using the same words, and imitating the animals’ voices, the sounds of the plants, of fire, of the wind, of the rivers, conjuring up movements and shapes with his earth-colored hands, as both of us would squat together in the African style he’d taught me, copying how the *namarrocolo* would sit, to tell and hear stories. Each adventure’s prize was a sugar cane, a clandestine snack between meals we savored sucking and chewing, noisily chomping away, just like the *namarrocolo*, hidden from my mother and the cook, Coimbra, who had a bald strip from his brow to his nape he claimed was the road to Lisbon.

We’d arrived from Lisbon that evening, on the *Colonial* liner, and night never seemed to fall in time for dinner. Twelve-years old, and despite thirty days of traveling and the successive perplexities of Cape Town, Moçâmedes, Lobito, Luanda, São Tomé, and Madeira, my internal clock still had everything well programmed: nighttime started around six, dinner around six-thirty; daytime around six; breakfast around six-thirty. Or perhaps, even inside me, the rhythm of time had already begun to change, with an undefined feeling of injustice I confusedly feared could come to correspond to a new way of being in the world. Up until then, there’d never been anything I couldn’t be or lacked: the spring where the stream was born at the end of the garden; the infinitely empty beach where Pimpão, who now needed someone to look after him so he could continue to look after me, for the last time moistened my head because of the sun; the basalt

heap the polished side of which I slid down, starting each day a little higher up; the leaves which closed up at dusk a little before I went to eat; the stones that thrown against each other after dark would spark like fireflies. But best of all was when we travelled by car from Zambezia to the south of Mozambique, through the war zones of Tanganica: people with tree branches growing out of their shoulders would come and speak to us, saying they were soldiers and didn't we know that this area was dangerous; in the hotel in Blantyre, you just had to flick a switch on the wall for there to be light straight away; and when you opened the room's window, there was always a very big, quiet man in the middle of the square, who, they explained to me, was an English lord called Roads but who was made of stone. *Oh vecchio buffonissimo!*

My comrade in awe of this marvelous new world, with shared shrieks and simultaneous bursts of laughter, covering our mouths with our hands, was the magnificent, sharp-toothed Makonde sculptor who went with us because my mother, nostalgic for Europe, was aware of the civilizing responsibilities that also extended to her. She had already managed to teach him to carve art-deco figurines, Greek amphoras, a miniature of Florence's dove fountain, and it would be a waste to leave him behind in Zambezia to regress to tribal masks. Of course, not everything was always a string of marvels because there was also the daughter of the postmaster Mr Lopes and a forthright lady called Tina—the awful Zezinha—who would pee on anything that resembled a bench, and I would always have the misfortune of sitting down where she'd been. I later met Mr Lopes again, in the Texas Bar, old and full of booze, complaining his daughter had turned out like her mother and boasting of whores.

As soon as I learned to get down the stairs on my bike, I challenged my dog to come to school with me so we could also learn the alphabet and times tables, and the railway lines and rivers of Portugal. He would resign himself to his lot under my desk during the alphabet and tables but when it got to Trofa to Fafe and Minho to Mira he would become restless: a couple of vehement yawns, sudden itching, ears pricked up by some noise outside, sometimes a head-butt against the corner of the desk, followed by a clumsy yelp or a loud bark with which he jumped through the window. The teacher would then get angry: if I wanted a dog in the classroom, it had to behave, like everyone else. One day, he actually refused its entry. Outside, the whining from the yard was so insistent, and, in the classroom, my mates' solidarity so unanimous, that he ended up being readmitted, not forgetting to

thank them first one-by-one, wagging his tail, before rolling up again in his place. However, he was genetically undisciplined and, at the usual time, he upped and left. After class, we went to find him, on the banks of the Incomati, where we always found him chasing birds, growling from a distance at the crocodiles lazing around in the sand, and sizing up the rivers.

At the end of the afternoon, there was soccer. Magude's Sporting Lions Team: Red and blue vertical striped tops, blue shorts, red socks, shin pads, boots. And a little later, my first verses, everything rhyming with "cat" and "mat," and sometimes even "all." My soccer friends were not that impressed with my verses, but the teacher's daughter, Bebê, was always keen to hear them, and everybody said she was very grown up for her age. One day, she asked me wasn't I hot after so much soccer and cycling? Didn't I want to get under the shower? She didn't mind drying me off after, her mother had gone to the mission to talk to the priest, and her father was at Silva's bar. Needless to say, I didn't trust her.

As much as anything else, this took place after the RAF Catalina had crashed on the beach in Bilene, making me pro-Allies like my parents while Bebê was pro-German like hers, but on top of that, it happened before I'd ever gone to the theater, an experience which taught me the same person can play different roles in different plays. Who knows what might have happened otherwise!

Theater was for when I was in Lourenço Marques, and a great troop arrived from Lisbon (Aura Abranches, Alfredo Ruas, Luís Filipe, Madalena Sotto, Alberto Ghira...) semi-gods from the new worlds of "let's pretend." I saw *Brother Luis de Sousa* and every other play twice, since it was the number of matinees in each run. By the second matinee, I began to suspect *Brother Luis de Sousa* was actually a ghost story, like *The Mummy's Hand* which I'd just seen in the Scala Cinema, with the Pilgrim summoned up from the other world by all those very angry people, to whom he told the truth when he said he was no one. Perhaps that might work for a learned article (a kind of semantic triangulation alongside Henry James and Machado de Assis), or if João Vieira were to put on productions again, perhaps I could convince him to see what might happen if the Pilgrim was not actually visible on stage. "Oh ye, fatal specters!" Sometimes, you have to accentuate the obvious.

The man with the hat expressed his thanks, put it back on his head, and continued to talk about people who didn't exist but, even so, everyone

seemed to know who they were, including my brother, who'd arrived a year earlier to go to university, and, three times already, had promised me an ice cream to calm me down. There were still so many cars and people in the streets, and there was no way the sun would disappear so we could eat but, at least, the entry into the estuary had been nice and there was no doubt not even the Incomati could be longer than the longest river in Portugal. Yet, I couldn't imagine how I would manage to live there, I just knew that from then on everything would be very different. I felt fat, my shorts were tight on me, and I was sprouting hair in the strangest places. Uncle Pedro, when he laughed, always ended his laugh inwardly, with his head thrown back, showing too much of the whites of his blue eyes. He also suffered from migraines, as I later discovered, but, with his bad temper, he bawled out twice as the hot footbath got closer, and carried on with damp compresses on his head, his eyes so rolled upwards they were only whites. His migraines can't have been severe.

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AUTHORITY, CINEMA, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF TEMPERS

If the future makes the past inevitable, the past, before knowing that's what it is, has no truck with such historical determinisms and can just be a case of bad temper, like with Uncle Pedro during Mr Tomás Vieira's visit.

At the time, Uncle Pedro was my Republican grandfather's secretary, and Mr Tomás Vieira did films, or rather, showed films. Skinny as a reed, he'd been a silent-movie actor in the twenties and emigrated to Mozambique where he acquired something across between a lorry and an armor-plated caravan, and he would come on stage before the screenings with a long-shoed tap dance, clowning around, accompanied by a blue-bell phonograph. He went wherever he was sought, sometimes, without being sought, and was always a big event. I owe him my first film, *Captains of the Clouds*. I immediately wanted to be a pilot: I put one chair in front of another, with my dog in the back seat as copilot, and we machine-gunned the Germans. He died in obscurity in Lisbon in 1979, just as I was named Minister of Culture. No one understood what base political calculation could possibly have made me want to attend his funeral.

At the end of the Great War, my grandfather entered the civil service and was posted to Ressano Garcia as the Commissioner for Native Affairs. Given the proximity of the South African border, it was a particularly delicate job. Delagoa Bay was still a burning issue, the memory of the Ultimatum very much alive, the War and the Republic's diplomatic efforts might have saved the Portuguese colonies, but there was also the agreement to export labor to the Rand's mines in exchange for railway lines and the port of Lourenço Marques. After the armistice, Britain had reverted to being a necessary evil, shameless and cynical, as the poet Junqueiro alerted us, and never to be trusted. In his past as a youth in Lisbon, my grandfather had stood in the way of religious processions, was a friend of the journalist Magalhães

Lima and I think it was through him he became a mason; he fought against Von Lettow's troops in north Mozambique, losing his right eye in battle at Negoma then, as soon as he could, signed up for the Red Cross and, before he knew it, was at Massano de Amorim's side during the Angoche Offensive; he gave Brito Camacho "a brotherly embrace" when he arrived as High Commissioner, and now shielded by medals of military valor, the Maltese Cross and the Order of Christ, he seemed to have survived the Metropolis's regime change. The Brits were not going to make mincemeat of him.

For example:

A trafficker of blacks had tried to corrupt the tribal chief from the area closest to the border with a few pounds of gold. Since the chief—"a true Portuguese!"—had refused, the slaver ordered his hut to be burnt to the ground in order to encourage his compliance next time he turned up with a few pounds. The case was serious: it would be difficult to prove Portuguese sovereignty over that territorial edge if the chief declared his tribe belonged over the border. My grandfather reread his historians, thought of King John II and the Marquis of Pombal, and invited the slave trader to a sumptuous lunch, congratulating him for having put the chief in his place. But it wasn't enough, a show of military force was essential. The slaver, sure his actual motives remained beyond suspicion and that an unjust and clumsy military intervention might even further his aims, agreed immediately with the suggestion, transferring onto the chief every detail of his own treachery. "He's a bandit, in the pay of the British, a slaver who wants to steal our population and territory." "If that's the case, he deserves to die!" Would he be willing to take, by hand, the necessary confidential instructions so he could explain verbally everything he knew? Yes, absolutely. They were drafted aloud in front of him and he even helped put the wax seal on the document. Except the instructions he took, in a previously prepared identical envelope, explained the treason of the bearer and ended succinctly: "Liquidate him." It was my grandfather's widow's favorite story, at a time when she was already debilitated by sclerosis. "Do you mean to say, mum, that dad ordered a man to be killed?" "Yes, dear daughter, he had the power for such things and much more besides!"

He certainly had the power to summon Mr Tomás Vieira. The reason behind the summons was Uncle Pedro's temper. He was amorously involved with "a beautiful Goan, smart like all her race, and very fair," who was bewitching him and would yield nothing without marriage. Ideologically,

my grandfather had no objection—the word of a democrat!—but the timid youth might end up being ensnared. He moped round, baggy-eyed, snot dribbling, and had already two or three times become enmeshed in romantic circumlocutions that meant only one thing: matrimonial intentions. It was vital to nudge him along the right path: hence a film showing! A dinner with choice wines, lights out during the screening, a dance to follow in the ballroom, the girl softened up with so many novel stimuli, Pedro finally able to sweep in, and everything over in a night. The plan of attack was implemented with the same strategic zeal devoted to the slave trader, and a month later, Mr Tomás Vieira was already there with Rudolfo Valentino ordered by telegraph, and precise instructions about how to arrange the V.I.P. seats: a large chair in the middle with a sign attached to its back in thick letters saying AUTHORITY; to its immediate left, under the watchful eye of authority, Uncle Pedro; and right in front of them, the girl. During dinner, she began to smile at the future being sketched out before her, seeing it confirmed in the seating arrangements for the film, clearing her hair away from the nape of her neck during the tap dance, revealing a little more of her delightful neck as she stooped to wipe away a tear during *The White Sheik*, and from Pedro? Nothing! So, my grandfather, in order didactically to show what one should do in such circumstances and pragmatically to move things along, tucked in his beard and moustache, majestically leaned forward and, with his very own lips, did the honor of kissing that tender little neck in response to its night-long demands. And that curved neck allowed itself to be repeatedly honored by lips it presumably took to be Uncle Pedro's until the lights finally came back on. Only, Uncle Pedro excused himself from the dance and failed to see the funny side however much my grandfather tried to make him the following day—"If she can't even distinguish between my lips and the Commissioner's...."—and shortly afterwards, he decided to return to Portugal, where he married the most virtuous maiden in Christendom and in Torre de Moncorvo. Bidding him farewell, with a characteristically noble and sentimental gesture, my grandfather took a diamond ring from his finger and gave it to him before his final embrace, saying: "Be happy, my son! It was for your own good!"

As it turned out, that distant marriage in Trás-os-Montes was not the only one inspired by Mr Tomás Vieira. The younger brother, to whom my future Uncle Pedro owed the never sufficiently recognized privilege of becoming my uncle, had driven all day from Lourenço Marques, implausibly

on the pretext of seeing the film but, in fact, he'd come to see how the Commissioner's daughter had grown up. She'd just returned from Odivelas and he'd never forgotten the red-haired lass who'd gone there a few years earlier. He liked what he saw, she did too, they got married, she was seventeen and he was twenty-two. "A handsome lad with a great future," as my grandfather had said various times in front of his favorite daughter, rather casually, as if he were talking to everyone but her. Now I see his wily ways more clearly, I begin to question whether the real reason for his inviting Mr Tomás Vieira went beyond Uncle Pedro's wellbeing.

My grandfather set eyes on his first grandchild before going to the Island of Mozambique and the zenith of his power. Appointed district governor, he took up residence in Renaissance stately homes as if he'd ordered them made-to-measure: a private dock, a rickshaw, a magnificent Indo-Portuguese throne which dispensed with any need for written signs to signify authority. There was even a fish there they called "the Gov" because it had a reddish beard similar to his. An absolute despot. But of the enlightened variety. He hated the Jesuits (well actually, all priests) and tried to make schooling compulsory for all children in his district "without racial distinctions and including girls, who are the mothers of progress and the future." His project was not thought to be realistic, and even if it was, it would not be given priority and priorities were dictated to him by the Governor-General. He replied in an official communiqué, paraphrasing Portugal's pacifier of Southern Mozambique Mouzinho de Albuquerque who, "despite being a royalist, was a real man." "I asked for schools, not advice." Thus thwarted, his greatest legacy turned out to be the active contribution, without racial distinction, to turning the girls on the island into future mothers as he asserted his *de facto* feudal right to inaugurate them, a right his Jacobin ideology would have fought, *de jure*, to his last drop of blood.

But, in a very public challenge to "those sanctimonious twits now in power," he quoted from his "good friend who became his venerated master" Brito Camacho's program: "We have to bring about the liberation of the native woman. She is a slave to her father, brothers, and husband. We should never forget that her womb is the *fons vitae* where future workers are produced. We have to dress the native.... Most of all, we have to instruct and educate the native, not to be a passive animal who serves an owner, but rather to be a collaborator of use to the white, as much a man as the white, but more capable of producing riches from this scorched African land."

In sum, the reactionaries might not have given him the governorship he thought was his by rights, but it was still an honor for him to walk there on the same ground, to breath the same air, to bask in the same sunshine that had been reward enough for Luís de Camões and Diogo do Couto! But it was all a flash in the pan.

In the Metropolis, the Naval Revolt had taken place, and repression was ratcheted up a notch. A wave of political exiles, en route to Timor, passed through the Island de Mozambique. "As Diogo do Couto had done for Camões," my grandfather organized a public appeal for them, using his own name, office and insignias to get it going. Unfortunately, the minister Vieira Machado was on a visit to the colony and right there and then he transferred my grandfather to Angola, demoting him with strict orders that he be placed in the remotest outpost of the Congo District.

Even so, my grandfather tried to fight back. He took sick leave, spent some months in Lisbon, in the thick of the Paço Café's colonialist intrigues, spent every last cent he had as well as a heap he hadn't in lush dinners and abundant chorus girls. He also spent something on more sober efforts to incite a revolution but times had changed, and, with them, so too had his friends who were not in prison or exile. They all ended up disappearing along with his wealth, and so, a broken man who actually now was ill, he went off to the outbreaks of the Congo District. There, he scarcely had time to answer a request for information from the Geographical Society about the phrenological bumps of cannibals.

His old house in Vilarandelo was sold to pay off part of the debts he left along with a stunned widow and half a dozen children who'd yet to be educated. The house was too big, no one wanted it, the government ended up buying it at half price, turning it into a village hall. After the Carnation Revolution, it was turned into a community center, with a cinema theater. Just as well.

THE EVILS OF ART AND THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Some imagine the world, others construct it. They are complementary ways of being and both deserve my sympathy. There are also those who construct an imaginary world and, in that case, it depends.

Around the time my Republican grandfather was still imagining and my father was beginning to construct, a colleague, whose life was opera, lived at the midpoint between them, somewhere in the remotest part of Alta Zambézia. His name was marked by the genius of literary ancestry—let's call him Gomes Leal—he'd attended a seminary and never known a woman, not even as the depersonalized hygienic substitute of the traditional native washer woman prevalent in tropical misogyny. He was not into the phantasmatic collectivism of itinerant reflectors, like those spread by Mr Tomás Vieira. He preferred to inhabit them in his intransitive daily routine after having constructed them himself, from flesh and bone.

Apart from opera, he only liked bullfights. However, since neither Poncelle nor Supervia's voice was within his reach and there were no cattle herds in the region, he had to train his servants. Of course, his favorite opera was *Carmen*, and among the Italian operas, he liked *Tosca* the most, which he understood in terms of transposed bullfighting symbolism: "the cow killed the bull and that was that." The servants preferred Bizet to Puccini and feared the worst on Scarpia's days.

Only two of the servants ever satisfied him completely: a plump, elderly cook, and a houseboy with handsome Moorish features who quickly acquired considerable prestige and more than a few privileges, including the use of a long Spanish smock with lace attachments ("you just need castanets, you old rogue!") thanks to the natural ease with which he learned the adaptation of "Là bas, là bas, dans la montagne" to the duet which invariably had to precede serving meals: "O'er there, o'er there, upon the

table”... “And what will it be that you will serve me?”... “Roast chicken ‘n chips”... and so on. Gomes Leal had the high, well-pitched voice of a church tenor. The houseboy a light baritone. They went well together. The cook knew all the parts but, since he was a deep bass and corpulent, he had been specialized in the March of the Toreador and also in being the bull. It was a trick the administrator had refined at the cost of several sets of crockery. In the last harmony of the March, also transformed into a domestic dialogue between the dining room and the kitchen, he whipped off the tablecloth with a single tug, leaving everything in its rightful place with the skill of a conjurer, and old Escamillo would rush at the connecting door, bent over, huffing and puffing, with his hands sticking out of the top of his head, to be baited by his boss’s cape.

It took many months of practice, and years of searching to attain the pair’s high level of perfection. And the search went on, for the secondary roles—laundry boy, gardener, driver—as an insurance for the future since there were quite a few servants who, both before and after the current ones, without the lyrical talent necessary even to sweep the yard or carry firewood, had ended their brief careers breaking stones from dawn to dusk, after half a dozen strikes on each hand had paternally expelled them from the arts world. “Are you happy or sad, my friend? You’re sad. I can see it on your face. I know it’s not your fault if you have no voice or ear, but you must agree it isn’t my fault either, and what must be must be.” “Yes, sir! Sorry, sir!” But Scarpia was not forgiving: “Half a dozen on each hand!” And then more candidates from the Catholic mission were sent to him, chosen from those who already had some basic training in litanies.

Now, as it happens, the administrator Gomes Leal was also hostage to the most tortured of stomachs. One day, while what had to happen was happening to a promising yet ultimately irredeemable Michaela, a young lad with huge, frightened eyes and the hesitant smile of a guilt with unknown cause, Gomes Leal felt a hot flush that meant his internal knots were beginning to unravel. The young lad profited, because the ritual to which he was being subjected was suspended after just his right hand had been beaten while the administrator went inside and then returned. The administrator profited because he felt so refreshed he no longer wanted to preside over the flogging of the left hand, and he ordered his sepoy to finish off the task alone and sang to Carmen to serve lunch earlier. Even the sepoy profited because, while he accepted the need for palm beatings as a legitimate part

of his duties when there was manifest guilt, he did not like beating just for the sake of it. He told the youngster to give six synchronized yelps as he hit the padding of the administrator's chair, and then sent him quickly off to start his career of breaking stones.

As part of the undeniable general profiting, the whipped chair also came to be replaced in sessions of justice by a "lion of Zambezia," a kind of chamber pot frequently used for pressing biological needs, and I think it got its name because, being three times the height of a standard chamber pot, it formed an ample sound box capable of transforming the most timid of sighs into threatening roars. Sat behind his desk, with a spotless white uniform jacket buttoned up to his neck and stripes on his shoulders, but with his trousers invisibly dropped to his ankles, from then on, the palm beatings stopped as soon as the lion roared. Although, at first, it sometimes proved necessary to continue until the condemned hands bled, the administrator Gomes Leal's motions ended up becoming angelically regular, to the relief of one and all.

He might have considered the origin of such a change angelic because, echoing the precedent of Luther in a similar position—a precedent he may well not have known, and which his unadulterated Catholicism would certainly have repudiated—one day when there was a torrential downpour, he suddenly had a mystic vision that made him aware of his sacred mission. Blacks were the ugly flesh of Babel against which you had to prevail with raw discipline, making on them the same stains the flesh made on the soul. The proof was they had already been born with the color of black stains. But he was hesitant, thought about it, waited for a sign. The following morning, he received several: the rain had stopped in a season when it was usually constant; there was a rainbow; a pungent smell of semen rose from the ground steaming with humid heat; ants had grown wings and celebrated in the air their black nuptial mass; a mongoose had broken into the chicken coop during the night and killed three hens. At that point, he decided he had no choice, he had to replace the songs of profane love with the prayers of divine love so he hung on two palm trees (there were no willows) the organs with which he sang: the cook and the houseboy, whose agonies he accompanied for three days and three nights, prostrated on the ground, in prayer. From then on, the number of palm beatings to be applied to the streams of the condemned on every work day, whatever their crime, was to be given in multiples of three in homage to the Most Holy

Trinity: “Three times three, nine on each hand... three times nine, twenty-seven on each hand... three times twenty-seven, eighty-one on each hand... three times eighty-one...” And he would always be praying, begging God to forgive them for the salvation of his own soul.

Eventually, the sepoy responsible for inflicting the punishments thought it was too much, refused to obey, received from his replacement three times nine and fled. The local chiefs met in secret and analyzed precedents for a solution. The population’s outrage was so great that whispers of it reached Quelimane, where Governor Ferreira Pinto was busy constructing a different imaginary world. He’d been one of the young supporters of President Sidónio Pais who’d taken part in the May 28 revolution and, along with a colleague, had accompanied Captain Teófilo Duarte in one of the periodic attempts to retrieve Olivença from the Spanish. They were rewarded with the following subsequent assignments: the colleague was Teófilo Duarte’s chief of staff in Timor’s government, with special responsibility for maintaining order among the political exiles who predated the arrival of my grandfather in the Congo District. Years later, Teófilo Duarte became Minister for the Colonies and then found out from the porter he was no longer the minister because there had been a cabinet reshuffle the previous evening about which the Prime Minister had forgotten to inform him. Ferreira Pinto had gone to Mozambique as a government inspector and ended up being named governor of Zambesia.

It was said that Governor Ferreira Pinto’s political role model and psychological archetype was Mussolini. The photograph of a haughty pro-consul with an assertive jawbone surrounded by a uniformed phalanx of administrators duly placed in the lower part of the frame did nothing to contradict such a reputation. The ladies of Quelimane, the snobbiest Creole aristocrats linked to the great names who’d made their careers in India under the viceroyalty—the Noronhas, Menezes, Perestrellos—saw in him the image of their ancestors, their only regret being he didn’t have a name more in keeping with his undeniable nature from a bygone era, so they could call him their cousin. He did, however, have a noticeable classical education, and liked to cite Tacitus and especially Virgil from his Prophetic Eclogue: “*omnis feret omnia tellus... incipe!*” His project was to initiate, by force if necessary, a Golden Age in Zambesia. He was married to a delightful, beautiful lady, whom I remember years later, in Lisbon. I think I had a brief, contemplative, adolescent crush on her that everyone but me must have

noticed: black hair, golden eyes, a white and red smile, a voice that seemed beyond this mortal coil. She had a son who'd died, said my eyes were just like his and that when her husband was my age he wrote poetry too.

The first measure Governor Ferreira Pinto decreed was that Quelimane's school children would all wear pinafores inspired by Roman togas. He summoned all the district administrators together, had a group photo taken, announced a forthcoming inspection tour in a few weeks time and ordered ("*omnis feret...*") that there should be trees providing shade on the sides of the road where he would pass. There was a general panic, an orgy of forced labor, and the destruction of hundreds of trees the inanimate carcasses of which were switched to temporary holes where they held up just long enough for the prophecy to pass.

My father thought it was time to pack our bags and was one of the few who refused to take part in the charade. However, Governor Ferreira Pinto was full of praise for him: he congratulated my father on managing to have the dam ready for the first rains, supported his requirement that the Boror Company set aside for subsistence farming by the local laborers an area of land equivalent to that dedicated to the cultivation of cotton, attended a class where he recited Virgil in Latin to astonished little black kids in a recently constructed rudimentary school where my brother was also learning his first letters under Professor Xinpanguela ("Quite right! One must set an example!"), visited a leper colony, and discussed at length my father's plan to settle two Portuguese families a year in a vast, particularly fertile but quite elevated region of his district that was sparsely populated. It was not too much to ask for the transport costs, the construction materials, tools, a yolk and some seeds with which, in less than twenty years, the region would be transformed into the breadbasket of Zambezia, with obvious benefits not just for the starving, local population but also for the traditionally wretched emigration policy of the Metropolis. The Governor promised to send the plan to Lisbon, but without much hope of success: "Keep doing what you can, we have to govern against the grain, they think on the miniscule scale of the Berlengas archipelago." To make his point, he spoke of his own project to open a roadway through the rocks to the mountainous regions of Gorué, without which the production of tea there would continue to be an economic irrelevance. He hadn't even got a stick of dynamite out of the central Government. Okay then, it would be done with pickaxes, like the Roman roads were! And it actually was, and is still the road they use today.

“And what about shorts?” The Boror Company was resisting my father’s instructions to distribute clothes to the cotton-plantation workers, who went round with just a piece of shredded tree bark covering their genitals, and an accusatory article had appeared in Quelimane’s newspaper entitled “Down with Shorts!” The journalist had presented detailed accounts, which were just a little exaggerated: since all the cotton produced there by law had to be exported first to the Metropolis before being re-imported as shorts, the cost of each pair of shorts was equivalent to a year’s work of fifteen men. And, in a side swipe against the governor himself, the article concluded, “why not togas?” Well, you shouldn’t worry, you’re in good company. Now, what Governor Ferreira Pinto actually wanted to know was if my father’s inspiration about shorts had come from his own example of “togas” as school uniforms. I can’t imagine what my father replied. Soon after, in a commendation published in the Official Bulletin, the governor declared my father to be “a civil servant who knows how to honor the seven laurel leaves on the shoulders of his uniform.”

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Regarding the trees at the roadsides, he made only one comment that was both cryptic and sententious: “literalism is always a symptom of corruption or incompetence, which needs to be investigated and punished without mercy. A new Achilles would have to raze a new Troy before those real trees grow again.” His purpose had been to set a test, and my father had passed with flying colors. So, as well as the commendation he decided to bestow there and then, he deserved a heart-to-heart chat and a piece of advice before he left: “I have many enemies, even among my oldest comrades... I hope you never know what it’s like to have the enemies I have. Don’t be too trusting. Be on your guard. But I also have my philosophy and fear nothing.” Those who had not passed the Latin lesson were subsequently disciplined. The administrator Gomes Leal, who is still in the photograph, did not return to his district, so that there, at least, the trees were left intact. He was sent for a medical check-up in Lourenço Marques and, from there, quickly dispatched to Lisbon where, after a few months rest, he was reintegrated and remained inoffensively in one of the divisions of the Ministry, drafting official letters until retirement age. “The only place for severity of justice is on this side of good and evil,” Governor Ferreira Pinto had written in the marching orders that accompanied him. Since the administrator of the Quelimane district had habitually used the indigenous chair for the most profanely sadistic acts, he ordered him to be thrown

in prison out there, at the mercy of his victims. A judge intervened, saying that was illegal, and after two nights, he was transferred to the whites' prison, babbling wide-eyed gratitude.

In part because of his commendation and in part because of his fights against the Boror Company, my father was transferred to an excellent district where there was no cotton and where he constructed a little more and had different fights, new commendations, and more transfers, progressively further south until he was named administrator of the district of Lourenço Marques, promoted to mayor and transferred to Guinea, a rapid passage before returning to Mozambique and being promoted to controller and transferred to São Tomé, then promoted to governor and finally neutralized in a semi-diplomatic honorary position in South Africa, where he worked to the end of his career. The colonial wars had begun, it was once more the military's time, a time of destruction with the hope that others would later come along and be able to construct again.

They say that when the plane carrying the first Russians overflew Lourenço Marques, there was a mutiny aboard because they couldn't believe that was the same city their propaganda had led them to expect. And that when the Mozambicans complained to them about the infrastructure left behind by the Portuguese—few roads, few hospitals, few schools, few ports, few dams—they told them they'd seen worse, and that as a starting point for a new country it wasn't all that bad. They also say that when the leaders of FRELIMO asked their giddy homeward-bound decolonizers for a transition period to allow them to prepare to take power, the latter replied "Now! Now! Or never!" to which the former retorted, "Now, then." But then they say a lot of things.

Governor Ferreira Pinto's career had ended much earlier, at the beginning of the 1940s, when the war was a different one, something remote and in an incomprehensible language, with my parents into the early hours pumping up the petromax lantern with a radio, behind them, attached to a car battery.

A coded telegram, which Governor Ferreira Pinto appeared to be expecting, had been taken to the Governor's palace in Quelimane. It was a Sunday, the codebook was not at hand, there were visitors in the room, he read it quickly, smiled at his wife with a tenderness more evident than he usually demonstrated in public, and asked her to continue to look after the guests. He locked himself in the library and pointed a rifle loaded with the explosive bullets used to kill elephants at his chest. Half his body was

splattered among his books and impregnated into the walls. The telegram was decoded the following day. It was some inconsequential, routine issue. We never found out what news he was expecting.

A BESTIARY RETRIEVED IN THE THEORY OF THE MOSAIC

If this book was an autobiography, or a novel pretending not to be, I would now have to fill in the passage of time with episodes which marked the narrator's transition from five to twelve years old—from Pimpão's Zambezia to Lisbon where a nameless character who, along with many others, will make no further appearance, had as his only diegetic function putting a hat on his head. What an obvious mistake, especially in a book that wills itself to have few words, a wasteful use of the narrative economy's resources with the inevitable consequence of stopping the reader from warming up and self-identifying, from nurturing grudges and sympathies and from reaching all by themselves predetermined authorial conclusions.

The only thing is—pardon me, the readers who already worked this out for themselves—my style is oblique and feigned, evolving of its own accord and is rather original—pardon me, the readers who haven't yet worked that out—stemming from a noble tradition of saying apples to mean oranges, which includes any poetry worth its salt and all the prose to my liking. Now don't think apples and oranges are different things, they're merely different reflections of the same thing. Like a mosaic incrustated with mirrors. Let me explain. When you break off a small piece of a mosaic, nobody can tell, by just looking at that morsel, that it's part of the nose and, thus, it could perfectly well become part of any other image as needed, even in a mosaic with no nose. Sure, you could also chip away at every bit of the mosaic, like happened to the Cheshire Cat who smiled so much at Alice it ended up being just a smile and no cat. But a cat is a cat while a smile isn't always. For example, Yorick's smile in *Hamlet*, migrated to Sterne's black page, whence it came back to life as a paradigm of oblique smiles. Besides, it's my firm belief, in any mosaic with a nose, the nose needs its little piece. Thus, I solemnly pledge I will continue bringing to my mosaic all the pieces

necessary for its nose, eyes, teeth, ears, and mouth but I won't necessarily bring them in that order and they won't always belong to a fictitious reflection of the same face. And, it will be up to the readers to find the most appropriate spots to insert them, according to their own experience in love, which, as Camões asserts, will lead them through my verses' meaning.

There are precedents, such as the national campaign for adult education in the 1950s, clearly inspired in the undeniable success, around the same time, of the national campaign in favor of alcoholism, when drinking a liter of wine was a way of feeding a million Portuguese. I was shown one of the biology tests, which followed the modern American system of leaving sentences in mid-air for the student to complete: "Birds f.," and the student, after counting the number of dots should immediately realize they "fly." "Dogs b..."—"Dogs bark" but the number of dots could also indicate they "bite," which isn't far off the truth. "Reptiles suffer m....." That one was more difficult and, after scratching his head a lot, the student decided so many dots must be a typo, if not a trick question, and completed the phrase "much." Reptiles suffer much. Who knows! He was beginning to feel too old to carry on as a pimp, and needed the certificate in order to work as a porter in the Texas Bar, a job Miss Clotilde, who worked without a pimp, but with her own connections, had promised him. He studiously carried on with the test, even writing in the section reserved for the examiners' signatures. *President*: Salazar. *Members*: Left Arm, Left Leg, Right Arm, Right Leg. Thus, it has been shown not all the sources of my narrative style are literary. The only problem is to strike the right balance between the various bits of the mosaic. Let's try another example:

"The house was a palatial construction from the times of the captaincies, the residential version of the military formation at Marracuene in the form of a spacious cube with four stocky towers, linked in perfect symmetry by balconies on the second floor, steps to the garden with a pergola, a baobab, palm trees, and a water ditch by the cane thicket. In front of the garden, the Platonic idea of a square opened up before you, prefigured by the bulging extension of earthy pathways, with no other houses to justify its existence, except for the administration headquarters opposite. However, in the center of the square, and only because of this was it a square with a center, a flagpole was erected. The sepoys, in their khaki uniforms and red fez hats, presented arms with *Kropachet* rifles, which had last seen gunpowder during the long-past Maganja Revolt, as one of them would

play his bugle while another hoisted or lowered the flag in the rapid break of day or the intense violet radiance which preceded the sudden night-fall. Then, they would march in formation to the silent beat of their bare-footed thick soles, disbanding next to a distant row of trees. The bugle call announcing the end of the imperial day was also the moment when bats, hanging upside down from daybreak in the haunted tree at the bottom of the garden, would begin their plundering free-for-all day throughout the same duskless night from which alarmed birds took shelter, with exaggerated shrillness. Groups of distraught, semi-naked men and women with children on their backs or hanging off their drooping, withered breasts, camped out from the morning in the sticky, insect-ridden shade around the administrative center, waiting until the last petitions had been sorted out, suddenly began to speak more loudly, before returning to their villages that merged in the distance with the dirt and cane with which they were constructed. One day, my brother built a dirt-and-cane bridge, capable of withstanding a bike, over the water ditch. It was pure magic. On another, very muggy night, when I thought I heard voices at the back of our house and a sudden boom, I dreamt there was a lion in the garden. When I got up in the morning, I found out I was right, but it was a lioness. I wasn't allowed to go and see her, but I was given a little lion cub, a tiny creature the size of a cat, which after a week in which we thought it wouldn't survive, now happily ambushed my dog that was so huge (if it's the same one as in the photograph) that, not long before, I used to ride it like a horse."

Too many pieces? Or too few? Or too many and too few all at once? Is the latent anti-imperial militancy of the bats sufficiently implied? Since I wasn't sure, this passage was chopped from the relevant chapter (it was going to follow the paragraph about Pimpão and his tales of the namarocolo) and since I wasn't all that sure about not being sure, I reinserted it here as a didactic example. The only thing is I now have to clarify: the aging tree full of bats was actually in Magude, south of the Sabi River, where the flag-hoisting ceremony was no longer used, and the sepoys' uniforms no longer included a fez. The poet Rui Knopfli was there after me, when his father followed mine in the post of administrator. He even wrote a poem about Amos (pronounced a moose), a "gentle giant" who was a type of Pimpão from his adolescence and from the beginning of the end of my infancy. Amos had apparently committed a heinous crime when he was very young. In that moment, all his capacity for violence had been drained

and he turned into a saint for the rest of his life. Now, when it comes to Africa, Rui is everything but a cowering scribe, so I don't want to give him the slightest pretext to dress me down in public, with his pen in his fist, because of my hazy details. I get enough of that in private, or through confidences shared with friends-in-common, like what he once told Zé Cardoso Pires: "I like Mozambique so much I even manage to like Helder Macedo." Put bluntly, you need to be very careful when it comes to Africanists.

So, despite everything, we will soon get on board the *Colonial* liner and reach Lisbon again for the first time. The only thing is there's still a stop to make, an homage to pay from the times when the streets of Lourenço Marques were covered with swords. I could do it here and now or later on, because the great advantage of mosaics is the pieces can be fitted together at any time and they always remain in their rightful place. But a few days ago, I received a telephone call from the journal *Colóquio Letras*, requesting an article about the modernist poet Mário de Sá-Carneiro for a special issue to celebrate his anniversary and, as it happens, Sá-Carneiro can fit perfectly into my homage as he, too, was part of those changing times and later, in Lisbon, it was almost as if he came to sit with us in the Gelo Café when Luís Garcia de Medeiros showed up. In any case, I wrote more or less what I was going to write for the relevant chapter, chopping out what made least sense for my friends at the *Colóquio* but, even so, I warned them it wasn't going to be a normal academic essay. And, of course, its editor David Mourão-Ferreira, an astute reader of the gaps between words, immediately understood what I was doing in Sintra when he acknowledged the receipt of my "quasi story."

**MR ROLA PEREIRA: A REMINISCENCE
OF A REMINISCENCE OF MÁRIO DE SÁ-CARNEIRO**

There was a time of year when the streets of Lourenço Marques were full of swords. Well, they were not exactly swords, their shape was more like that of a cutlass and they were, in fact, the long pods that fell from the acacias facilitating duels the likes of which even Errol Flynn in the Scala Cinema matinees had never performed. The longest pods reached nearly a foot and a half, which is the ideal size for the arm of a twelve-year old. The seeds inside the chestnut-colored shells rattled to attention with every blow, the duels ended not when one killed the other, because you could always come back to life, but when someone asked for a truce, which could be dishonorable. Or else, when one of the swords disintegrated. For that reason, it was always better to choose a sword that was still firm but also already reasonably dry (this had the additional advantage of having seeds that roared like war drums) so that, by easily disintegrating with honor, you could go and meet up with soccer mates on the Harmonia Club field. Coluna would sometimes turn up at the end of the hot afternoon, lingering a few minutes to give advice: "Never shoot with the toe; your foot at an angle controls the ball's direction better." He already played for Desportivo F.C., and was listened to with metaphysical respect. Costa Pereira, who was more populist, sometimes deigned to play with us, as the goalie for the team that was losing. Once, I almost scored against him. An unforgettable moment: with my foot at an angle.

By now I've forgotten what earthly reason I had, when I went to Minerva Central bookstore on another occasion, to leave with a work by José Régio under my arm. I was still writing poetry on the quiet, even so that doesn't really explain my sudden switch from Afonso Lopes Vieira to the *Poems of God and the Devil* and the *Crossroads of God*. Yet another thing for my mother to worry about. One of her other worries (she knew nothing about

my duels), was my math. I read the Régio with the same passion with which I devoured oranges, both activities being simultaneous thanks to a finely honed technique. I separated the book's pages, as I read it, with my right index finger (how barbaric!), while my left hand squashed oranges, juicing them inside their peel. Then, I would bite open a little hole and it was just a case of sucking and reading. The stains splattered all over the pages of the surviving copies attest to my voracious literary precociousness.

My mother would ask: "Do you still know the poem about the little bulls by heart?" I would retort rebelliously, in an echo of Régio "No! I just know there I won't go." It's hardly surprising she was worried. So, she thought it wise to take urgent measures over my math. It was the time of the latest educational reforms, the exams had been brought forward to the second year of high school, the year I was in, and I'd got a "D." My father was dead-set against tutors, but knew Mr Rola Pereira, and thought tutoring with him would be less of the crutch he feared and more of the stimulus I needed. And that's how it turned out.

Mr Rola Pereira's house was a raised ground floor, in the sober, colonial style of the 1930s. Around five steps led up from the street to a verandah or long porch that went to the living quarters, which were set back. Right at the top of the stairs, on the left, was the classroom: a rectangular desk, surrounded by eight chairs, and a blackboard. However, I was to have private tutoring. "Hey, old boy! You must be Helder." I was won over at once. If there were any problem implicit in my being Helder, his tone showed that until he had proof to the contrary, that was okay too. Mr Rola Pereira was thin, always wore a smock without a belt and beige linen trousers, had the features of an old Republican, a handsome mane of white hair that was difficult to keep kempt, a small white beard, and the expectant gaze of a bird. He stuttered slightly, I think more for emphasis than need. And he always addressed me as "old boy!"

Straight away, I wanted to know more about him. Actually, I was really annoyed I'd never paid attention to the rumors I'd heard which always ended in a story of the great love that led him to marry a lady who already had five children and had been widowed in circumstances I quickly deemed could only be tragic. Everyone said *Senhora Dona* Laura was extremely beautiful, Mr Rola Pereira had stopped land-surveying and was tutoring in mathematics. There must have been some logic to this that escaped me and no one wanted to explain. Anyway, from this great love two daughters

resulted, the younger was Laurinha, even I could see she really was exquisitely beautiful, and everyone said she was the spitting image of her mother when she was younger. She must have been a couple of years older than me, which, at the time, meant she was light-years older but, when I was more grown-up, I chanced upon her again so that retrospectively I could understand, through the beauty of the spitting image, that Mr Rola Pereira's love needed no logic.

If mathematics had always been what Mr Rola Pereira transformed it into (after four months of his tutoring, I passed with a B), I would be here today not as a poet in my prose years and a poor humanities professor but as a contagious architect or computerized banker. But I doubt Mr Rola Pereira would have applauded such a future. The fact is, one lesson, I pretended to hand in by mistake a note book in which I'd written down some verses I was working on, which happened to be identical to my exercise book. He took it without saying a word, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Next time we met, once the lesson was over, he invited me into the room at the end of the porch, his living quarters, where he called together his entire family in a theatrical performance of the upmost solemnity. One by one, he asked his wife, his five step-children and his daughters to sit down, then pointing his arm out to me, he declared stuttering more than usual, "He is a poet." There was a really long pause. "Read." It was a right of passage. His solemn tone was infectious, I was not yet the timid adolescent who I would later become for a few years, timidity wasn't why I couldn't recognize myself in the slow, adult, transfigured voice with which I obeyed.

At the end of my next lesson, he asked me about my favorite poets. "Régio? At twelve? Old boy, that's very young, very young indeed!" And with a twinkle in his eye, he added, "Whom you really shouldn't read is a poet called Mário de Sá-Carneiro. Got that down? Sá-Carneiro. Don't read him!" Of course, I rushed straight out to the Minerva Central bookstore and when I arrived at the next class even earlier than was becoming my custom, with Sá-Carneiro in hand, he asked, "Well then, old boy. You haven't read him yet, have you?"

Six years later, at the end of my high school, I returned to Lourenço Marques. In the interim, there had been Lisbon, Guinea and a copper-colored girlfriend. I'd gone there to complete my last year of high school near my parents but, in the meantime, they'd moved to São Tomé and I stayed in the house of my Uncle António and Aunt Amélia, my mother's older sister,

both had always been integral to my awareness of being. Dr Pacheco, my Uncle Antônio, was something of a saint—I use the word without exaggerating—exercising his profession like a tender-hearted Franciscan visionary, going from house to house in the poorest areas in his tiny car which resembled the body of a small, slow wingless plane, paying for his patient's prescriptions, lending them money for bills he never got round to sending them. I suspect he also suffered from the abysses that go hand-in-hand with sainthood, but I can't exhaust every tale in one book. In the afternoons, Aunt Amélia would play canasta, discretely going to vomit after eating, and sing tunes from the days of Mirita and Estêvão Amarante with the clear voice of a soprano, trained in Odivelas. It can't be easy being a saint's wife.

I was the same old erratic student, full of highs and lows, if I managed to get away without the entrance exam to law school (fancy that!), it was thanks to classes from Fernando Gil, a classmate in my first years of high school, and the only friend I still have from when I was nine or ten, which must, by now, mean we will bear witness to each other to the very end. He was also going to study law and wanted us to go at the same time. So, instead of me having to read the textbooks, I listened to him talking about them and improving them, beneath a pergola in Polana, with a view of the bay. At one point, he wanted to explain the difference between memory and reminiscence to me, for the philosophy exam, and told me to try to visualize my father's smile, a rare and thus unforgettable smile. Was that memory or reminiscence? Today, I no longer know.

Lessons over, which with Fernando were even less formal than Mr Rola Pereira's math tutoring—the only way I can learn anything at all—I would return to Uncle Antônio's house over the moon, without any notion of a chore having been done, to read Proust in a room stuffed full of the Chinese porcelain collected by Aunt Amélia, the twelve volumes initially stacked on the left side of the armchair with its inlays that were also Chinese and, week after week, read and transferred one by one to the right side of the chair until the pile was completely reconstructed, from end to beginning.

Of course, I also carried on visiting Mr Rola Pereira, who, since he'd always been an old man to me, I would find the same as ever. I was the one who must have changed and could no longer find that old magic in him. We became as good friends as is possible for a youth of seventeen or eighteen and an old man in his late sixties, which is to say not as close as a child and the same old man, six years earlier. I suspect he wasn't particularly pleased

about the visible admiration—well, more than admiration—I’d developed for Laurinha. We’d go out sometimes, and Mr Rola Pereira had perfected the art of accidentally appearing wherever we were, even on the beach, which he hated, by the coconut trees. Great loves are protective of their outcomes. Even so, for several months, Mr Rola Pereira and I would see each other nearly every week, and talk about Sá-Carneiro. Remembering is very similar to imagining, but I think I remember this with reasonable accuracy. In any case, here’s an outline of my memory of Mr Rola Pereira’s memory:

—Until Fernando Pessoa showed up, they’d been inseparable friends. Sá-Carneiro wrote in a crescendo of round letters “To my great, Great, GREAT FRIEND...” in the copy he gave him of the novellas, *Beginning*, one of which is dedicated “To Gilberto Rola.” He used to say to him, “You know, you’re my nanny!” Then Pessoa and Africa happened, and contact was still maintained but at a distance.

—The idea of suicide was very old, it had always been a structuring obsession of imagined destinies. The issue for Sá-Carneiro wasn’t knowing *if*, but *when*, *how*, *where*, an issue of opportunity and courage. Tomás Cabreira Júnior (co-author of the play *Friendship*) turned up a few days after a failed suicide attempt with permanganate. The jeering was enormous. Killing oneself by drinking permanganate revealed the soul of a kitchen maid, and even worse, of a failed kitchen maid. Next time, don’t shame them. And so he didn’t, because when he managed to kill himself at twenty, he went the whole hog, with a pistol bullet which merited a poem in his honor by Sá-Carneiro to “the brave great man” who in life still managed to achieve something: “death—and there are many like me who achieve nothing...”

—In his final-year high-school exam, during the oral test, having refused to sit at a desk which was too small for him, Sá-Carneiro steadied himself with his enormous weight supported on his left hand supported on the desk top, balancing languidly with his right leg suspended in the air. The examiner, with corrupt but influential requests on Sá-Carneiro’s behalf still ringing in his ears, pretended not to notice the misbehavior, and tried at all costs to salvage his (let’s say) history exam: “Now then, let’s see if you can remember, what were the causes of the discoveries?” And Sá-Carneiro, with his insolent leg swaying backward and forward, responded, “Oh but, sir, what importance does that have now?”

—He passed and went to Coimbra, where the usual idiots pulled down his trousers and painted his penis with mercurochrome. He wrote to his

father asking how he thought it possible to continue living in a country like that. His father agreed it wasn't easy. That's why it was eventually decided he should move to Paris.

—Around this time, Sá-Carneiro was considered more of a prose-writer than a poet, the poetry that interested him even Cesário Verde hadn't written, he thought legitimate topics for poetry were, for example, a lamp post, not because it was a lamp but because it was a post, or a heavily pregnant woman, not for her maternity but because of the spherical shape of her body. He tried a poem that began "I do not sing of the marchioness her alabastrine neck/No, I sing nothing of this..."

—Now, his relationship with Pessoa, the dominance Pessoa acquired over Sá-Carneiro was not at all healthy, and didn't help. Pessoa nourished himself on the lives of others, dreamt the dreams of others, lived the deaths of others, wasn't a nanny, or the new Great Friend, but was the Great Shadow. He took from Sá-Carneiro's work everything he wrote before knowing him, and appropriated *Friendship* and *Beginning*. "Just pay attention to the titles, old boy!"

—Sá-Carneiro's father had also gone to Mozambique. Between father and son, there was a relationship built on blame and blackmail. He was, however, a generous man. He tried to convince him to go out there and spend some time, using all sorts of monetary and emotional incentives and disincentives. Sending an allowance to Paris was becoming difficult because of the war. His son replied by always asking for more money, employing a rhetoric of "I would rather die..." Only, it wasn't rhetoric.

—Mr Rola Pereira also wrote to him shortly before his suicide, highlighting that there were paper, pens, desks, chairs, and the whole inner world you brought with you in Africa. As well as a whole other world, perhaps the world of the Other he sought within, a wider and more potent light-headedness than the crumbling mirage in the North. He was being his nanny again, wanting to protect him from the fast-approaching confluence of the when, how and where of his suicide. His last communication was a telegram in French to his father: "Je suis perdu."

—"But Mr Rola Pereira, the letters he wrote to you?" He stammered: "I don't have them, old boy. I lent them out to be shown to José Régio and they were never returned. They were from a Mário different from the one who wrote to Pessoa, saying similar things but he was different, Régio is spiritually closer to Sá-Carneiro than Pessoa ever was and would have

understood. But I don't know if he ever got to read them. Oh well.... Old boy, weren't you the lad who used to read Régio?" I realized. Until then, he'd forgotten.

—In January 1966, the journal *Vértice* published three of those letters “thanks to the kindness of Mrs Laura Rola Pereira Vale de Andrade.” Luís Amaro sent me a photocopy when he realized from the first draft of my article for *Colóquio* I didn't know if the letters had been rescued or if they'd survived Mr Rola Pereira's death. Laurinha (Vale de Andrade?), wherever she is, might know if there are others, and she might even have them.

**METAPHOR AND METONYM:
LIBERALS AND ABSOLUTISTS**

As a minister, Teófilo Duarte had a concept of Empire similar to Groucho Marx in the film in which he is the manager of a big hotel and orders all the room numbers to be swapped around. “But think of the mayhem!” “Okay, but think of all the fun!” So, he decided all senior civil servants should swap colonies. In the postwar period, the seeds of separatist tendencies seemed to be sprouting in Angola and Mozambique, the minister wanted to avoid future Brazils. Recently, there had been an attempt to open a bicycle factory in Lourenço Marques that had to be quashed decisively. If there wasn’t even one in Portugal, that was a sure route that led to not knowing who ruled whom. The same logic banned any whims about local universities: national hegemony depended on sending to the Metropolis future doctors and engineers to play ping pong at the Imperial Students Club alongside Amílcar Cabral and Agostinho Neto, although some more influential Mozambicans preferred to go to South Africa instead, to show they really were white. And, in fact, what came to pass were not Brazils.

In Mozambique, except for the RAF Catalina beached at Bilene and some smuggling, the Second World War took place primarily in the Lourenço Marques Hotel Club, under the colonizing gaze of Mouzinho de Albuquerque’s statue and of anyone else with an interest in observing the activities of the four spies who stayed there. Just like the jokes, there was an Englishman, a German, an Italian and a Frenchman. An example of smuggling was a corner-cutting local chemist who got a secret contract through a duly licensed accomplice in Johannesburg to provide drugs for the South African army that was going to fight in North Africa. Medical supplies were scarce on the open market and the business had to be kept secret because Portugal was neutral. So, he would send instead whitish powder he had his servants grind at the bottom of his garden, or innocuous liquids, flour

tablets and various dyes, depending on the order, that, to avoid being seen, he prepared in the back of the pharmacy with his wife, a former embroiderer with dainty hands. When an amputation required an anesthetic, or gangrene sulfonamide, who in North Africa would have time to check their provenance? His endeavors yielded one of the tallest buildings in Lourenço Marques but, as you can't have everything, his wife years later went round recycling some of their accumulated capital on psychiatrists, because she thought she was a radio, and his daughter went to Paris to recycle yet more of it after convincing her father she was going to study painting, I think it was 1951... with Modigliani....

The Hotel Club was not a tall building, with only two floors, designed in a style reminiscent of England, with red brick, its only concession to the tropics a terrace over Manuel de Arriaga Avenue. Naturally, the English spy was the first to lodge there, and felt quite at home. There was even a games room with walls covered with ochre cloth and a fireplace like in the clubs on Pall Mall. It's true the fireplace had no chimney but as it had never been and never would be necessary to light it, the problem didn't really arise. The other spies followed him, attracted by the secrets to which he might have privileged access due to his proximity to the Portuguese authorities. If he did or did not have such access, it wasn't because of it that England won the war. But since he thought he could benefit from the information the others had, they began to greet each other, nodding their heads from separate tables, then asked the barman to formally introduce each other and decided that four is, after all, all that's necessary for bridge, pairing up according to their alliances (the Frenchman came from the Free Side) and ended up drafting their telegrams together which they asked the barman to send, to show they had been working. I have a vague recollection of a rented car with four disagreeable foreigners showing up at Bilene beach during the Catalina incident and, who knows, maybe it was them, sharing expenses.

Bilene was the district before Magude through which I walked with my dog on my way to school. They were not far from each other, both part of a huge area of noble ancient traditions, which over time had been tempered by the military rigors of the Vatuva Empire, neutralized by the laws of the Portuguese, and degraded by the insidious corruptibility of the tribal chiefs who encouraged the recruitment of workers for the mines of the Rand in exchange for a pound of gold for each chief for each man. There were also the tribal sorcerers, psychiatrists without Freud, as I came to call them

after a visit by my brother to London when I asked him to come to one of my classes and tell my students the story he had told me the night before. The class was on linguistics and, at the time, everything at the university was some take on Jakobson and his theory—more showy than useful—that metaphor and metonym were semantically opposite poles. My brother, a doctor in Lourenço Marques where he also taught at the university that had eventually come into being there, had inherited from a colleague on holiday a patient who had problematically been diagnosed as psychotic. He was a detribalized black who was very respectful, and whose symptoms included homicidal dreams. Before exchanging his tribe for the city, he'd been married and, ever respectful, had complied with traditional expectations with regard to his bride's brothers: here have six head of cattle, give me my bride. She was a valuable woman, young, pretty, strong, and according to her brothers, hard-working. But it all went pear-shaped because her youth and beauty landed her on successive non-conjugal sleeping mats, her strength meant she didn't stop despite her husband's protests, and as for work, she just didn't have the time. As a result, the husband took her back to her brothers, as was the custom in such unfortunate circumstances, requesting his cows in return. Nothing happened. The brothers had turned out just like their sister and vice-versa, humiliated him in unison, blaming him for not being man enough, gave him a few shoves and sent him on his way without his cows or wife. According to age-old tribal law, the husband should then have killed his ex-brothers-in-law. But the husband had a degree of learning from the Catholic mission, where they had taught him to be a cook and, conscious of the fact that the white man's law would only add thirty years hard labor to his misfortunes if he complied with the black man's law, he decided to go and make stews in the city instead. There, he spent ten such happy years that he even left the house where he was in service and opened a shop in the vicinity of Matola, where he sold mind-numbing liquids to a grateful population. That was when his dreams began or, rather, the visitations from his ancestors torn from the peace of the other world by the family shame he had caused them. "Kill! Kill! Kill!" But he couldn't. He went to a white doctor and allowed himself to be injected with insulin, grateful for the electric shocks. "Kill! Kill! Kill!" In between, except for the side effects of his treatment, everything was normal. Hence the diagnosis of psychosis by the doctor who'd gone on holiday. My brother must have recognized the dreams as more examples of the many others

he'd heard told by our unforgettable Pimpãos and Amoses and, in the circumstances, he concluded, there was nothing to lose and took advantage of the situation to make a sentimental pilgrimage, taking the patient to the tribe's witchdoctor, to whom he told the clinical history as he would any colleague, and left him there. A few months later when the other doctor, the one with Freud, returned from his tour of the strip-joints of Europe, and both remembered the psychotic with dreams, my brother returned to the witchdoctor and asked how was he coping with the problem? Problem? What problem? The Freudless colleague explained: the man had dreams ordering him to kill, but he couldn't kill but, as he needed to kill, he had to kill, so, it was better to kill. Thus, they built two brothers out of straw, covered with gazelle skin and killed them. The man was cured. And he concluded, with infinite pity for those who took the imagination literally, "A dream is a dream. To kill is to kill." The linguistics lesson ends here.

But it was also through these and other forms of linguistics, as well as the pound of gold paid to the tribal chiefs, that the Portuguese recruiters whom the British had recruited to recruit Mozambicans for the mines of the Rand, had more success in their sinister trade than had been the case with the shock tactics first tried out in the time of my Republican grandfather.

Patiently, year after year, persuasion after persuasion, pound after pound, the ancient tribal rites of initiation into adulthood, were transferred to the mines' katabasis, a descent into the depths of the earth where youths entered as pre-lapsarian 'mamparras,' and came out as men. A bit like the returned Brazilians in Camilo Castelo Branco's novels, who only went to Brazil so they could return changed men. Or even now, like those Portuguese émigrés who go to Germany or France. But maybe the latter don't really return changed, forgetting why they went makes them all come back so the same.

I would see those who'd gone to the Rand pass through Bilene on their return, greeting with a liveliness, peppered with English, women whose hair was adorned with grains of clay, showing off in overalls in the torrid heat, with dark glasses, and sometimes a bicycle they had not yet learned to ride. That was what it was like around the time of the Catalina incident.

One night, the beach guard turned up at our house, having cut across the fields all the way on his bike, gasping for breath, saying there was a big plane trying to float on the water. In between him arriving and my father going, the crew had disappeared (saved by another British hydroplane?) but the Catalina had run aground on the fine sand dunes that separated

the beach from the high seas and, when I went there the next day, it was an Aladdin's Cave: masks with long tubes coming out of their mouths, metal helmets, pistols, chocolates, and the strangest instruments. It was all sealed off for the admiralty but I got there in time to try a chocolate, which turned out to be a tasteless soup cube, and to scare my dog with a mask. As well as the admiralty, a lot of other people came up from Lourenço Marques and, since the route to the beach was just sand and boulders, my father managed to get an additional allocation to finish off the twenty kilometers of roadway that were missing, and built for the administration the first house there was there. On our first night, I couldn't sleep, I was so eager for the following day to go and run through the infinite sands and dive into the warm and clear water full of frightened fish.

With the end of the war, the Hotel Club spies went back to their respective lives but, since it was also General Norton de Matos's election campaign, the PIDE arrived. Governor-General José de Bettencourt voiced his opposition, was wise and respected, and didn't want to import from the Metropolis problems that had nothing to do with the colony. He returned the first batch to Lisbon. But he was nearing the end of his mandate, so the PIDE returned and took root under his successor, Commander Gabriel Teixeira, whose curriculum included active participation in the suppression of the Naval Uprising, a decade before. The PIDE smelt danger and, as soon as the scent's source was identified, they sprang into action against adolescents like Rui Knopfli and Fernando Gil and some other high-school students, whose enthusiasm for Jorge Amado's Brazilian realism was an irrefutable symptom of premature Mozambican rebellion. And so it went on, the PIDE in hot pursuit, from governor-general to governor-general, until one of that last governors installed bugging devices throughout his palace, recording his own conversations with microphones disguised as cufflinks and tiepins.

In the meantime, since the cards in the great imperial deck had all been shuffled by Minister Teófilo Duarte, my father had been dealt Guinea, where he was made head of the civilian section of the administration. There was no high school, he gave the governor arguments to persuade the minister that a high school did not mean immediate independence (although, the fact is, it helped) and, in a qualitative amplification of what he'd done with my brother in the elementary schools that he strew throughout the inlands of Mozambique, he called me back from Lisbon to complete my high-school sophomore year, and to serve as an example. This gave rise to

a gaffe more than twenty-five years later. “No, Mr President. I never did national service.” This confirmed his worse suspicions. Since me giving enthusiastic hugs to three of the ministers lined up at the airport in Bissau might be normal and even politically desirable (the Finance, Interior and I think the Public Works ministers) if a few years earlier I’d gone round shooting at them. But since I hadn’t, it didn’t add up...

The Prime Minister had insisted I, as Secretary of State for Culture, accompany the President of the Republic to Luanda, for Agostinho Neto’s funeral. The president either didn’t like the idea or, to give him his due, didn’t like me so, in order to maintain an appropriate distance, he sent me as a punishment on a regular flight, with his bodyguards, who were to reach Luanda a couple of hours before him. But the plane was a TAP flight and eventually reached Luanda two hours after the president, creating an excellent impression of confidence in the local police. On the return flight, thanks to I don’t know what diplomatic maneuvers and reconsiderations, there was now a place for me on the presidential ex-bomber, despite the fact that room also had to be found to give a lift to President Luís Cabral as far as Bissau. In the circumstances, hugs even began seeming quite fitting. But, it didn’t add up... and even worse, me referring to the Glorious Armed Forces as mere troopers... Explaining the uncontaminated pacifism of my colonialist embraces really didn’t add up and was beyond all explanation. Besides, my role was that of the symbolic left, when needed, in a government the president wanted eclectic and that was to be transitional. It wasn’t appropriate to complicate it with exaggerated subtleties.

But that is not the novel I’m writing at the moment. The fact is that, since there was still no high school in Guinea (and even when there was, it was only allowed to teach up to the tenth grade), I had to stay in Portugal. Where and how was discussed at great length, with everyone in the family and outside the family having opinions except me. The only thing I thought was I didn’t deserve either of the two most popular banishments: the *Rouge* or the *Noir*, Military School (in honor of my grandfather) or the Santo Tirso Jesuits (Uncle Pedro’s revenge). First of all, the house of one of my grandfather’s old comrades was considered, who later became a member of the National Assembly for Mozambique, and there was a practice run of this living arrangement while my parents and brother remained in Moncorvo and I returned to Lisbon for the start of classes. The house was nice, one of the nicest on Defensores de Chaves, at the time one of the nicest avenues

in Lisbon, then one of the nicest cities in Europe. But there was a daughter, a fat lady very interested in checking my body-hair growth, who would lie back on a chaise longue in the study, under a big recent photo of herself, completely naked, in color, posed like a baby waiting for talcum powder. That was when my brother, with the most cheerful simplicity, suggested I stay with him, in rented digs, and much to everyone's surprise including their own, my parents ended up agreeing. The decision that I was, after all, spared the punishment of having grown up was taken in Moncorvo, when we returned there for Christmas. Uncle Pedro shook his head, rolling his eyes in a prophecy of disasters: an undisciplined child of thirteen handed over to his brother who, however sensible and intelligent he may be, had not even reached nineteen... No way.... These modern parents.... No way....

Uncle Pedro liked my brother. Against me he harbored silent rages since I laughed at the wet compress for his migraines and, what's more, he'd found out I'd been playing soccer with the thugs from Corredoura, among whom was one, who became a great friend, even taught me poker and looked just like my uncle, but we were not allowed to notice that. Even worse, one night in the square in front of the parish church where respectable families crossed paths dopily after dinner, a scuffle broke out between liberals and absolutists, which resulted in some bloodied faces, and I'd joined in on the liberal side. Just by chance, just out of soccer camaraderie with the thugs from Corredoura on their unwelcome invasion of the town center because, only much later, despite plain-clothes policemen arriving and arresting only those from Corredoura, did I retrospectively begin to suspect the contemporary relevance of the Romantic historical drama in which I'd taken part. In order to help the export of his almonds, Uncle Pedro, a pillar of Moncorvan society, was now an officer in the Portuguese Legion and I was putting him in a compromising position. I only returned once with my brother. A pity, really, you ate magnificently there: sourdough and olives or rye bread and smoked ham to whet your appetites—a little more bread to finish off the ham? A little more ham to finish off the bread?—fresh wine made on the farm that was so light they even let me try it, figs, cottage cheese, muscatel grapes, the smell, throughout the house, of apples drying in the loft, and that's how you made it through to meal times with everything so good but Uncle Pedro refused it all in order to punish his family. On his plate, there was only English roast beef and rice, invariably containing a stone that always targeted him. He would stop

in the middle of chewing, with a deathly silence all around, get up from the table with his dignity deeply offended, leave the room in an echoing silence, return a little later with the servants in tears, maids and all, who stayed at the kitchen door, wringing their aprons, sit down again, push away his plate and say: “A stone.” Not another word was uttered by anyone for the rest of the meal. But after desert: “I’m going back to Africa!” Twenty years of this, and it must have gone on for another twenty with his wife, his in-laws, his children, all the family trained to beg him not to go, they were all aware of the sacrifices he’d made to live there with them. When he swallowed the stone without noticing, he became nostalgic, remembering times gone-by, still calling Lourenço Marques, which would later become Maputo, Delagoa Bay, as was the custom in the *jeunesse dorée* of his youth. He would ask my brother about old friends as if he’d seen them since the last time he’d been asked, a few days before. I also knew some of them but my important contributions were supremely ignored. “And Mr Mota Marques?” (Me: “He made bugle sounds with the side of his lips”). “And Simões da Silva?” (“He was so fat that one day he got stuck bent over forever while tying his shoe laces”). “And Solipa Norte?” (“Solipa by name and soliped by nature”). “Ah, and your grandfather!....” But this was no longer a question. On Sundays, he would hand out bandages and iodine drops to his workers, who would thank him, bowing profusely in a line. He was also held in high regard for letting children under the age of ten work alongside their parents in exchange for free food.

At the time, my brother had two girlfriends and I thought he should choose between them, not getting that he could actually want both, one summer on, one summer off. So, I’m perfectly capable of also having put him in a compromising position, like I did to Uncle Pedro. They were two sisters, one blonde with brown eyes and the other dark with green eyes. Nothing against the blonde, who was the then favorite, but the darker one had found my “naughtiness” very funny and I desperately needed someone to find me funny again. And since I also wanted to show my brother how grateful I was he’d decided to take care of me, I thought the three of us could be very happy together. I began to make up notes from one to the other, using as my code shreds of the lyrics from the latest songs I’d seen them dance to. The song “Perhaps” was the easiest (“A million times I’ve asked you, and then I ask you over again, you only answer, perhaps, perhaps, perhaps”) and proved to be particularly efficient. But when I started

to exchange messages between them in my “p” language, “pthat pneipther pof pthem pknew, pold pboy,” my cover was blown. With huge affection, they let me know that for many days, they hadn’t needed any “pnotes”.

Now unemployed, I asked the blacksmith for the horse and rode through the woods of Serra do Reboredo. There were lost hamlets with thatched roofs more primitive than African huts; there were putrid legs dragging, if not leprosy, then elephantiasis; there was a shepherd with horridly expressionless eyes and when I got lost and went up to him to ask for directions, he was reduced to articulating the guttural sounds of his daily solitude, with no one else on the horizon from dawn to dusk.

After the independence of Mozambique, a newspaper, sucking up to the new regime, published a photograph of an idiotic peasant who looked like the shepherd from Serra do Reboredo, with the caption below “These were our colonizers.” Doubtless, the journalist concerned would have preferred them to be cleaner and shinier, like the British, who would rush to wash their hands after having acknowledged a “Good day, sir,” with a distant nod. The journalist was as white as any Portuguese could be but, recycling the imperial philosophy of Captain Teófilo Duarte, he thought you needed to know who was white and who was black, and who rules whom, only this time in reverse. I think he’s now based in Lisbon, trying to get over his double colonialist hangover. The thing is that Moncorvo, the Serra do Reboredo shepherd, the diseases without hospitals and the children without schools, the Corredoura liberals and Vila absolutists, Uncle Pedro’s domestic tyranny and what was considered his public generosity, all of this, I began to suspect, might be linked to my father’s tenacity, Governor Ferreira Pinto’s illuminated paranoia, my Republican grandfather’s grandiose fantasies, the leper colonies and weaknesses of the doctor with headaches, and the mystic monstrosities of the administrator Gomes Leal, all aboard the same ship, victims and workers of an empire constructed against the grain, both at home and overseas. I also began to understand a little the world of new miseries I saw around me, the same as the world I’d previously seen without understanding. The magic of my feudal infancy was broken.

My brother didn’t marry his girlfriend with the green eyes, who ended up marrying a cousin who was a pilot. The pilot husband took part in the campaign in Guinea, where he lost an arm, and left the forces six months before the Carnation Revolution.

Bissau was a small, nostalgic and anxious town, sweating the porous pantheism of a slow dissolution. The humidity of bodies lingered in the air, birds fell on verandahs, throbbing, beaks open, next to dogs the heat had made floppy, like rugs with their bellies on the flag stones and paws to the side, from time to time opening an eye glazed with insects and then giving in, with a feeble, sleepy snarl. Only insects proliferated, fat and slow, dealing in decay. Yet, when the swollen sky contracted, everything became ominously alert and shrunken before the elements fused into a sudden explosion of tornados: the propelling fire of the first lightning strike; the wind hissing sheets of rain and raising zinc plates against the deafening crash of thunder claps; the rain swollen by the sand rising up again in cloudy ricochets from the steaming earth. It might have been my age (I was fifteen) but, after the storm was over, women's eyes shone more brightly, and men's voices were deeper.

They spoke often of times gone by and times to come in far-away places and, of the present, they would often say "Whoever drinks the waters of Pijiguiti won't leave here." The same people would meet up every day, in hierarchized circles and, in between their meetings, the ladies would ring each other up, going over issues from the night before. There were some love affairs, which didn't remain secret long, in the shadows of muggy rooms, and official corruption wasn't out of hand, for lack of desire and opportunity. The colony was a plantation of the CUF, Union Manufacturing Company, whose distant profits depended on local stagnation: ground-nuts and palm kernels harvested from wherever nature produced them, then transported to Portugal in their own ships named as if they were dear and conventional Portuguese family members like "Ana Mafalda" or "Alfredo da Silva," where they were transformed into oil and soap in the factories of Barreiro and, in part, re-exported to Guinea as soap and oil, just like the

hypothetical trousers of the Boror Company in Zambezia. Everything else came from Dakar or Conakry: Swiss cans of milk and French cans of vegetables, as well as the soothing crates of Bathurst whisky.

The Cape Verdean middle class were who, in fact, exercised a nominally Portuguese colonizing hegemony, just as they would later exercise hegemony over the anti-colonial struggles in the name of the local population, a dozen intermingled tribes in a small territory scarcely larger than a district in Angola or Mozambique, and politically divided between Islamists, willing to accept their place, and animists who wouldn't. After five centuries, Christian missionary zeal had been reduced to decrepit churches from when Bolama was the capital, and a new church, with an unfinished look, built in a rush in Bissau for inauguration during a ministerial visit that never happened. Just like everything never seemed to happen. But that was how things happened in the darkness of History.

The governor at the time was a professional son-in-law, with mediocre ambitions, of whom it was said he only had two drawers in his desk: one for problems with no solution and the other for problems that time would resolve. He was the calm that preceded the storm, Pandora's as-yet-unopened box, Hercules' house with bolts on the door. But the Governor's reputation was unfair, his conjugal influences aside, he was a good man and, at least once, he opened a drawer of disasters, which my father had to close. And closed it remained until another governor came along who didn't understand how drawers worked and the Pijiguiti massacre took place but, by then, my father was already in São Tomé, where he had been sent to herald peace after another massacre there, in the village of Bate-pá. In Guinea, the drawers were never again closed, with its expeditionary forces, its napalm, and mutilated bodies, blown apart by mines in a war without barracks or sense between those who struggled to preserve an irrelevant colony and those who fought to transform it into an unviable country. Guinea was, in fact, where the Portuguese lost the war in all their colonies.

In the late afternoons, I would stroll on the wharf of Pijiguiti, hand-in-hand with my first girlfriend, a splendid creature with copper-colored skin, with whom the only thing I knew how to do was stroll, letting the humidity glue our hands together, breathing in deeply the smell of lavender that wafted from her long floral-patterned dresses and mixed with the putridly sweet stagnation of the tides. There was also the beautiful and sacrificial Raquel, for whom I often let myself stay up at never-ending adult evening parties.

Raquel didn't speak much, smiled even less, occasionally, would flash me a smile, but always seemed sadder when she did. I tried to wait on her as much as I could, bringing her a glass of water before the servants did, passing her the peanuts, opening her car door before her husband could. She was so gaunt, everyone thought it excessive but her slimness was in perfect, translucent harmony rendered all the more improbable because of the tropical carnality of the world into which she had fallen. She had ashen eyes, a grey that sometimes turned cloudy, almost green. She was Jewish, had been handed over as a girl-bride to whoever would get her out of Germany on the eve of her parents and siblings being taken to Belsen. That happened to be Dr Proença, twenty years older than her and on a grant from the Institute of High Culture in Munich. He was good-hearted and braver than, knowing him now, seemed possible and, as a result, his career suffered and he ended up working for the forestry commission in Guinea. They had no children, rumor had it because she either couldn't or didn't want to. "Frigid," was the verdict of the Governor's wife, "frigid and sterile, and an ungrateful Jewess putting on airs, if you must know!"

One night, shortly before I left Lourenço Marques, when my parents let me go to the cinema with them, the documentary before the main feature showed the opening of the German concentration camps, with the arrival of the Allies. It took me a while to realize those twitching shadows, those bodies with no body beyond gauntness, were people. When my mother also realized, she pulled my face toward her, wanted to leave, but it was too late. The horror I felt at that moment formed part of my fascination with the incorporeal Raquel, of my wanting to serve her in an anguish of unnamable transmigrations.

I was wallowing in this unsettling incomprehension of abysses when a huge scandal erupted in Bissau, as juicy as it was completely unexpected. An unidentified man had been seen scurrying in the twilight out of the back of Raquel's house while Dr Proença was out of town tending to the plants of the hinterland. Scouts were organized, servants were bribed, the Governor's wife threatened their driver with deportation to Bijagós if he didn't uncover who it was, the shamelessness ended up engulfing a low-level official from the port authority, who painted water colors in his spare time. The official, dressed in uniform, denied it, giving his word of honor to the Governor, he was a gentleman. But Raquel neither confessed nor denied anything.

Dr Proença probably no longer had the courage his youth and inexperience had lent him in Munich and, if he still loved his wife, if in fact he'd

ever loved the woman the girl he'd saved had become, it was now with a love as estranged as life had made him from himself. Even so, he wanted to be understanding, to be able to forgive her, if at least she would help him to forgive. Some of the nicer ladies to whom he, drained of all initiative, had turned for advice, helped him to find obvious and essential explanations in what they called Raquel's "difficult childhood" and "what happened to her parents and siblings." Some went even further: age difference, male cunning, abused innocence. But even my mother, who was always so ready to be sympathetic, agreed that, in order for there to be forgiveness, there first had to be an acknowledgement of guilt and the smallest sign of contrition. Yet Raquel did not confess, denied nothing and would not receive visits.

I didn't consider myself a visit but an unconditional ally yet she didn't even want to see me. I didn't give up, told the servant I knew very well his mistress was in, and wouldn't go away. I sat on the porch step, and then I sat on the little wall by the road so she could see me from her window in case she looked out to check if I was still there, sweltering in the mid-afternoon heat, which is when I'd decided to go, to make sure I wouldn't find her husband at home. I waited for an hour, maybe more when, suddenly, it became dark, it was a tornado. I wouldn't budge as the world around me exploded in every direction, and was stoically drenched when Raquel asked me in. She smiled her smile, maybe a little less sad than touched, maybe even a little ironic: "Oh, what are we going to do with you?..." She went to fetch her husband's smock, and some trousers, all too big for me, I would find a clean towel in the bathroom, could leave my shoes there to dry while the servant dried my clothes. And no, my dear reader who's already forgotten what it's like to be fifteen, nothing like what you're imagining happened. She offered me a glass of port to ward off a cold, which in hot climates are always worse, we spoke of tornadoes, of my studies, of my plans for when I returned to Lisbon at the end of the month. And that was it, or almost. I was suddenly very shy, could hardly answer her casual, gentle questions, had lost all the determination with which I had gone there to tell her.... to tell her what? That I believed in her? But that would also be a way of judging her, of presuming her innocence, which is a way of presuming the possibility of guilt, which is the same as presuming there could be guilt or innocence to judge. The servant came in to say my clothes were now dry, he'd ironed them and dried out the worst of the shoes. It was the cue for me to change again, and get going. I got up, without complaining. But

suddenly, surprising myself, I clumsily asked, “The journey.... The journey from Germany, was it very difficult?” It wasn’t something one talked about with Raquel, even her husband only mentioned it when she wasn’t there, I felt myself shudder at my boldness. She hesitated, looking at me for a moment with her verdant ash eyes, looked away, replying after a short pause: “The journey? No, not the journey. That wasn’t difficult.” And just when I thought she’d said everything, “You know, there’s no way of telling if girls are Jews, as there is with boys...” I didn’t understand, had no clue what she meant. I replied with an “oh...” which must have sounded very daft because she laughed. No sad smiles, she really laughed, as I’d never seen her laugh. “What are we going to do with you?... Look, thank you. Now go. Go and put your clothes on. They’re already dry. Go.”

Now, the fact was that as Raquel continued to refuse to allow her husband to forgive her, her obstinacy became proof positive to Bissau’s society of her guilt compounded by pigheadedness. As a result, Dr Proença had no alternative but to comply with the pre-established ritual that applied in such circumstances in the colonies. And if the reader recognizes anything familiar in the ritual, that’s because you already met the psychotic with homicidal dreams from somewhere between Bilene and Magude.

On Thursdays, the plane for Lisbon materialized and everyone would go to the airport. Dr Proença took his wife there, left her, returned home alone, with red eyes, a wreck. Despite the waiting room being crowded, an exclusion zone somehow surrounded Raquel, stood, calm and unlikely, transcendently aloof from the surrounding inquisition, suitcase at her side, a mutant waiting for her boarding call. I’d actually gone to the airport, but not because of Raquel, no one seemed to have been forewarned, perhaps her husband hadn’t even decided until the last moment that afternoon he would exercise his honor. I’d just gone, like everyone else, because that’s what was done on Thursdays, I was there with my revelry friends and with my copper-skinned girlfriend. We’d never spoken of Raquel, nor of Raquel’s scandal, nor of her flight from Germany, nor of my visit to Raquel the afternoon of the last tornado, they were from different circles and there’d be no point. But my girlfriend knew more than she could know, certainly much more than I knew she could know, because she helped me to go over to Raquel, pushing me very gently, as I began to drift away from the group, moving toward her. “May I.... May I carry your case?” I think I sensed a moment’s panic in her. But then, very serious: “No, it isn’t heavy....

Thank you. Now, go.” It was an echo of what she’d said to me in her house, taking her leave, on the afternoon of the tornado. There was nothing else she could have said to me.

That was when my girlfriend suggested no one should sleep that night. We sang serenades from door to door, dancing through the streets until the early hours, our bodies finally beginning to discover each other and to find their way of loving each other. Later, we all went to see the sunrise, red and sudden, on Pijiguiti’s wharf.

I already know this is the most difficult chapter of my book. So it had better be brief. I've tried to write it three times, and three times I've given up, realizing each time with the same words you can fake lies as well as truth, something I actually already knew. I tried to go on without it but had to come back. It is slotted in here. My problem is managing to make the relation that must, by necessity, exist between Moncorvo and my father or, transposed into fictitious veracity, between those two parts of the same Africa, so obvious that no one notices how.

When my grandfather, who's never mentioned, said, "I'm off now and I'll be right back" and he didn't come back (and then he came back twenty years too late just to avoid saying where he'd been), my grandmother, who never smiled, summoned her four sons, armed them as knights, and sent them to the outposts of the empire. She and the three damsels would remain behind awaiting the return of her and their lord. These modern-day Galahads already had their visors down and their lances in the cargo hold when their chivalrous mother noticed the youngest had barely reached twelve: let the others go off; he would follow soon enough. She placed him in a lawyer's office to help out as necessary but with strict instructions to learn the law and grow up quickly. That's where the shadow of an interrupted infancy came from in the broad clarity of his eyes, as well as the timid pleasure in the childhood he rediscovered and always wanted to preserve in my mother. He obeyed his orders, went out to join his favorite brother, Uncle Pedro, completed in two years a course on African Law in Johannesburg, entered the higher level of the civil service after a swift series of ad hoc exams allowed him to bypass all the lower ranks. Even in his hobbies, he was in a rush: swimming champion, second-place in the Polana car rally, pilot's license, but all this with the same melancholic distance that softened his high-caste Roman features.

My father believed in the law. He knew it, obeyed it, enforced it. I don't think he believed in men, he didn't expect much from them and, at the end of the day, the consistent generosity of his public acts reflected a profound, impersonal indifference. Often idolized, sometimes hated too, he was always invulnerable, commanding respect and loyalty from those around him yet I don't think he ever really made a true friend. At the end of each of his commissions, he completely detached himself from the problems that, until the night before, he had intransigently treated as his own, leaving for the next set of problems, with his perspective nuanced from each new commission, never trusting compliments and ignorant of the gratitude and rancor he left in his wake. Pure matter in search of form. Or pure form of what kind of matter? Some of his acts became the stuff of legend, entering the colonial mythology of Mozambique and Guinea. Manuela Margarido told me, at one time, they sang ballads in his honor in São Tomé, recalling one in which a plantation owner fainted when my father obliged him to eat the poisonous food he was giving to his workers.

When my father retired, in the death throws of Marcello Caetano's regime, he began to write a memoir at our insistence, the title of which S., with her perfect instinct, suggested to him: *Laws and Men*. But he soon lost interest, the little he left written doesn't have the truth of his reports. At first, I thought the independence of the colonies had left him without an addressee, that he was just a historian of the future and they had robbed him of the future. That was one of my romantic mistakes. I now think he simply preferred to die unconfessed, not because he had something to say but preferred to stay quiet but because what he had to say was nothing. The terrible secret of poets and, as it happens, those who build empires. Or, at least, of this particular empire-builder, in a game of life and death, which ends when the last card in the pack has been played, and then the pack is put away and no more is said of it. For him, the end of the game, the last card in the pack, must have been the last governor-general of Angola, sneaking out the back door with the flag wrapped under his arm.

And here is where Moncorvo surfaces again in the metaphor of this story, in the group of émigrés who might not even be from there and whom I saw on the French border surrounded by the extravagant bundles of their portable misery. There must have been eight or nine of them, sat on the ground as if they had been waiting for hours. S. and I didn't even have to get out of our car and while one gendarme signaled for us to go on our way

as mandated by the tourist campaign, Operation Smile, I heard through the half-opened window another gendarme interpellating the émigrés with the contemptuous, polyglot discharge “Galicians?” And I heard the reply: “Oh no, sir. Not even that. We’re Portuguese.” There is also the story of when King Carlos got lost at sea, buffeted by northern currents, and was saved by a fisherman who spoke the border dialect. The king asked him, in order to decide how best to reward him, if he was Galician or Portuguese. “Oh sir,” came the reply, “I don’t know. I’m a fisherman.”

Meanwhile, Antero de Quental wrote about the causes of decadence among the peoples of the peninsula, since when it comes to decadence, it’s always more appealing to be in Spanish company, and then he blew his brains out, thank you very much, always at your service; Mouzinho de Albuquerque returned from making Gungunhana sit down, looked around, and did the same; Eça de Queirós, when he meant someone wasn’t Parisian as he would have liked to have been, would say they wore their morning coat and boss’s top-hat like the blacks of São Tomé; a national appeal fund was run to buy a gunboat from England with which to invade England after the Ultimatum; the Republic came and went very fast; Salazar grafted miserableness within fascism; Angola and Mozambique started to become nations, Luanda and Lourenço Marques became two of the greatest cities in Southern Africa, all this through hard labor, through the hands of hypothetical Galicians and blacks without top-hats. Yet, as I’ve already said, my father was not given to metaphors.

I, of course, am, so it was easier for me to think I understood him while he was alive, when there could still be the portable symbolism of Freudian things in the transposed language of political confrontation. It was through it we actually began to communicate, for many years my mother would translate back and forth for us as best she could but when we found a common language, our arguments became ferocious, we would say what would have been unforgivable things to one another if forgiveness had ever become necessary. They lasted until the end of his life, although in his final years it was more because not to have argued would have made him feel as if he didn’t even have a past. Or at least, I thought so, thinking I’d won. But before that, for years, my favorite theme, infinitely inflected in rather unsubtle variations, was that he was the good cop who swapped places with the bad cop, or the doctor who fixed up the prisoner before the next torture session, the moral justification for colonialism’s immorality. He would ask

me what I and others like me, exiled in and outside of the country, had managed to do for anyone with our moral superiority. He'd fed whole populations, clothed them, educated them, protected them when they needed protecting, opened roads for them, built them schools and hospitals, contributed personally so the young countries in the making could come into being. "And what about you? You can't even go to the shop to buy a loaf of bread in the language in which you claim to be a writer because you prefer to live in a country where others, much worse than we were, tolerate you as inoffensive?" We would stop as soon as the tone caught up with the words, better friends for having been able to stop, more complicit for the panic we'd caused in whoever happened to hear us, shocked more by his tolerance than my nerve, they would then catch sight of us, calm and smiling, whisky in our hands, ardently agreeing on any pretext about some triviality—the make of a car, coffee blends—that might serve as the marker of a truce until our next clash. Now dead, at the mercy of my metaphors, I'm afraid of his secret I discovered and which we probably both already knew the other knew, without confessing to it. As long as it remained unconfessed.

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A few days ago, I went to the shelf where he'd left copies of his reports stacked, leafed through some of them, and took out the Guinea file. I came across a heroic tale, à la Mouzinho, I was told when I arrived there, of how he, alone and unarmed, had managed to control a revolt and avoid a massacre: the drawer he closed before others came along and opened worse drawers. The facts he tells coincide with the tale but I don't know if it's the same story, or if it's a worse or better one. I've changed the principal characters' names, and the place names are not on any map. The report is the next chapter.

**THE CONSTANÇA INCIDENT: FROM THE REPORT OF THE
HEAD OF THE CIVIL SERVICE, GUINEA COLONY, 195...**

The Inspector-General of Native Affairs requests in his confidential memo number, dated ..., “the most detailed and specific clarifications of the incident involving the Felup natives from the administrative district of Constança to which the reports in confidential memo number ..., dated ..., sent to the Colonial Ministry refer.”

The Inspector-General also suggested the following:

1. “That the rebel natives be sent to serve on the plantations of São Tomé e Príncipe, since we believe that there a greater sense of discipline and native politics might emerge, alongside better socio-economic and moral conditions for the lawbreakers, their more efficient rehabilitation and, furthermore, a saving for the state coffers.”
2. “That the latest model of hunting rifles available in the colony should be distributed to the civil servants from the districts and regions, as a mark of their authority, and to impose greater respect among the natives, and for defense against attacks from either natives or wild animals.”

It is incumbent on me to reply as follows:

The reports I have already sent to his Excellency, the Governor of Guinea, which were sent on by him to his Excellency, the Minister, contain all the facts necessary to judge the causes leading to this incident. In reiterating the most salient points, I will also outline the measures already taken before giving my opinion on the Inspector-General’s aforementioned recommendations.

On April 15, a little before 08:00 hours, I was sought out by the administrator of the Fatela region, Bernardino Fernandes, accompanied by Naval Second Lieutenant José Silveira. They came to tell me that the Felup

natives from the Constança district, under the jurisdiction of Fatela region, had rebelled. The district head, Fernando Gomes, had left Constança with his wife and children, and had turned up at the regional headquarters to ask for help. He was accompanied by Second Lieutenant Silveira, who corroborated the following facts related by the district head:

- a. The insubordination started among “youths,” as Felup natives classify those between the approximate ages of 17 and 21.
- b. On the 13th, around 18:00 hours, a group of more than 200 youths, armed with knives and bows and arrows, had surrounded the district building, entered the office where district head Gomes was, blockaded the doors and windows, and with arms in hand, demanded: (i) the immediate abolition of the courier service between Constança and Fatela, for which the district head had determined that six youths should be permanently on standby; (ii) authorization to practice their batuque dances whenever they were approved; and (iii) permission to use their (long-barreled) rifles during their batuques, and whenever they went hunting. They also demanded that the birch used in the district be burned immediately.
- c. In the opinion of the district head, the chiefs and elders of the area had lost control of their youth, who burst out laughing when they were threatened with severe punishment if they persisted in their insubordination.
- d. Second Lieutenant Silveira had arrived at the district office a little after its invasion, with the intention of reporting that he too had been disobeyed by Felup natives, from Lala and Jafunco’s tribes. The former had refused to provide them with canoes to cross the river. The latter had refused to work on the installation of observation towers for the geo-hydrographic project. He also reported that he had not even been able to obtain food for his men from these natives, despite offering them generous payment. He had only managed to acquire the supplies after threatening them with the hunting rifle with which he was armed.
- e. Faced with the district head’s allegations and the additional information provided by the second lieutenant, the administrator had attempted to speak by phone via an interpreter with the two tribal chiefs from Constança, Lala and Jafunco. But he only managed

to speak with the sepoy Ansumane, who had been left alone to guard the district office, and who confirmed the gist of the facts. Convinced of the futility of any further attempt at communication with the tribal chiefs, either because they had lost effective control of their youth or because they had actually encouraged the rebellion, Administrator Fernandes decided to come to Bissau, accompanied by Second Lieutenant Silveira, to bring me up-to-date on what was happening and to request the urgent dispatch of a military detachment. Both expressed the conviction that, without military intervention, not just the district head but the entire white population in the area would be in mortal danger.

I immediately alerted His Excellency, the Governor, of the issue so that, if he deemed it appropriate, the military measures sought by the administrator and Second Lieutenant Silveira could be taken. Since His Excellency, despite the reservations I then considered it opportune to disclose, ordered his military commander to send a detachment to quash the Felup revolt, I requested that he also allow me to go to the region to observe what was actually going on and, as far as possible, to search for an administrative solution to the problem, as was my job. Appropriately authorized by His Excellency, I went to Fatela, accompanied by Administrator Fernandes in the Aeroclub's propeller plane, without the need of a pilot. However, before leaving, I spoke with the Military Commander who, for his part, took the measures he deemed appropriate.

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At nearly 15.30 hours, I reached Fatela, where the district head was. I asked him if he had anything to add to what the administrator had related. He stated that at around 11:00 hours the sepoy, who had remained behind to guard the district offices, had phoned to say that the Felup youths had met again in front of the building, armed with mussassas (bows and arrows), knives and now with some rifles, too. They had said they wanted the district head there to talk to him, but he had decided not to go, waiting instead for the arrival of the military detachment.

Before landing in Fatela, I took a small detour, over-flying Constança and verifying that, at that time, only the district sepoys were near the offices. There were, however, small groups of youths spread over several huts, who eyed the plane with curiosity.

Working out the length of time it would take the military detachment to arrive by land, I decided to personally go and see what was actually going

on in Constança, and asked the administrator to provide me with a pick-up truck. Since the native driver volunteered to go with me, we set off for Constança, leaving behind the administrator and district head, who waited in Fatela for the arrival of the detachment. We reached Constança around 16:00 hours, where everything seemed quite calm.

The sepoy Ansumane, who was guarding the district offices, confirmed the youths' hostile and insubordinate attitude, and also confirmed what the district head had said in regard to how they had demanded his presence that morning. I instructed him to summon the two tribal chiefs from the district, who, he had told me, were in the Big Chief's hut. After a short while, they were before me: first Chief Lala and then Chief Jafunco.

I told Chief Lala that I wanted to see all his men and youth immediately in front of the district building, with their knives, and bows and arrows, and that if my order had not been obeyed by 20:00 hours, the hut of the area's Big Chief would be set ablaze by me personally, in addition to other severe punishments that would be meted out to all. Chief Lala shrugged in refusal or indifference and, as I approached to discipline him, he fled. Later seized in the wild by the sepoy Ansumane, he was returned to my presence, but this time promising he would do as I ordered. In the meantime, the other tribal chief arrived, to whom I gave identical instructions. They told me that the youths' lack of discipline was a response to the district head's excessive demands and punishments. They also suggested that their rebellious attitude had been encouraged by some malcontents, among the elders of the area, who had exploited the situation to challenge their own authority as chiefs. I assured them they would now have the opportunity to reassert their authority. They took their leave, each accompanied by their own sepoy, in order to beat their drums in summons of their people, which is exactly what they did, since a little later the characteristic sounds of the batuques could be heard.

An hour and a half later, several hundred Felup assembled in front of the office building. When I told them they would have to pile up there all the arms they were carrying, there was some hesitation, which obliged me to repeat my threat that they should choose between the Big Chief's hut being set ablaze or the surrender of their weapons.

Reluctantly, my orders were obeyed. In the meantime, I went to inspect the Big Chief's hut, accompanied by the sepoy Ansumane, and didn't notice anything out of the ordinary in it. It seemed to me, in fact, that no violent

measure would be needed to solve the problem. I phoned Fatela and told the Administrator to ask the Military Commander not to march the detachment toward Constança before speaking to me. The supreme Military Commander complied, as soon as he arrived, at around 19:30 hours, and decided to meet me in Constança without waiting for the arrival of the detachment, scheduled to reach Fatela a few hours later in their slower transports.

As soon as the Military Commander reached the district, I told him that, from that moment on, according to His Excellency the Governor's instructions, the responsibility to decide what measures to take fell on him, although I would remain there, at his complete disposal. However, the Military Commander asserted that he did not wish to interfere in civilian matters or in native politics. He would only act, if it proved necessary, from a military standpoint. As a result, I outlined in his presence my warnings to the natives who were nearly all assembled in front of the district building, telling them that by the next morning they must have brought there all the weapons they kept at home, in particular all caliber rifles and gunpowder. They all promised to comply, leaving in a pile the weapons they had brought with them, and went back to their villages.

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Between 01:00 hours and 02:00 hours on the 16th, the military detachment began to arrive in Fatela, awaiting further instructions. In the meantime, in Constança, by 06:30 hours the square in front of the offices was already almost full of natives, and there was a large pile of weapons among which 45 rifles.

By mid-morning, the Military Commander and I began to conduct inquiries to find out the reasons behind the youths' insubordination. They alleged that the district head punished them indiscriminately, even when they had committed no offense. They denied, however, any intention to harm him and, when they occupied the offices, they only wanted to register their discontent. The tribal chiefs, while corroborating the gist of the youths' statements, reiterated the view they had already given me that some of the area's elders had encouraged a lack of discipline, in the hope of challenging their own authority. Their allegations were confirmed by the Big Chief and the majority of the area's elders, who identified the ringleaders, numbering five.

Our inquiries over, the insubordinate youths and those who had been the ringleaders instigating a breakdown in discipline were punished in the following ways:

Three hundred youths were stripped of all adornments that distinguish them from the rest of the natives in the tribe, namely the aluminum bracelets they wear on their arms, and the feather-decorated ornaments they wear as a kind of cap on their heads, made from shells tightly tied to their hair.

I ordered that this punishment be carried out by the region's elders themselves, led by the Big Chief and the tribal chiefs, as a way of allowing them to reassert their authority over the entire tribal population. As a marker of lost standing among the people of this area, this punishment is felt deeply by the youths, and will remain inscribed in their spirits forever.

It should be mentioned that, after they had been punished, in answer to the Military Commander's inquiry as to why the Felup youths systematically refused to do military service, all immediately volunteered to enlist, if they were chosen. There were, among them, some magnificent athletes, who could be molded into excellent soldiers.

The natives with least responsibility were merely reprimanded.

The five ringleaders responsible for the incidents in Constança (Motula, from the village of Constança Butame; Mopeicusse, *idem*; Macundio, from the village of Constança Odongal; Nocosiba, *idem*; Ampar Quebi, from Lala's chieftaincy), were all punished and detained in the district to be later conveyed to Bissau with the military detachment, so that his Excellency the Governor could determine what fate he felt they deserved.

Our inquiries over and punishments meted out, the Military Commander gave instructions by phone to the detachment waiting in Fatela to enter Constança so that the whole local population would be made aware of what would have happened to them if they had persisted in disobeying the civilian authorities. He ordered them to give a demonstration of their firepower with machine guns, bazookas and grenades. Furthermore, he ordered the natives to provide two cows to feed the soldiers.

Since my presence in Constança was no longer necessary, I returned to Bissau, where I arrived around 19:00 hours. I went to relate verbally to His Excellency the Governor the events of the previous couple of days. The following day, April 17, I handed over a written report that was immediately forwarded to His Excellency the Minister for the Colonies.

It is not within my remit to comment on the actions of the Military Commander. However, I consider it appropriate to register, along with His Excellency the Governor, my appreciation for the intelligent and considered way in which he acted. Not abrogating to himself, as was his right, a

military intervention, he raised the standing of the civilian authorities. He also avoided imposing excessive measures that might have transformed the Constança incident into a powder keg capable of igniting far worse evils.

In regard to the civil servants who answer to me: the administrator of Fatela received a verbal warning for not having taken the necessary preventative measures in a timely fashion. The Constança district head, after a similar reprimand, was transferred to Bolama, where he now works in an office, with no direct contact with the native population. This particular civil servant lived through the horrors of the Japanese invasion of Timor, which flashed back to him as he found himself surrounded by two-hundred-odd armed men. Punishing him more severely would add nothing to his rehabilitation, the progress of which will henceforth be closely monitored by his immediate superior. Finally, the sepoy Ansumane was praised for his loyal and courageous actions. This sepoy did not shirk his responsibilities for one moment. In fact, he assumed other responsibilities that were not technically his, when the district head retreated to Fatela. Not once did he hesitate in following my orders, carrying out whatever task he was given, without flinching. He was also awarded a handsome sum of money, given that is what he most appreciated.

In essence, that is what happened in Constança, and those were the measures already taken.

Finally, it falls on me to give my opinion on the disciplinary and preventative measures suggested by the Inspector-General of Native Affairs.

1. (On sending the rebel youths to São Tomé e Príncipe): It may be possible that the sending of several hundred Felup natives, as indentured labor, to the plantations of São Tomé e Príncipe could bring respect, reinforce discipline, produce savings, result in better material and moral living conditions, and that the civilizing process exercised over them might be very wholesome. But the same cannot be said for the realm of native politics.

Economically, the Felup have just enough to survive given the expectations of their tribe, as, in fact, is the case with almost all the natives in the colony, who do not improve the socio-economic living conditions to which they are accustomed only because there is no real incentive for them to do so. At the moment, it is only in their interests to pay the required tax to the state and nothing more.

Since the border with French territory is not difficult to cross, if two or three hundred youths were indentured to São Tomé, within a few months

the region would be completely abandoned by the rest of the population, who would go and settle in Casamance, given the common knowledge of the ease with which the French accept our natives. That would be the repercussion on the native politics of the region.

The fact that many of these youths have volunteered for military service is a gain that should not be wasted.

It is beyond question that these people must be civilized, but by means different from the ones suggested. For example, large-scale agriculture, especially the cultivation of rice, would, as far as I am concerned, be an excellent start.

Having considered the Inspector-General's suggestions, I proposed to His Excellency the Governor that the five native ringleaders of the insurrection in Constança, instead of completing their sentences in Bijagós, as His Excellency had ordered, be sent to São Tomé. His Excellency agreed, and these natives will be sent within a few weeks to Lisbon on the *Ana Mafalda*, and from there to São Tomé.

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2. (On the distribution of rifles to civil servants): In the Fatela region, as indeed in each of the administrative areas of the colony, there are some magnificent *Lienfield* rifles. They are new. However, the events of Constança show that their use should not be encouraged. It should be added that there are few wild animals in the area. The problem in Constança was not caused by a lack of rifles.

With nothing further to report, respectfully submitted,

Signed

THE WORLD THE WRONG WAY ROUND AND THE WRONG WAY ROUND OF THE WRONG WAY ROUND

A big problem in São Tomé was how to avoid the PIDE inspector. Another was that no one tried to. I'd scarcely got off the plane for my summer holiday after my first year of Law, and the little man, with the eyes of a scoundrel and an easy smile, was already in front of me at the airport, a camera around his neck, and little side steps more agile than a hyena's from one of Pimpão's stories. However, there was nothing sinister in his eyes or his smile. His skullduggery was good-natured. His smile was of someone at ease with life. The next morning, before I'd even had breakfast, he knocked on my door to see if I would like to go with him on a tour of the island in his jeep. I refused, without bothering with an excuse. He flashed a very pleasant smile. We could go another time, for we certainly would meet again very soon. "Here, there's no way we won't."

This was nearly two years before General Delgado's election campaign. I had no particular reason to be wary of the PIDE, but became nervous and uneasy, accentuating the scarce reasons I might have had: my name on the banned democratic slate of the university students' association; my daily routine of beginning the afternoons in the Gelo Café, indiscriminately signing petitions, protests and pamphlets, anything a furtive militancy moving from café to café brought to our table and we would sign without reading, as long as it was against, an exercise in bureaucratic cleansing prior to beginning our libertarian nights.

Listening to my protests at lunch about if I was now even under police surveillance (it's rebellion not charity that generally begins at home), my father commented that maybe it wasn't such a bad idea and my mother explained the inspector (I hesitate over whether I should use his real name, given that he's one of my distilled characters, following Taine's method), Inspector Lobo dos Santos, was the most popular man on the island, especially among

the emancipated, the local population descended from freed slaves. His only declared enemy was the president of the National Union. In the Gelo Café, we were into cultivating the absurd, but this really was the world the wrong way round.

Yet, Dr Lobo dos Santos's popularity, and the local population's gratitude to the PIDE were well deserved. He and the PIDE had saved them from Carlos de Sousa Gorgulho—the Weevil—the governor who'd made up the "War of Bate-pá" and who later made up a revolution to justify the massacres with which he suppressed the war that hadn't happened. Or else someone made everything up for him and he believed it, ordering hundreds of people killed, standing with his binoculars trained on the sea to see if he could see the invading boats from Libreville arriving, depleting within a week all the munitions on the island, inciting the Mozambican workers—the "Mozambiques"—to vent their resentments at being semi-slaves through the "emancipated blood" of the free blacks. The most respected citizens from the black aristocracy—doctors, lawyers, engineers, owners of small plantations—were the obvious ringleaders so that some of them were tortured until they confessed: electric shocks ingeniously improvised in metal chairs, ball and chains on their feet and boulders around their throats to see if they still knew how to swim after a few hours in the municipal baths up to their necks in water, bloody dives into the shark-infested sea.

It was Governor Weevil's second commission and his big ambition was to be the Governor-General of Angola. It's true his administration in São Tomé had been one of the best up until then. He was pleasing Lisbon and he wasn't displeasing the colony. Angola was a distinct possibility if he could solve the perennial problem of labor for the plantations. First of all, he believed the colony's slave-trading reputation needed to be overcome. He wanted to silence Cadbury's malevolent international campaign and increase voluntary immigration. He convinced the plantation owners that corporal punishment should not leave many marks and that the contracts of workers who remained healthy should be respected, so they would become propaganda agents in the areas to which they returned. He began to recruit in Cape Verde, where there was a drought. He insisted salaries be paid as agreed and without any docking for transport, food or lodging. But the Cape Verdeans immediately began to cause problems. They refused to come without their wives and, while Mozambicans could not bring theirs, the Mozambicans' newly acquired buying-power allowed for a few

clandestine small presents for the Cape Verdean women in the hope of getting a quickie. The result: jealousies, brawls, stabbings. Worse still, the Cape Verdeans were citizens, like the emancipated, while the Mozambicans were considered natives, though certainly not from there. In sum, a certain degree of confusion was created, made worse by unexpected rains in Cape Verde and a lack of patriotism among the Mozambicans, who, in spite of every effort, persisted in their preference for the mines of the Rand. As a result, Governor Weevil decided the final solution to São Tomé's labor problem lay with the emancipated locals. However, from the abolition of slavery onward, the emancipated locals had refused to work on the plantations where their ancestors had been slaves, following a logic the governor considered perverse and revealing of poor character. As much as anything else, the land was fertile, you just had to plant a walking stick in the ground and a tree immediately shot up, there were more rabbits than land owners, more fruit than mouths, more cocoa exported than officially produced. A kind of Garden of Eden in the Devil's Forest. Thus his decree: any emancipated local found at home or outside their houses during working hours would be arrested for vagrancy and sent to the plantations. The first round-ups yielded well, and promised Angola. Then, disaster happened. The police went to the village of Bate-pá, near Trindade. They found no one, just a huge silence in empty houses. But the police constable who commanded the squad was a live wire, he'd not put up with darkies being smart alecks, he heard a sound from next to the trees and, sure enough, raised his hand and grabbed hold of an arm. The said arm, yanked, brought behind it a four- or five-year-old child, who'd eluded the supervision of the hidden adults and gone to spy on the exciting spectacle of the police. The constable wanted to know where his mum and dad were, shook the child to see if he got an answer, instead, he got cries and yells, which he silenced with a rifle butt to the head. That was when a cutlass flew out from between the trees, landing right on the constable's throat. The squad quickly fled to the jeeps, and a carnival of cutlasses did the rest, until there was little more than constable chops. And that was the War of Bate-pá. Or it would have been, if the Governor had let it be. But he wanted punishments as an example, ringleaders and names. He got them the next day, along with details of the plot of a communist cell that seemed insidiously to already have the island under its control and have even established secret ties with Libreville, ready for an invasion. Not even the Minister for the Colonies believed this, but he sent the PIDE.

They arrived, applauded the measures already taken, corrected some of the finer torture details, advised that the bathers with chains around their necks better get out of the swimming pool since they could then dry off in Tarrafal Prison. All this while one of the inspectors, an enthusiastic photographer, smiled a lot and went from lunch to lunch on the plantations asking the guests to pose for a souvenir shot. The PIDE returned to Lisbon amid brotherly hugs and, on the next plane, the governor also returned, summarily dismissed with a commendation for his “eminent service.” The structure of the communist cell was vintage 1930s, and had fallen into disuse, yet among the photographs, there were several of a bloke who’d been in the party at a time that matched. It was later discovered he’d been forced to perpetrate fraud by his boss, the administrator of the Mira Mar plantation, who employed him as a book-keeper and protected him from his sinister past in exchange for several less bureaucratic tasks like, for example, annexing land from the neighboring plantation, by moving the stakes at night, with the skills of a mole. The administrator of the affected plantation, the nephew of an owner in Lisbon, had been exiled there for his homosexuality, spent his days playing Chopin, didn’t have the stomach to appear in the city, let alone to go and complain to the authorities. But, just in case, as a warning against his improbable bravery, one of his men had turned up crucified, serving as a temporary stake for the new boundary. Well, you don’t get this even in Jorge Amado novels at his worst.

But there was more. A lieutenant-colonel was sent as a government representative, boarded the *Empire* liner in Lisbon, and when the barges went to fetch him in São Tomé, he wasn’t aboard, and no one ever saw him again. Around this time, the Prime Minister, as ever with the impeccable manners of someone who didn’t wish to interfere, asked the Minister for the Colonies if it might not be prudent to ask Inspector Lobo dos Santos to return to São Tomé, where he could be so kind as to help out the new administration, the governor of which was another lieutenant-colonel, with my father as secretary for native affairs.

The new governor made frequent visits to the Metropolis, for consultations, leaving my father in charge of the government. My holidays coincided with one of the governor’s absences, so I got to live the life of a little prince while there, bewildered, understanding less and less who were the goodies and who were the baddies in the area, at the beginning of the angriest phase of my life, ready to question everything, to break the mold

that was beginning to sketch out my predetermined destiny: a Law degree, a career in public service, positions of power, perhaps a university post as a platform for higher things, the governorship of a colony, an ambassadorship, a ministry. Confusedly, I suspected the urgent need to say no, to ruin everything, to behave badly, to open up a space for any alternative destiny, whatever it might be, even if it was none at all. It wasn't a question of ideology. It was a basic survival instinct, not wanting to survive like that, knowing that when I was afraid of doing something it was because I should do it, when I was in the right it was because I wasn't, that virtue was the vilest of vices and, at least, vices were not a virtue. These were the themes about which I was writing poetry at the time. In my friends from the Gelo Café, I'd found new comrades in a shared refusal, in a libertarian abjection as a response to an incarcerating abjection. It wasn't empty rhetoric. Over the years, quite a few would pay with their own blood the bill charged on all our behalves, in suicides, exiles, prison, cirrhosis, wars in Africa, lives spoiled by miseries, until the dead among us now outnumber the living. One year later, I would abandon my Law degree, spend some time semi-underground following General Delgado's election campaign, choose exile in London and continue to work in the shadows for the revolution. I returned to university, got a doctorate, became a professor, after April 25, it was suggested I could have an ambassadorship maybe in an ex-colony, if I joined the Socialist Party. Even without joining, I was offered the post of cultural attaché, named Director-General for the Performing Arts, was a Secretary of State, and now I hardly write poetry, am the Camões Professor at the University of London, and on sabbatical in Sintra thinking about all this. Yet, at that time, I still didn't know how destinies can be reorganized to be the inverse of what they're supposed to be, and I still was far from this my journey to the interstices of destinies.

The then Camões Professor at King's, Charles Boxer, went to São Tomé on an official visit while I was there on holiday. His trip is quite irrelevant for this story and the fact I would succeed his successor in the post, twenty-odd years later, is the type of coincidence only worthy of a realist novel. The only thing the eminent historian wanted to do in São Tomé was to climb the summit, where he found an obscene message in a bottle from Admiral Gago Coutinho. But a fortnight later, another professor arrived, because the Ministry for the Colonies was in one of its cultural fads. He was a talkative Frenchman, eager to please. My father suggested I accompany

him on a trip to the plantations, always a better option than being photographed by the PIDE who continued to pursue me with kindnesses. We ended up having lunch, I can't remember if at the Água Izé or at the Santa Catarina where, without precedent, Inspector Lobo dos Santos was absent. However, a young plantation owner was there with his delightful Creole wife who reminded me of my copper-skinned girlfriend. But plantation owners are plantation owners, so there was no trusting him.

The French professor was a *gourmet*, utterly delighted with the abundance he'd begun devouring the night before, with scarcely sufficient time to wipe his mouth with a serviette between meals, doubtless, he thought everything he said there of the most virulently colonialist nature was not only welcome but would also never leave the island's borders to embarrass him in the Sorbonne. He sounded off about the civilizing mission, racial harmony, peace on the streets and tranquility in the heart, there just wasn't enough time to start on Prince Henry the Navigator. I jumped him from one side: "Bien sûr," and told him what I then already knew about the war in Bate-pá. And then the young plantation owner jumped him from the other side, with everything else I didn't yet know and a final word of advice that, at the end of the day, between Indochina and Algeria, France was hardly an example, but, in any case, it would be better to talk about things with a modicum of seriousness or not at all. Caught off guard between the government's representative's son and a plantation owner, the erudite visitor no longer knew if he should respond to such unexpected aggression with arguments which he might not himself believe, if he should take offense and demand to be taken back to the capital straight away to lodge a complaint with the government (but the government there was actually the father of one of his assailants), or if he should just have another brandy. That was the civilized option he preferred, with the young plantation owner's wife, ever graceful, commenting on the island's beauty, its tourist potential, all the world's climates concentrated on the Equator, while the bar owners, terrified, offered more and more brandy, banana chips, mangoes, papayas, mangosteen, passion fruit, breadfruit, and more brandy. The young plantation owner and I went into the garden to discuss in depth our first impressions and to discover he wasn't really a plantation owner, but the poet Alfredo Margarido, and he'd come to the colony with his wife, Manuela, a native of Príncipe who'd inherited some land the size of a postage stamp. Many years later, in Paris, the *vieux patron* saw the three of us together at

a conference at the Gulbenkian, and something clicked in his memory: “Ah, mais vous, mais vous...”

Is it time to start a new chapter? No, it's part of the same chapter. I'm very sorry but the theme is the same and, besides, why should I look for faults or excuses since the book will be what will be written in it? And the theme, as you'll remember, is the world the wrong way round and the wrong way round of the wrong way round, or rather, the popularity of the PIDE.

Now things like popularity, public images, and the gratitude of the meek change the face of who sees them when they look at themselves in the mirror. The opposite is also true, but that can wait for another occasion. The point is Inspector Lobo dos Santos discovered it was nice to be loved, a new sensation, a more pleasant way to be in the world, and a responsibility too. He was rejuvenated and no longer seemed older than his thirty-odd years, walking head held higher, looking at people more directly. And since everything had become possible, he even thought of getting married, having questioned the new vet's daughter with that in mind. She was from Lisbon, almost a foot taller than him, and because she was tall, she seemed slim, with flat breasts, solid legs, a hussar's moustache, hair in a pony-tail, and the ambiguous gestures of an ephebe. All excited, the inspector offered his services to my father to look into the frauds perpetrated by the president of the National Union. His investigation found nothing but it did lead him to uncover worse frauds perpetrated by São Tomé's member of the National Assembly, an ex-governor who thought that the Tonga residents of the Vale Flor plantation were trees. Accomplices, receipts, and secret bank account numbers, everything duly photographed to confront him when he came for a visit. The parliamentarian turned his departure into a rally at the airport, swearing vengeance against the troika who threatened to undermine the colony, and whose membership he characterized as “the Governor in absence, the negrophile Secretary for Native Affairs, and the Bolshevik policeman.” Instead, he had to cite poor health and resign. The result: a public petition from three-hundred representatives from every ethnic and social strata of the island calling on Inspector Lobo dos Santos to be their new member of parliament. He would have won without any cheating, but he couldn't accept because the PIDE sent him a telegram from Lisbon in which the word “deontology” was used. And that was that, except it never is, because it only is until we see which change takes possession of everything.

The Negritude poet, Francisco José Tenreiro was also on holiday in São Tomé. A man of the left and child of the land, he was a citizen of a future before its time. He'd done his graduate studies in London, taught at the University of Lisbon, and his career promised to be brilliant despite all the racism and political pressures. But there were pressures of a different order, subtler, more complex, harder to resist. Margarido had introduced us and we found out we were going to return to Lisbon on the same day so we set off together at the end of September. At the time, the trip was first from São Tomé to Luanda, in a Dakota that TAP had already wrecked on the Lisbon-Porto route, and then you picked up a four-engine craft that came from Lourenço Marques. That arrived in Luanda with its customary delay and then remained stranded a further twelve hours, but in two-hour increments so that no one could indulge the desire to go and have a coffee in the city. As a result, Tenreiro and I drank all the coffee in the world in the interval between time and space into which the airport definitively turned when the flight was delayed for a third time. The official excuse for the delay was the all-embracing operational problems, but a large load of gold also seemed to have disappeared, triggering ontological questions about prime causes and ultimate aims, which if they are not easy to glean in the well-documented designs of God, are even harder to understand when a cargo loaded in Lourenço Marques with no manifest disappears without a receipt in Luanda during its transportation to Lisbon.

On the other side of a glass partition, in the VIP lounge, was Captain Henrique Galvão, at the time inspector-general in the Ministry of Overseas Affairs (I think the colonies had been rebaptized by then). He vaguely knew me since he was also the second cousin of my Republican grandfather and wanted to know Tenreiro better since he was also a practitioner of the literary arts. He signed he would come over, a little later he passed by to say he was coming soon but was waiting for the governor-general. He was a demagogue, he didn't appear again. There were many stories about him, both true and false, for example, he preferred safaris to inspections and always insisted on being accompanied by two young women, rarely the same two, whom he presented alternately as his wife and sister-in-law, to avoid accusations of favoritism, even if their nationalities didn't coincide as was frequently the case given his polyglot vice. He became irritated with the very governor-general who had made him wait (or maybe it was his successor?), returned to Angola without a wife or sister-in-law, refused to

go on safari, did a rigorous inspection, the minister tried to hush up its conclusions, the Prime Minister modestly recommended prudence, Captain Henrique Galvão publicly denounced everything and the rest is history: the hijacking of the Santa Maria, the beginning of the end of the best kept secret in Europe.

That was all in the future, a future Tenreiro would not share, destroyed by the consequences of the impossible decision he told me, on that long Angolan day, he had taken. The decision was to accept being the new member of the National Assembly for São Tomé. The proposal had come from Lisbon, a response to the petition from the local population proposing the PIDE inspector. The inspector might even have had something to do with the proposal, as the professor to whom Tenreiro was an assistant also seems to have had, alerting him of the invitation he was going to receive, and advising him to accept it. My father had called in Tenreiro, instructed his cabinet secretary to leave them, and shown him the instructions he'd received from the minister to invite him to be the member of parliament. I interrupted him, wrapped up in the patricidal fad that obsessed me at the time: "Of course, my dad tried to get you to accept, too!" (After four hours, we'd passed through me addressing him as Doctor, and him replying formally, to formal respect between the pair of us, and after another four hours to complete informality). "No," Tenreiro replied, "on the contrary, he told me it wasn't the right time yet. He also told me he had a son almost my age, and he would have given him the same advice." He grinned, "Except your brother isn't a mulatto from São Tomé..."

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Now here I have to be very careful with what I think I remember, because this isn't one of my metaphors composed from imagination and memory, and I don't want it to look like a retrospective justification Francisco José Tenreiro doesn't need. Santomeans who remember can speak to that. And as for his ex-comrades who lack imagination and who, suddenly, the moment he accepted, accused him of betrayal and stopped knowing him, it was really because they never knew him, and they would never be capable of imagining a bridge suspended over a river with no banks.

He was a hardy lad, full of a future. He died quickly, in less than two years.

That was the same amount of time it took for the troika governing São Tomé to be disbanded. The ex-member of parliament didn't get his revenge to the degree he wanted, but he did manage something. The governor went to an obscure military command post in the Metropolis, where he seems

to have supported a pseudocoup that predated the one in Beja into which I, getting involved through other channels, stumbled. I think he ended his days in the pajamas of a premature passage to the military reserve. My father was offered the no-less-obscure government of the Congo District, with its all-too-familiar outbreaks that led him to opt for the semi-diplomatic post of representative of the Ministry of Overseas Affairs in South Africa, as a long and honorably neutralized ending to his career. But the fate that interests us for the moment is that of Inspector Lobo dos Santos.

We've already seen how he'd been roused by the popularity he acquired in São Tomé. Well, he married the vet's daughter, resigned from the PIDE, remembered he had a degree in Business Economics, and went to Angola to head the department in his area of expertise. There, not only does he seem to have exercised his public duties in an exemplary manner but, so they say, he acquired an aspect of sublime dignity in his private life. It wasn't by chance that the vet's daughter had agreed to marry a man who had come from Hell. I'm not sure what expectations she'd planned, but whatever they were, a few months later she felt frustrated and vindictive, and provoked him with sordid lovers, public scandals and daily humiliations. But Dr Lobo dos Santos always remained so level-headed, having always already seen much worse, always thinking she knew what she needed, always with a smile, taking his pictures and getting on with everyone. Instead of courting ridicule, he became ever more esteemed and respected. Or, as an ex-lover of his wife concluded, "the cuckold is whoever shags her." And since no one likes to be a cuckold in the colonies, her ration of lovers dried up. She was reduced to the company of her dog, a warm and placid Estrela mountain hound, known as "Mee" in Luanda's bars.

While all that was going on, Dr Lobo dos Santos carried on contributing with gusto to the economic development of Angola, to the creation of a well-off African middle class, and the extraordinary growth in wealth that preceded the outbreak of the war. He was also attentive to the spirit of the Wild West unleashed by the new economic prospects and didn't make any secret of his view that Angolan independence was inevitable but wanted it prepared gradually, "to avoid another Congo," dreaming of the creation of a multiracial federation of Portuguese-speaking nations by the end of the 1970s in which Angola would be the most important. "The Empire's capital has already been in Rio de Janeiro, why not in Luanda?" It looked like a provocation, but it seems it wasn't. At the same time, he drew attention to

potential dangers, he pointed out errors, he criticized working conditions in the coffee-producing north, he suggested economic measures—salary increases for the majority, a share in the profits for the minority, subsistence agriculture—he foresaw what would, in fact, become the trigger for the war. Since his warnings were not heeded, and his preventative economic measures not adopted, he threatened to resign, waited a little longer, and then resigned. Then the names that enacted what he'd foreseen appeared—Holden Roberto, the Union of the Peoples of North Angola, later without the North for greater international credibility—the first massacres and counter-massacres occurred, the anticolonial war began later prolonged into the civil war that continues to this day.

Dr Lobo dos Santos thus found himself both right and without a job. The PIDE recognized how right he was and offered him a job, reintegrating him into their Special Branch as a first-class inspector. And there's no atrocity he hasn't committed, no torture he hasn't refined, or horror he hasn't perfected, pregnant women's stomachs opened with a knife to demonstrate in the crushed fetuses that never again would a terrorist be born in Angola. And there was worse, all very slow, with pride, and with pictures.

After the Revolution of April 25 1974, he disappeared. Officially, he died of a heart attack while fleeing to South Africa. But there are also those who say he reached Cape Town, where he may have had plastic surgery to make him unrecognizable and changed his name.

I believe there've been some writers in Portugal whose literary careers have been damaged by censorship. I'm certain others owe their literary reputations to censorship. In both cases, good for them because things like careers and literature, reputations and merit gain little by being mixed together. Of course, they're mixed all the time, and I think the mixture is called professionalism. Something that always leaves an uncomfortable void in the place the soul is said to be, to use an expression of the excellent Clotilde, the Queen of Texas (who actually ruled in the Texas Bar, without pimps or rivals, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 60s, with her little doll's nose and lean, fashionable body, with long legs). She always complained she'd started out liking to fuck, she was really good at it, she became a professional, and then, only when she was going to do a little kid for free could she feel, if not pleasure, at least a memory of the pleasure she used to feel before. Worse still, because she'd turned into a profession what she liked most and was best at, there were even those who called her a whore. No, dear comrades who earn a living from writing, I'm not calling you nasty names at my friend Clotilde's expense. I'm an avid reader of every one of your books, and I too live off literature, including your literature, by teaching it, which is even worse, to dubious English lads and rash English lasses who actually learned Portuguese in order to read you all. But I'm also reminded of the sad story of two libertarian lovers who lived extremely happily together, sharing a house, a bed, a pillow, breakfast—the big test!—and because of the tax benefits, decided to get married. A disaster, only the motions of their former love remain the same. I'm well aware we have to eke out a living, but you're better off remaining a foot soldier than to expect from writing promotion from lieutenant to captain, to major, to general, to Joint Chief of Staff, and even better to be a professor than to write books that are already the result of university theses which will later be written about them.

My instinct, which despite everything has helped me to survive until now, has always been to avoid turning pleasure into obligation and to eke out a living at the margins of pleasure. Thus, when I begin to come into fashion, as has already happened to me a couple of times, it isn't difficult to quickly go out of it, with a helpful nudge to always short-lived memories. Now, while that might be what I prefer for myself, it shouldn't be a cause for offense that I prefer my writer friends in free transit between two books, I grab them on the sly and we go for both real and metaphorical drinks with the place of the soul visibly there on the table, shining with the same pleasure writing had given them before they turned professional. The rest is just fame and glory, like in the anecdote Eugénio Lisboa likes to tell about the man who had printed on his calling cards, below his name "Ex-passenger of the Quanza liner." But don't think, dear editor, don't think for one moment that because of this anecdote I'm going to give up any of my rights as author of this book nor a single publicity clause in the contract. All I'm trying to say is the pleasure of having written it first for free, without any reputation as a novelist to defend and ready to ruin any other reputation I might still have, no one can take that from me. It's true, and here I agree with my libertarian friends, writing novels could never be the same as not writing them, preferably in bed with a beautiful girl of around thirty, that is, with her own opinions but still capable of being surprised, because in contrast to my Republican grandfather, I hate inaugurations. But what can I do? On a whim, I just decided to go back to my former devotions. On the other hand, these novels are nothing like what is traditionally considered to be a novel, which has its skeleton on the outside, giving shape to the metaphor, like in lobsters. But don't worry, at my age, there begins to be time again for everything: devotions, girls, lobsters.

It's getting on for twenty-seven years since Luís Garcia de Medeiros sent me from Angola something that, despite everything, really was much closer to a novel. Of all of us who hung out at the Gelo, it was Medeiros who became Clotilde's favorite, something that no one ever understood very well since he wasn't conventionally good-looking, with his awkward and lingering airs of Sá-Carneiro with glasses, everything the pretense of a refinement prior to the world. Clotilde found him to be "a spoilt child" (if she were a writer, she'd have said a fallen angel) and she explained to whoever wanted to listen that he had "a pipe like this, very thin and long, that made you really dizzy." And he would laugh, abstractly, as if he'd nothing to do with such metaphors,

with the placidity of well-measured alcohol, letting her take his glasses off so that—what love is capable of—“you look even more like Tony Curtis.”

Medeiros had appeared in the Gelo somewhat out of the blue, at a table in the corner, without anyone knowing him. I think Manuel de Castro, João Rodrigues, and certainly José Manuel Simões were with me. João Vieira could also have been there, in one of his trips back from Paris, to maybe have lunch. A little later, some of the others must have appeared—Sebag, Virgílio, Gonçalo, Escada, Forte—and then Gonzales, ever the errand boy, saying that Herberto Helder was already in the Lisboa Café and he was asking for help. When we left, Medeiros left at the same time, walked at our side but maintained a slight distance and, ever so proper, when we reached the Lisboa Café, he went to sit at another table, which happened to be next to the one where Herberto was actually well entertained listening to Antonio de Navarro’s wedding plans. “A great lass, you know! But my mother is a child and, I don’t know, at her age, it can be dangerous.” The magnificent ex-member of the late Modernist movement must have been around sixty at the time, with noble tufts of white hair like a romantic crown surrounding his glossy bald head. The bride-to-be was forty-five and trained in Physics and Chemistry. His mother whom he looks like was seventy-five and a meter and a half in height. “My father sent her to the convent the day they married, poor thing, to see if she would grow. He was a father to her, may God protect him, not that I believe in God but I’m a monarchist, you know! And now, my mother, getting smaller and smaller, doesn’t have a wrinkle, but she’s becoming forgetful. For example, the other day, I’d come to Lisbon to see my girl, a problem, you know! My mother doesn’t approve, and when I got home, my mother said to me, António, it was good we went to Lisbon, wasn’t it? Poor thing, she thought she’d gone along too, she’s getting smaller and smaller, but never a wrinkle, never a wrinkle...” By this time, of course, there were no longer any divisions between the tables, with Medeiros and his table absorbed by ours. And with no fuss, when it was his turn, Medeiros handed over a note of one hundred thousand sovereigns (quite a chunk of change) to Mr Salvador, who worked in the Lisboa Café with the solemn discretion of a butler of old in a stately home. Medeiros asked him to keep serving *Sagres* and then *Constantinos* every quarter hour until the money ran out, and to make sure he included a tip for himself too. Sebag immediately wanted to do the same but he only had twenty pence and sat there in a sulk.

From then on, Medeiros would turn up every day, whether in the Gelo, the Lisboa, the Texas or the Bolero. He was a writer or, at least, like many of us, he would be if he didn't have other priorities like not writing. He could read music and always managed to remember the more florid passages that João Rodrigues had omitted when he whistled Bach, which might have seemed pedantic if it weren't for his extreme deference and his impeccable manners. These, at first, really irritated Manuel de Castro, himself quite a gentleman and thus distrusting of anyone else who was. But when, one day, Medeiros told us about his play in verse that already had a title and epigraph, Manuel was won over. The title was *The Ham-Eater or Love that Kills*. Its epigraph: "what doesn't kill you makes you fat." The only character who spoke while the actors made appropriate gestures on the stage was the prompter, whose head emerged from his box like a turtle's. "Given what he's like, I'm much more at ease," was Manuel's verdict. Herberto declared in all seriousness that the play had the innocence of debauchery. Sebag offered some complicated rhymes for which he still didn't have any verses. José Manuel Simões, who at the time was a sort of live conscience for all of us (he probably still is, but we are ever fewer and he is ever more), insisted on being the one who bought the round. And João Rodrigues designed the set on the table top, at the same time implicitly forgiving the Bach corrections. I liked Medeiros straight away and even took him to the Restauração Café on the other side of *1 de Dezembro* Street to introduce him to the anarchists and to pay homage to Edmundo de Bettencourt, master in civilization and the reluctant visionary of deaf poems. To see them together was a feast fit for the lords they both were, beyond this realm, who very ceremoniously danced their verbal jigs in tartan colors.

As a general rule, I would savor the dregs of the night with Medeiros or João Rodrigues, and sometimes with both, after the bars, keeping each other company, interminably, right up to the threshold of each of our houses, in a slow toing-and-froing of intimacies in the deserted streets, until the magic moment when the street lights went out and everything plunged into darkness until the day began to break. "Brother Vampires, danger is imminent!" And with that, we would finally disappear into our respective dens. João Rodrigues once said: "I always feel like a chrysalis prematurely exposed to the light of day." But that was after a night of ontological frights, in which the when, how and where of suicide descended on us in a disturbing visitation. I defended the alternative theory of Absence:

suicide meant giving too much importance to what was considered being, there was always a get-out clause in that article of the Civil Code, the only thing I learned from my Law course, which allowed for being “absent in uncertain or unknown parts without knowing if the person is dead or alive.” In any case, we agreed that if one of us ever needed it, the other would rush over by taxi. Fortunately, the next day, without having taken part in our conversation, Sebag committed suicide, sat on the floor, with a rope round his neck with the other end tied to a table leg, which he pulled with his bum, dragging the table backwards. The scene helped to lighten the atmosphere and made us all laugh out loud. Only João Vieira didn’t find it funny, it had happened in the studio he still shared with the other future members of the KUY school of painters above the Gelo and the table had had his tubes of paint on it, which began falling as it was dragged. He had shaken Sebag really hard, taken the rope off his neck and Sebag hugged him, very grateful, calling him father. It’s always better to have a father.

The main reason for my close friendship with Medeiros was opera. For him, it was an old vice, for me, it was a recent but over-powering obsession, worse even than the administrator Gomes Leal’s in the relevant chapter. My brother, who from the moment he constructed a bridge over the ditch of water in Zambezia for me had become the builder of every kind of rainbow, had kicked off, I’d caught the ball in the air and passed it back to him, and we’d settled into a rhythm of an opera over here and an opera over there, up until the point when, in the apartment to which we’d graduated from our digs, we put the mattresses in the living room, next to the gramophone, thus avoiding the loss of much time between having to go to sleep and waiting for the next day to hear once again *The Marriage*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così* or the *Flute*. There’d ceased to be a next day and, yes, we were, above all, Mozartians, although we gradually also admitted the later Verdi into our home, *Fidelio* because of the politics, and Cimarosa and Rossini at the request of Stendhal. But there was, as yet, no Wagner.

One day, my brother realized he’d forgotten to sort out his paperwork and had to do national service, which was when Medeiros turned up, and Medeiros explained to me that Wagner’s operas were really extremely funny comedies. Anyway, the São Carlos theater was going to celebrate that year (a year late?) Mozart’s bicentenary, and if I’d a tuxedo, he had a godmother who’d been a student of Viana da Mota. He went to see his godmother, kissed her brow, and two claquers’ tickets appeared for the entire

season. Twenty pence tax and another twenty surreptitiously offered to the usher to find us seats in the stalls once the lights had gone down. And so it was, except on the opening night, at the solemn inauguration of the season, full of medals, evening dress, tiaras, organdie trains sweeping the floor, low cuts that squandered untouchable breasts, the poor at the door clapping at the most complicated toilettes, Marcello Caetano in a box answering with the smiles of future ambition the most respectful bows, all in all, a full house. So, we had to put up with *Parsifal* standing for six hours squashed behind the stalls amidst the other professional applauders, who clearly, en masse, had dined on garlic and liver that night, and me unable to make head nor tail of that story about geese. Nor was it clear what the claque was for, since its role that night was to not clap. Medeiros told me as we left, confidentially, “Bayreuth’s rules.”

Things got better after that and the high point was when the Vienna Opera came for *The Marriage* and *Don Giovanni*. The unparalleled Erich Kuntz singing Figaro and Leporello, Anton Dermota, Hilda Zadeck, Don was Ernst Blanc, causing extra political frissons when he provoked the world’s rage with his “viva la libertà” at the end of the first act, and an incredibly beautiful girl, Magda Gabory, whom I have wandered in vain throughout this vast world wanting to see and hear again in anything and everything that is opera and who continues to be the best Cherubino and one of the best Zerlinas ever possible. The opera season ended early for us, a performance before the last, which consisted, in the first half, of a poisonous concoction with music by Ruy Coelho and a libretto by Júlio Dantas to be followed by *Carmina Burana*, which is why, of course, we’d gone. As for the concoction, there were those who booed, those who left in the middle, and even the claque couldn’t muster the customary length of applause. But Medeiros got his own back, in the intermission. We were next to a group of the most offensively right-thinking people, who censured, with the tone of voice that comes straight out of their noses and then ricochets back there, the public’s antipatriotic behavior, suggesting a leftist infiltration of the San Carlos Theater. A huge matron covered in jewels complained the most harshly, to whom the others listened deferentially, panting their agreement and calling her the Lady Marchioness as if the monarchy still existed. Medeiros took off his glasses, placing them in his pocket, raised the back of his left hand up to his brow, emulating the singers from Ruy Coelho’s opera and, with a huge shriek, threw himself at the shrew’s feet: “Mummy!”

It was melodramatic and convincing, with his anguished look, eyes full of hope, and hands blindly tugging away at her dress. "Oh sir, how preposterous! What are you doing?! What are you doing!!" And to the others, she boomed, "But I've never seen him before!" as Medeiros floundered, swimming around on the carpet. "No, Mummy! That's exactly what cuts me up!" He tried to grab her knees, in a filial manner, but she retreated, rendering his swimming ever more desperate, by now, she was shouting hysterically. "Oh sir, let go of me, let go of me, let go of me!" And Medeiros, suddenly resigned to his fate, "it's always like this... it's always like this..." He let out one last shriek, while the lady, as if she was also in Ruy Coelho's opera, collapsed into the arms of one of her acolytes. "At least give me your blessing, Mummy... Don't abandon me again, what will become of me, what will become of me??..." And Medeiros fell to the floor.

Another acolyte had gone for the policeman on duty, another, probably, for first aid or the firemen, Medeiros continued in his despondency, some bystanders began to take sides restlessly, the policeman could be seen approaching, I warned Medeiros, he got up straight away, with an agility that didn't go with his body size, he took a respectful bow, put his glasses back on, adjusted his bowtie, and we legged it just in time, since the policeman could be heard saying it wasn't his responsibility, if something had happened to the lady's son, it was better to summon a doctor.

We ended the night, in our tuxedos, our reputations on a high, in the Texas where, Medeiros recounted the sad tale of his life, insisting the lady really was his mother, which melted Clotilde's heart, and must have led to his first shag since the revelations she made about the sexual tackle of her young boy came just a few days later. No one ever knew any such intimacies of this or any other kind from Medeiros. In his tales of women, he exercised the discretion of an Albigenian, and even when they bragged, for Clotilde was not the only one and he even seemed to have a bona fide girlfriend, he remained silent, considerate and respectful. Like in the exemplary tale João Rodrigues made up, with more detail than a structuralist novel, about how a jealous husband had once caught Medeiros on top of his wife, and how he got up straight away, completely naked but very well composed, put his glasses on, looked perplexedly around him, explaining ceremoniously he couldn't see very well, he thought he'd gone to the gym, he must have mistaken the door for which he was very sorry, he was there just doing his press-ups and hadn't noticed someone underneath him. To cut a long

story short, we didn't get to see the *Carmina Burana*. The following year (if I have my chronology right, and if I don't, who cares now? as Medeiros's spitting-image twin would doubtless say), was Delgado's election campaign, which meant there was no time for the opera especially after the campaign was over, when Medeiros, Herberto Helder (yes, indeed) and I hung out with Manuel Serra, Lígia, Sacuntala, Jean Jacques (who would go on to become a character in José Cardoso Pires's *Ballad of Dogs' Beach*) and I don't remember who else, preparing for civilian participation in the first military coup that then ended up not happening. For the second coup, the Beja plot, I was already in London, having had to flee Portugal in somewhat of a hurry, and others will know better than I why that coup also ended up not happening.

Everything began because Medeiros and I had driving licenses, a rarity at the time among youths not affiliated with the Catholic Students Movement. We'd been at the march from Santa Apolónia train station to *Liberdade* Avenue like everyone else, we went to see what was going on, and got beaten up at the entrance to the Camões High School, they came to the Gelo to lead us astray, saying the government was not distributing the cards or bits of paper (nobody really knew what exactly they were) needed to put into the ballot boxes, and some needed to be taken some up to Porto and others to Portalegre in time for election day, which was fast approaching. The campaign already had cars with the engines running. I challenged João Rodrigues and we set off to Portalegre, a police car eventually began to pursue us like in the films, and our car spun round three times on the Alpalhão bend, I lacerated my arm, João snapped his belt and spent the rest of the time with his trousers falling down. The local population hid us, recovered the voting packages from the boot and disinfected my wound with husks. Then someone volunteered to take us to Portalegre by tractor, changing the movie in which we were starring into a neorealist novel by Alves Redol. What is for sure is we arrived in time to hand over the damaged packages of bits of paper, and were strongly advised not to go to the hospital under any circumstances to treat my arm as that would raise suspicions. The hostel room where we collapsed from exhaustion was a fleapit, my arm began to throb, João wanted to turn on the light to frighten our ravenous roommates but, by mistake, he rang the bell at three o'clock in the morning. Soon after, a half-asleep maid appeared, still tying her apron. João, buried in the sheets up to his neck, asked for the first thing that came

into his head, as if such a request were quite normal at that time in the morning and in those circumstances. He just said, “a brush,” in his deep, bass voice. The maid went and came back, with the expression of a modest martyr who isn’t very demanding, leaving the brush on the chest of drawers, without a word. She was there long enough to see my sheets were soaked with blood and bedbugs, so we decided it was better to take the first train back to Lisbon.

In Porto, problems also greeted Medeiros. His contact was a survivor from my Republican grandfather’s generation, an antique, deaf and with a wig, who could only understand what his granddaughter said to him but his granddaughter wasn’t there and would only arrive a little later. Medeiros’s travel companion was a member of Arlindo Vicente’s codedly communist campaign and he nervously began to talk of ambushes, which the old man without being able to hear must have perceived, since he became even more nervous. At last, his granddaughter arrived, a humanities student at Coimbra, and, from what I could glean from Medeiros, stunning. She explained everything to her grandfather and recommended a restaurant to them, which was open until late. Where she turned up a little later, dressed like a whore, since it wasn’t actually a restaurant but a hook-up joint. She asked Medeiros to dance, found out where they were staying, thought it was a bad idea since it was an inn of spies, didn’t like the look of his travel companion, and liked it even less when she found out he knew Porto well and had been the one to choose the lodgings. In the next dance, she suggested to Medeiros they make love at once and flee together to a place she knew. The next morning, she put Medeiros in his car and insisted he forget about his travel companion in the inn where he was waiting for him. In fact, we found out later he was a PIDE informant. As for the rest of what happened that night between the two sudden secret lovers, the tale falls silent, because from Medeiros, we only heard praise for the moral and intellectual qualities of the democrat’s granddaughter.

There are more cars in this story. The missing car is the one that, after the campaign, we hired for the revolution along with Manuel Serra. Herberto, Medeiros and I had stayed up until five in the morning, stoically as if on death row, waiting for the phone call telling us to go to Monsanto forest to get the arms. The call came, saying that the General—there was one involved although it wasn’t Delgado who was busy contemplating exile—had decided it wouldn’t work and he’d been toying with us. As a

result, we went instead for drinks at the Beira Gare, which opened at six, we drank with disgust for generals, and went up Liberdade Avenue making obscene gestures. Medeiros's gestures were so vehement he actually broke his glasses with one of them. Now, there was the car, and the car had been rented in my name, with my address and all my details—I've already said I'm praising amateurism—when I got home, the building custodian was at the door, as she was supposed to be, but she was very nervous and warned me some gentlemen in plain clothes, who'd told her not to say they'd been, had come round asking questions she didn't understand because she had a daughter to marry off and preferred not to know anything about these things. A distinct smell of cannon fodder lingered in the air. Clotilde arranged a sofa backstage at the Texas for me, where it was calming to see the girls dressed in petticoats as a means to protect their dresses from wear and tear, knitting petite cardigans, shoes and gloves for their young children, while I pondered on my foreseeable destinies. I pondered and decided spending the season bathing in Caxias prison with water up to my knees without a bucket-and-spade or any swimming trunks was not what most appealed. I decided it would be better to go on a trip, to buy time: London, Paris, Berlin, Saint Petersburg. It ended up being Johannesburg because my father was there and he'd actually sent two telegrams, saying we needed to talk and I just needed to go to TAP and get a ticket. The lesser of two evils. Medeiros sorted out the details, in those days, flying was the preserve of the plutocrat, and I left with no difficulty.

It was in Johannesburg I met S. But how can I at this point in the grave odyssey of my travels, how can I insert the most interesting and mysterious romantic episode ever told or sung? I don't know and I'm not even going to try. Suffice it to say that in everything it comes to life and it's beyond remedy. On the level of irrelevant facts, I met S. at a reception thrown by a lady with lips turned inside out who, when the scandal broke, felt responsible for the erogenous effects of her hospitality and called her to explain that God had created the waistline to render perfectly clear that there were two types of love: above the belt and below the belt. What a pervert. The scandal was because S. had an architect husband who wanted to come between us, and we wouldn't let him. As a prank, the architect went to the police and denounced me as a communist and at least in that he was a pioneer as it was the first time I had been tagged with the label. Offsetting him, Jorge Dias was then a visiting professor at the university where S. also taught.

He explained to her, with anthropological rigor, this type of Portuguese husband would only grant a divorce if there were an even greater public scandal, and he was there to help. He was going on holiday with his family to Portugal, the house in which the university had put him up was very much in public view, “move in with your guy.” And so it was. My mother, with a ready disposition toward compassion, immediately added fuel to the scandal when she sent their chauffeur in a diplomatic car with a small plate of rum babas. S.’s father tried to hurl me under a train. Her sister visited us at the most inopportune moments, as in fact every moment was. Her sister’s husband was a magnificent *roué*, in the style of Central Europe between the two wars, having fled the Nazis and with excellent contacts in the police because he was also a very successful lawyer. He thought, at last, something interesting was happening in this family, he knew about the denunciation and invited me to a slideshow of naked women in garters and high-heels, he was moved and warned my father I wouldn’t have a future there either. My next conversation with my father was not pleasant. In the meantime, however, the architect husband had already written to shops saying he would not honor any purchases, as if we were going to charge him through groceries for our tickets to London, and we caught the plane, penniless, jobless, without prospects, in disgrace, and over the moon.

In London, I found out Manuel Serra had been arrested a short time after I left Lisbon. (He was in Caxias for as long as I was away from Portugal, which was until Marcello Caetano began to do his fireside chats to the nation all on his own, and when we next met, we were both dumbfounded by how our subversive conversations that used to take place over an espresso were now conducted over a whisky. We embraced warmly, ordered a couple of doubles, and discussed the decadence of the peoples of the peninsula). The other piece of news I heard on arriving in London was that Luís Garcia de Medeiros had gone to Angola, enlisted as a lieutenant in active service in the conflict that had broken out there. I never imagined he would do military service, no one ever asked him and he didn’t think it relevant to say anything, just like everything else about himself.

What I didn’t yet know was if Medeiros was still in Lisbon or already in Angola when he handed over to either Herberto Helder or José Sebag, who had also gone to Luanda to do a colonialist stint, a briefcase with verses he had in fact written himself, while always pretending not to have done so. The details of this are extremely confused. José Manuel Simões confirmed

to me there were some poems. He had read them (there were around sixty), even transcribed one of them, and also remembered the opening lines of another, *Sonnet to my Father*, dedicated to João Vieira to commemorate the non-suicide of Sebag: “The onanist shattered his hand / his hand that was so adroit...” I have a copy of the other poem Simões transcribed, it’s a little on the long side, but here goes:

Retreat from life copy the abyss
waste away from the vague balconies
of landscapes sustained on shoulders
trees long dead
faces put on of mutilated lunar pharaohs sleeping
on the west side of a river of which you are waters.
And if you make a single gesture in which you can see yourself
the more relinquish nothing more be.
There are mouths you well know at the edge of the adventure.
No no it’s of you I speak you naught I am
the now faceless mouths are relics
of the spasms I left along the way.
Yet if you if god if simply the other
demand I recall
I will compose with pallid and fake hands
boats I didn’t go digressions I was:
in Lisbon I was born
the dark death of its river crying I memorialized
nothing recalls the sweet ancient rupture
I exhibit between my incidental brothers
nothing more.
Whoever rules me stop playing around.
And of everything of everything I kept
except the saline fruit I swallowed
swathed the rhyme absorbed in a dubious furrow?
Whoever rules me stop playing around
or receive me in its crosséd smile.

Regarding the other poems Medeiros may or may not have left, the problem is that Herberto Helder told me a while ago he had in fact seen

them but the briefcase had not been given to him and he'd not even come across Medeiros in Angola, being convinced to this day that I was given it by him before leaving Lisbon. As for Sebag, it depends whom he's talking to: he told Gonzales he'd had the briefcase with the poems but he'd destroyed them for being terrible. He told me Herberto actually had the poems and he'd been present in Luanda when they were given to him. And Sebag was who told Herberto I had the poems. Since Sebag is now enjoying a drink in hell with most of the Gelo group, there's no way of going there to confront him about all this, with any kind of guarantee of returning. Worst of all, there's nothing to be done about Medeiros himself, since I knew not a thing more about him after his misfortunes took him off to distant lands and foreign women, with no pleasure at all.

Or rather, I did know until I stopped knowing. The first time was a postcard sent from Luanda that could only be from him. It was a photograph of a man's arm coming out of a crocodile's stomach. Typed on the back was: "I was sent this picture of your supposed wedding. Can you confirm?" I made several copies to send to friends and I remember I also sent one to Mário Cesariny because he later published it as if it were a surrealist revelation "communicated" by me. It's in the gallery in my parents' house, next to the official wedding photo. Nearly a year later, the postman knocked on the door early in the morning and handed over another envelope from Angola that I also immediately assumed had come from Medeiros. I opened it, happy though sleepy, and the horror of the image that came out knocked me into a physical nausea before I processed it visually. It was a photograph, later circulated widely, of a group of Portuguese soldiers, smiling as they showed off bayonets onto which they had skewered the severed heads of some blacks. A few months passed and a hand-written note arrived. It said the following:

Brother Vampire:

I still have twelve cans of beer to get through and it's already four in the morning. At least I won't have to shave before the crack of dawn since I've let it grow after receiving the appropriate authorization from the captain who's a son of a bitch who traveled out with me and whom you'd remember if making the effort to remind you were worth the hassle. I'm writing to you because I'm feeling cruel, frenetic, a little demanding, and I've already written you other letters I didn't send. Instead, I sent family photos, yours and mine. I'm the wrong way round. I need to talk to someone who isn't here

and you have the advantage of not even being in our so-called homeland. Come by taxi. Yesterday, a black nymph who occasionally used to come and visit my voids was caught by the captain and ended up confessing. Not that she came to see me but that she was a terrorist. I don't know if she was and I don't have anything to do with it, but I told the captain straight away I already suspected her and I'd brought her under surveillance to avoid being fucked too. She'd studied in Kinshasa and knew Baudelaire by heart. When I went to identify her, I had to take my glasses off to recognize her since it was no longer possible by looking at her features given the state in which they'd left her. Apart from all this, I've been writing *Don Giovanni* as a novel of our revolution set in Lisbon—a fine revolution, the one that wasn't. If there's one later, later you'll see. If not, maybe you will in any case.

Yours most gloomily,
LoGaritMo

The manuscript arrived the following year. Without a letter, but I recognized what it was and whom it came from by its title: *A Dramma Giocoso*. It had politics, sex, violence, well it didn't quite reach violence, but rather a kind of small Salazarist sadism, something clumsy with no cause or motive that was disturbing because you often didn't know quite what its author's attitude was, all in an antiliterary language nurtured at the Gelo but also in an antiquated tone, dialogues with a false theatrical naturalness derived from the, at times, almost literal transposition of Da Ponte's libretto. It followed *Don Giovanni*, scene by scene, sometimes resembling an alternative staging instead of a novel in its own right, with some scenes separated into two or three parts, and some additions rendered necessary by the transposition of the action to Lisbon at the time of our joint political adventures between the Delgado campaign and the revolutionary fiasco that preceded the Beja fiasco, in other words, "un dramma giocoso." As a literary artifice, it actually had some merit and was somewhat pioneering in the constipated Portuguese novelist discourse of the time, but its qualities depended on the many faults it also had, with its narrative technique between courageously direct and banally elementary, not to mention the innumerable "he said," "she murmured," "she lowered her eyes," "she turned scarlet," and other such sloppiness. I sent copies to some mutual friends, who on the whole, liked it even more than I did. I ended up thinking it would be a good idea to publish it anonymously, so that Medeiros could later claim

it as his own, without exposing himself politically in the meantime. First, I thought of Pedro Tamen, who was then the literary executive editor of Moraes, since he would get the functional masks better than anyone, as that was how he managed to preserve his intransigent liberty as a poet. But he was also away in the wars, in Nampula. I tried Espadinha, a cool friend from Passos Manuel High School and the recent founder of Presença and he almost took up the novel but, in the circumstances of the time, we ended up agreeing he would be the one who came off worse while I would remain high and dry in London, since this story about him finding an author disappeared in parts of Africa just wouldn't wash. In summary, if there were a victim of censorship in Portugal it was Luís Garcia de Medeiros, who didn't even get a literary reputation out of it.

When the moment arrived, with the April 25 Revolution, to open the drawers stuffed with clandestine magnum opuses, I opened mine, which was empty like everyone else's but I did have another drawer where in 347 pages lay if not a magnum opus certainly a clandestine work by Medeiros. Except from Medeiros himself, not a squeak. No one knew anything, no one had heard anything, he wasn't on any list of the dead or the survivors, it's as if I'd made him up. In fact, if he'd officially died, I would have known because one of the sections of a horrendous and yet very useful subversive pasquinade which I helped produce was a grotesque compilation of the dead in Africa, meant to undermine the morale of the living. I reread his book, editors were no longer in short supply but, I don't know, it was no longer right, I didn't know if Medeiros would have wanted it to be published like that, it was too late, its precocious pioneering invention now seemed a pastiche of other works that had, in the interim, been published under censorship in Portugal, thanks to Marcello Caetano's regime. And from April 25 onward, it only got worse. Even Bolero's orchestra of the blind Medeiros had playing in the orgy corresponding to the end of the first act now has a better literary owner in José Cardoso Pires.

So, once I again, I don't know what to do. Not long ago, I asked Pepetela and Manuel Rui if by any chance they knew a Luís Garcia de Medeiros who did military service and who was utterly capable of having become a guerilla. But no, the name meant nothing to them. And since here in Sintra time is flying by, and very soon, it's back to London and classes, before everything is postponed yet again because of my eternal scruples, the best thing is probably to include in my book a fragment of his, and use his juvenile ambiguities

as the only possible ambiguous witness to that time of shared ghosts, bringing him to the center of my mosaic of shadows. That's also a way to pay public tribute to a friend missing in some uncertain or unknown place, showing that it isn't just with good novels that literature is enriched. It remains to be seen if a more adventurous editor might not be interested in publishing in its entirety the juvenilia of the famous author which Luís Garcia de Medeiros never became. Okay. It's decided then. But before we move on, a few coordinates for the less operative reader, in a transition chapter.

Accordingly – as they would say during the militant aftermath of the Carnation Revolution. The characters of *Don Giovanni*, as transposed by Luís Garcia de Medeiros to his *Dramma Giocoso*, are as follows: in the place of the protagonist, João de Távora, a historically improbable surname since no seed remained of the once treasonous House of Távora but, perhaps, it's emblematic of the ghosts that insist on not dying once and for all; Lopo Reis, João de Távora's scrounger friend and general dogs-body (Leporello); Ana Maria Salema, a pioneering feminist (Donna Anna) and her father, Commander Diogo Salema, a former member of the regime (Il Commendatore), both involved along with João de Távora in the improbable revolutionary coup of a reluctant general which serves as the novel's backdrop; Zulmira (Zerlina) and Macedo (Masetto)—yes, I also cottoned on to that, making fun of me at the expense of the proletariat—workers from the wrong side of the tracks saving up to get married and then to scarper to France; Octávio, a chubby, very proper lad who aspires to be a diplomat; and Elvira, a rich, little bourgeois from Porto who thinks she's João de Távora's fiancée and who, trained by her convent education—at the Slaves of the Sacred Heart of Jesus—to metaphorize her sexuality by literalizing that of others, could not understand how João de Távora could reject the self-sacrifice she was willing to accept if he forced her to make it, and pursued him everywhere, interfering in his “piacevoli progressi” with an impassioned and persistent humiliation. And there's also Bernardo, who doesn't feature in the opera since he's a bureaucrat in the Portuguese Communist Party, through whom João de Távora, when he contacted him about the hypothetical military coup in one of his safe houses, stumbled across Zulmira—whom he immediately wanted to “protect”—and Macedo—who didn't want to let him; a Captain Mendes Ribeiro, the General's assistant; and finally, the “cameriera di Donna Elvira” whom the “giovane cavaliere estremamente licenzioso”

serenades in the second act (“Deh, vieni alla finestra”), is metamorphosed into a sexy cousin of Elvira, Helena, in whose house she stayed when she came to Lisbon to settle accounts with the traitor who’d abandoned her in the middle of Porto, something which, in fact, one shouldn’t do.

As for everything else in need of explanation, not even for my friend Medeiros will I stoop here to a literary analysis so, for the moment, content yourselves with the clue that the book rests on the play between two ambiguities of which you should be aware: whether João de Távora denounced Commander Salema to the PIDE or not, as Ana Maria claims, who also accuses him of having tried to rape her the night before her father’s imprisonment, while João de Távora told Lopo Reis he’d simply gone to bed with her after comparing notes on what was then called the female condition, and her old man had been outraged when he caught them in the act; and (the second ambiguity) whether João de Távora was nothing but impotent and all his womanizing just an elaborate fraud, as he confessed to Elvira, or if his confession was yet another of the ruses with which he liked to entertain himself, in this particular case, with the added advantage of freeing him from her once and for all and allowing him to be more at ease with her cousin.

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I will produce the transcription, indicating cuts, from the beginning of the second act—the more, shall we say, Intimist sequence—leaving implicit the ideological and sexual confrontations between João de Távora and Ana Maria, the Commander’s imprisonment, the crescendo in revolutionary expectation up to the anticlimax when everything came to nothing—which Medeiros obviously based on our common experience—and a certain orgy João de Távora improvised to celebrate the fiasco, with the Bolero orchestra of the blind plus everyone else he managed to herd together—Zulmira, Macedo, other workers, Helena, assorted figures from the arts and the political arena of the time, our dear Clotilde and half a dozen of her colleagues from the Texas Bar—and for whose festive intentions he’d opened up the art-nouveau house he’d inherited from his mother, which he usually kept unoccupied because it didn’t have a view of the river. Ana Maria and Octávio, accompanied by Elvira, also turned up at the party, all furious for different but unifying reasons, with Ana Maria publicly accusing João de Távora of having denounced the Commander to the PIDE, while he tried to have a quick shag with Zulmira and, in turn, then accused Lopo Reis of having been the one who tried to have a shag when Macedo lost his cool smashing everything up around him:

“The few people left standing continued not to understand what had happened. Someone had screwed someone without permission, that much didn’t seem to be in question. But was it just that? No, it seems it wasn’t even that. And what was all this about the PIDE? Ah, it’s that the father of a young girl had been arrested and she accused the owner of the house of having informers at the party. As if it were his fault. They’re all over the place! [...]

It was already clear day when the blind men were spotted prowling around nearby the house. They were drunk and had become disorientated. The police rounded them up.”

[*Scene 1—João de Távora's Apartment (João de Távora and Lopo Reis); then a restaurant (the same characters and Elvira on the phone).*]

— Today, I'm mean — João de Távora said — frenetic, demanding.

— As if it were just today!

— No more a strange book will I read. Unbelievable. I've already smoked three packets of weed...

— How come? So, you were already awake before I got here? Three packets!

— The uncivilized character who cannot recognize the literary allusions of oh my precious, oh my pure one, oh my great one, oh my strong one.

— The oh what?

— The oh Cesário Verde, beast!

Lopo Reis was perplexed. He was sat on the sink top, as his friend completed his *toilette*. It was beginning to get dark. João de Távora shaved carefully. The blade was blunt. — I hate waking up after sunset—he protested as he changed it. — It's an act of treachery the daily cycle referred to as life has been able to take place without me. J'accuse! Oh what a life without joy, despair or anything. People lie down....

— Who made you not wake up like everyone else?

— José Régio.

— Who?

— J'acusse!

— Okay. You still have a hangover.

— And it's your fault I didn't wake up sooner.

— My fault.

— Of course. I opened my eyes several times but thought it was too early since you hadn't come over yet. I have to move into the big house and put you up there.

— So you mean, if I hadn't arrived, you'd still be sleeping a week from now. Look... — João gestured him to be quiet; he was getting to the difficult part, over his Adam's apple. Lopo became interested. — Why don't you let your beard grow? It would suit your profile.

João spread out some more soap. — Because it's ridiculous. Not to mention guys with beards have problems.

— Problems? Such as what?

— Such as hairs on their chin. Right, now shut up. I could still cut myself, and if I do, it's bad luck. — Lopo complied, and remained quiet for a moment. Then, he began to laugh, silently. João dried his blade: — What's got into you?

— I was just thinking that in a week's time you could still be sleeping... You know, I nearly didn't come over?

— Why not? — João splashed a little lotion over his face and passed the bottle over to Lopo: — D'you want some?

— Is it foreign? Give it here.

— So why weren't you going to come over?

— I've had enough. I came over just to tell you that.

— Great!

— Great, my foot! I've been thinking the same for some time. I don't think you're good company.

They'd gone into the bedroom. João began to dress. — It's Sunday today, isn't it?

— Is that all you can think of when I tell you we're going to stop seeing each other?

— Sorry. I was just thinking what to wear. Maybe a polo?

— I think your company is noxious. Last night was the last straw. Orgies, yes, but them wanting to butt-fuck me, no, I don't let anyone do that, not even my dad. Besides, I thought it was awful that you, when those guys came to get even for you having screwed that working-class woman... you're as horny as a rabbit... I really didn't like you putting the blame on me!

— And you think that's reason enough....?

— They could've beaten me to within an inch of my life!

— But can't you see I was just having a bit of fun.

— But I'm not. It's over. Goodbye. — Lopo was hesitant. But it had to be, later could be too late. He walked over to the door. — Goodbye — he repeated.

— What a pity... — João murmured. Lopo stopped at the door. — Just as I was going to re-open the big house for good. You could move in there, and save around eight hundred thousand sovereigns a month. Well, what can you do?

— Hmm... — Lopo grunted.

— And what if we made up? — João proposed.

— Do you swear it wasn't out of malice that at the party yesterday...

— Of course not. I've already told you — João interrupted.

— Well... When can we move in?

— That now depends on you, when you have the house ready.

— Hmm...

— Look, I've got a marvelous plan for tonight and I need your help.

— As long as we leave women in peace. It's like having icing on our cake all the time.

— Leave women in peace? Don't you get yet that without women...

— That's why you cheat on them all!

— It's all love. Can't you see? Whoever is faithful to just one is being unfaithful to all the rest. Given my Catholic, fair-minded nature, I, for my part...

— I see. I've never seen a more Catholic nor fairer-minded nature... Well, what's the project?

— First, to dine.

— I approve. As you know I suffer from RD: Rapid Digestions. — It was a running joke.

— Then I promised to go and serenade Helena.

— Elvira's cousin. Great! Keep it all in the family.

— I'm head-over-heels for her. — A blasé gesture from Lopo. — And in response to the good-natured camaraderie with which she defends herself — João recited — an ironic, slightly dated romanticism. Take note. It's all part of your emotional education. So, bring along your paper and pencil, I have to write the verses over dinner. Also, bring along the guitar and put it in the car ready.

— Do you know how to play it? I thought it was just for show, like the house in Mariquinhas's fado.

— When I was a lad, I used to play it. My mother, you know, was a sentimental soul! as the poet Navarro might say. We spent the afternoons reading poetry and playing the guitar for one another.

— How many years ago was that?

— Many. But it's like riding a bike. They're things you don't forget.

They dined in a serviceable, local Galician place with generous portions. João de Távora beatifically sucked a cheroot, his left hand playing with a glass of Madeira — The only problem is Elvira — he said.

Lopo carried on with his desert, it was the third flan pudding he devoured. — I'd already thought of that too, I'm really looking forward to seeing how you get away from that one!

— You still have a soft spot for her, don't you? — João fixed his eyes on Lopo with the brief, encouraging smile.

— For Elvira? — He felt a little embarrassed. — She's nice...

— Just nice? Tell me, frankly: did you never think what it would be like to be... well... alone with her? To take her out, to go to a dance, and then a slow walk along the river bank, getting home and going inside together on a pretext both know to be false, lost for words for moment, then you grab hold of her, kiss her, she doesn't put up a fight, kiss her again, she responds in kind, and you begin to undress her...

— No. — Lopo guaranteed, his voice struggling — I never thought of any such thing.

— Well, you don't know what you're missing, my dear Lopo! I'm just saying that with that virtuous little air of yours.... In any case, what's more important is she also has a special soft spot for you. Do you remember Porto? The truth is you both have more to say to one another than me and her. And unless I'm mistaken, you even told me once you harbored intentions toward her....

— Yes, I did! And you nicked her from me without standing on ceremony!

— I shouldn't have done that. I realize that now.

— But you did, and now it's too late. That's the type of thing that sometimes really upsets me.

— And you're right to be upset, it's the way I am... you even explained to her what I'm like, right here, a few days ago... You're so right.

— I did explain to her, but if you think I gained much from that... She immediately broke down in tears, giving me the reputation of a sadist in the café.

— But you know, — João continued, enticingly — I'm positive it's not too late for you.

— I don't want your leftovers — Lopo murmured. But he couldn't stop himself: — How?

— I don't know yet... However it is, I have to phone her. But it would be really good for you and her to get it together tonight.

— So you can have a freer hand with her cousin, right? D'you think I don't know you!

— It isn't just that, Lopo. It really isn't...— João got up.

— Can I listen in? — Lopo asked.

The phone was in a cubbyhole, next to the kitchen door. — It's not worth it — João said. — There won't be any great secrets shared nor much talking actually. I'll tell you about it afterward.

Having made the phone call, João asked for another glass of Madeira, a brandy for Lopo, and the bill. He returned to the table in silence.

Lopo burned with curiosity: — So?

— Nothing in particular. I begged her to forgive me, told her only she could save me, promised I would explain everything. The usual. She's coming to the apartment to see me in half an hour. It worked, don't you think?

— What I think is you're a treacherous monster, that's what I think! — But that coming from Lopo was not necessarily a bad thing. It was the circumstances that upset him. — You really are — he protested — you were pulling my leg. When all's said and done, zilch for me! But don't think you took me in. I know you too well!

— But Lopo! — João said in amazement — I'm doing this for you, don't you get it? To be able to show you it's really you she loves.

— And you think I love her, don't you? You just have to say the word and, ping, dick to attention!

— That's up to you, to the pair of you. As far as I'm concerned, I recognize the truth of things, and that's that. That's friendship for you.

— Hmm. No. I don't want to.

— Yes, you do. You'll see.... Go out with her for a bit, enjoy yourself, you really need to. And you deserve to. And then, when you've had enough, just dump her.

— I'm not like you.

— Okay. We'll see. For now, the plan is this: you disappear. You go out for a walk, you stay in the car....

— You mean, the same as always.

— But it has to be like that! Or do you want me to sing your praises in front of you? Then, after an hour, which is more than enough to show her how she really feels... because, after all, she already knows deep down it's you she loves...

— Okay. She likes me a little, that's all.

— Oh, my dear, I know women. It's much more than liking. It's probably because of that I turned against her. Unconsciously, do you get it? Freud explains it all... Yes, the truth is I've been going round feeling jealous of you.

— Now that's very funny...

— Okay. But give me an hour, and be at the door of the apartment. I'll leave and you'll go in. And then, have fun!

— And if she doesn't want to?

— If she doesn't want to, no one will make her. At least, not like normal. But she does want to, you'll see. What's vital is that you don't pussy-foot around.

— We could try it out... But she'll immediately think of marriage, won't she?

— No, okay.... She's a civilized person. And listen, Lopo — he added, solemnly — this is the greatest proof of friendship I could give you. I really love her!

— I can see that — Lopo meditated philosophically, so as not to give the impression he was being taken in, even if he was — As in Einstein's law of compensations: everything is relative.

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[*Scene 2 — João de Távora's Apartment (João de Távora and Elvira).*]

João de Távora had received Elvira with aloof and very formal rectitude. He thanked her for the speed with which she had come. He offered her a drink, a tea, a coffee. She refused, increasingly confused, as the emotional expectations with which she had come, ready for a whinge, a reconciliation, forgiveness, gradually transformed into a serious, unsettling premonition. She sat down on the sofa, bolt upright. He remained standing.

— All I can do — João finally said — is tell you the whole truth. It's going to seem ridiculous. You'll immediately think it isn't very likely. But if you think about it for while, you'll see it makes sense, and explains everything. — He moved closer to Elvira, caressing her hair as if he were saying farewell. Then, he moved over to the window slowly, from where the river seemed far away, in the background, sparsely lit by the anchored boats. He turned round. He looked at her for a long time. He hesitated. He filled his lungs with air. He straightened himself up. He was suddenly very tall, firm, rigid. But it was in a quiet voice, biting his words, that he murmured: — I'm impotent. — His shoulders slumped, his chest deflated, his eyes filled with sardonic grief.

The revelation did not immediately seem to make sense to Elvira. — Come here — she said. As an automatic reflex, she let out a dry, rough, tense near-laugh. She covered her mouth with her hand, embarrassed and frightened. She blushed violently.

— Listen — João repeated very slowly — I'm impotent. I always have been. I don't work. My whole life is a farce. Now does it make sense?

— Come here — Elvira repeated. — Sit next to me.

He went over. He sat down. — You're quite right. It does make you burst out laughing.

— No — she said in a serious tone. — It doesn't. — She followed his every move. Then she gazed at his face, studying his expression, very carefully, with an anxiety immediately tinged by a lack of trust: — You aren't lying to me, are you? — But she saw his face wrinkle, the effrontery of the challenge with which he looked at her. — No, I don't think you are lying to me — she murmured.

— You can laugh all you like — João said. — It's grotesque.

— No — she said again. — It isn't. — She lowered her eyes. Both remained silent, without exchanging glances. Until Elvira repeated: — No, you aren't lying. — João was going to get up but she held onto his hand: — Stay next to me.

— Now, d'you see? At least everything makes sense. — João forced a sad smile.

— Yes — she said. But then: — No, it doesn't... — By now, she was quite meek, her beautiful face of an adolescent Madonna illuminated with a smile of infinite tenderness. — João... look at me... So it was because of this? Just because of this?... Why didn't you tell me, straight away? It's so absurd... — And she shook her head in a protective, maternal reproach. — D'you know, you could have destroyed us? The pair of us? Forever? — She stroked his cheek. She wanted to lay his head on her shoulder, to shelter him in her arms, to cradle him.

João pulled away, with a sudden movement. — Don't do that.

— Why not? — she said. — I love you... Oh João... don't think you're arousing pity... — And the pity she might have felt was certainly less than the unbelievable joy with which she felt, deep down, able and willing to serve him.

Throughout all her humiliations, Elvira had managed to maintain the latent conviction that her abandonment by João and his indifference, after the love she knew he felt for her, were a lie, or a type of test that she had

to pass through. Thus, she had not given up, thus she had sought him out, challenging conventions, feeling she was risking everything. And now, everything was explained. She had been right. She had got him back. At that moment, nothing else mattered to her.

— But you're so daft, my love. — she continued, oblivious to the tense withdrawal into which he had plunged. — You should have told me straight away. Can't you see...? I don't know how to explain it to you, but can't you see that you're more true, you're more you, after what you've said? I don't know if you understand...? I now feel able to love you, as if up until now you've just been an idea, one of my fantasies... I'm talking nonsense, I know. But you get it, don't you?...

— I do, Elvira... I get it. And you're right. Up until now, I didn't exist. — He paused for a long time. — But how can you love me.... like this?

— Loving you.

— But I can't love you. You're the one who still doesn't get it! I want to love you but my body isn't able to, as if me and my body were two different people. My body is your enemy — he added, darkly.

— If you really wanted to — Elvira said softly —, if you would trust me, if you would surrender yourself over... If you don't think too much... Oh, I don't know! It isn't important... — and she added, with a suddenly childish expression: — Is it that important to you?

— I am my body — João said. — For me, it really is important. But perhaps, perhaps you're right. Miracles can happen. If you... If you could be patient with me... — He covered his face with his hands. — Oh God, this is awful.

— Patient? Don't talk like that!... — She was pensive for a moment, with a vague, abstract semi-smile. And then, timidly: — But look... Doctors...? Can't it be cured? Oh, I'm so inexperienced! What I would give to know everything...

— This has nothing to do with doctors. It isn't at all physical. Only you, maybe... It's just I can't, I'm not able to... Just thinking about it terrifies me. It makes me destroy whom I start out wanting to love.

— Have you tried... often? — Elvira's curiosity overcame her shyness.

— Yes. Many times. For many years. Then, I gave up. Now I fake it, my success is huge, men envy me, women adore me. Sordid, isn't it? All theater.

— It's unnecessary. It's sad....

— I don't know — João began —, there are psychological explanations, lengthy theories, I've read everything about it, they explain everything, they don't mean anything. The cure they suggest is being different from

the way you are, being Spanish if you're Portuguese, being white if you're black, stop being me in order to be me.... It makes no sense. D'you know what happens to someone when they cut their legs off?

— What happens...?

— They also have their soul amputated where their legs are. They're no good at walking, especially with their soul. They're no good at getting together with others, they're no good at loving. They end up alone. There's no way to make love without legs. But even this impossibility, even this solitude can end up becoming a cause for pride, if it's appropriately channeled. And even a new way of communicating, of getting together with others, without having to move. In a kind of love. In my way of loving. That's how I learnt to love just the way I am, just how I know how to, with the active absence of my love. It's what I've been doing. With everyone. Even with you. Even, in this very moment, with you. — He stopped himself. — But no, with you, it's too late. You now know everything, I no longer have any power over you. It's you, now, who could harm me.

— Harm? No, my love, believe me...

— Yes, I know. And I almost hate you for it. Because I now need you. — He looked at Elvira, who could not conceal a shadow of apprehension, on the edge of fear. João smiled: — Now I love you. You've won.

— I wish I were able to understand better — Elvira murmured.

— You know, my mother died when I was twelve? — João suddenly said.

— Twelve?... — Elvira queried, without knowing what tone to adopt.

— It's as if I killed her.

— Because you loved her a lot...?

And João de Távora, as if he hadn't heard: — I didn't denounce Commander Salema either, and he was arrested. I liked the old man. — He forced a smile. — I'm King Midas the wrong-way round...

— Elvira looked at him, trying desperately to understand the connection. — I knew it couldn't have been you — she finally said.

— No. It wasn't me. Or at least, not in the normal way. It's all so funny, you've no idea. — A pause. — Great. But my mother. Do you want me to tell you about her?

— Isn't it really hard for you to talk about her?

— No. I don't care any more. The classic situation: she married young, she mustn't have been very happy with my father, I was the only child, she showered on me all the love of which she was capable. We always hung

out together, it was as if my father didn't exist. Until she was the one who ceased to exist. She was twenty-nine when she died. A brain tumor. Months of dying slowly. She couldn't get up. Pains that drove her crazy. My father sent for cousin Luísa to take care of me, because I wouldn't let my mother rest. Luísa must have been around twenty at the time. Straight away, we became great friends. I wasn't allowed to be with my mother except for ten minutes, once a day. I didn't really believe she was that ill, she was paler but that was it. She was the same as ever.

— Was she pretty?

— Yes, I think she was really pretty. But I don't really remember that well now, only the pictures, which isn't the same thing. I was entering puberty, my relationship with my mother was being left behind, along with my childhood. It was as if growing up betrayed her. But I also felt she'd abandoned me, as a punishment for growing up. Besides, cousin Luísa voraciously witnessed my growth. She wanted to see me naked, bathed me, noted every modification in my body, commenting on it to me out loud, touched me, tried to excite me, when she managed to, she would laugh heartily and say she was waiting for me... She must've wanted my first orgasm.

João paused and looked at Elvira, who had blushed and lowered her eyes, not daring to look at him. — My mother — he carried on — began to complain I no longer loved her, those ten minutes a day became an eternity. Luísa, maybe to prepare me, maybe her intentions were good, often told me my mother was going to die. Several times, I wished she would just get on with dying. One afternoon, I was summoned. I was playing in the garden. I asked Luísa to come with me. But my mother wanted to see me alone. She didn't even want father there. I sat on a chair by the bed. My mother looked at me unblinkingly, with a loving intensity I couldn't bear. I began to kick the chair legs, rocking backward and forward. The knocks really hurt her. She asked me to stop. What I wanted was to get out of there, into the garden, to Luísa. I stayed still but sulked. She said: Don't you like being with me any more? And I didn't reply. And I started to kick again. She asked me again to stop. And I murmured: Why aren't you dead yet?! And she heard. And she shot me a look that... I don't know, a look I still see every day, still trying to smile at me, so I wouldn't be hurt by what I had said to her. She died that afternoon.

João took a long pause Elvira dared not interrupt. She did not try, however, to disguise her emotion, tears streamed down her cheeks. João stared into space, his eyes blind.

— I've never told a soul that — he murmured, as if he was talking to himself. And after having laid his eyes, for a moment, on Elvira: — I killed her.

— She was going to die...

— Yes, but I killed her — he repeated curtly. — Later, they didn't want to let me go and see her body. But I did, taking advantage of the confusion caused by all the coming and going, visitors who wanted to embrace me as if they had something to do with me or her. I had time to lift her shroud and see her face. Few hours had passed. But the smell that wafted up was sickening. And a thick liquid came out of her nose. Her face was almost black. She was already rotten inside before dying and now the decay was beginning to ooze out of her. I wanted to kiss her, trembling with horror. I shrieked. They took me to my room, and left me there locked in. She was buried the next morning.

Elvira moved closer to João, without touching him, just staying close, available should he want her. They stayed like that, without looking at each other or talking. Then Elvira said, in a whisper: — Now, you have me.

— You — João said in a completely neutral tone. But then: — You know, you look a little like her?

— Really?... — Elvira queried, not knowing how João wanted her to react, not knowing how he had reacted to her humble self-offering.

— A year later, she married my father — João murmured.

— Who? Your cousin?

— Yes. So everything would stay in the family. They now live in the Alentejo. The house you saw yesterday was my mother's. And now, it's mine. As soon as she died, father decided to go to the country. The house in the city, the one from yesterday, smelled of death. It wouldn't have been an ideal atmosphere for a honeymoon.

— Is it because your mother died there you don't live in it?

— No. It's because it doesn't have a river view. Sorry. I know it should be. — They both tried to smile, acknowledging the change in the hackneyed answer to a question so often posed.

But Elvira went on: — And that... that party yesterday? How did you manage?

— It's all part of it, don't you see? You were right, you and your new friends, when you turned up accusing me of all manner of horrors. It's just it isn't what they think, or what you also thought. It's just I'm no longer in control. I don't know what will happen to me. I might even end up... No, I don't

even have the courage for that any more. — And then, in a dry, factual tone:
— But my cousin. Just because she married my father didn't abdicate the rights she felt she had over me. A week later, she took me to bed. What a let-down, poor thing, after so much foreplay. And I ended up forever... like this.

— So, how did you want to...?

— Yes, it's all very simple. It's all beautifully understood. My case appears in the prefaces of the clinical textbooks. But the fact that it's understood doesn't help.

— It does help. If you begin to believe in yourself. And a little in me too...

— In you. Only in you. — He sat down next to Elvira, took hold of her hand, holding it in his as he went on: — After, for a while, I tried everything: doctors, surgeons, psychiatrists, magic potions, drunken love, while dressed, in water, with a false beard and legs in the air... I went through every kind of humiliation, paying every prostitute twice over so they wouldn't say anything to anyone... Until I accepted myself the way I am. I turned over a new leaf, I was disciplined, accepted my impossibilities as a modest virtue. The dress rehearsal for this new theater of shadows was a visit to my father and his chaste wife. With whom it wasn't difficult to manufacture an extremely compromising situation. It was enough just to lock a door and not locate the key when my father knocked, curious as to why the door was locked. Never had my relationship with Luísa been more innocent. Later on, I went to speak to my father, man-to-man: yes, from a young age, I had gone to bed with his wife. No, there was no excuse. Forgive her if he could. Etc., etc. It was the last time I saw them. Luísa must've later tried to convince him it was all lies, but I doubt he believed her. No one ever believes. And now, I'm a professional in active impotence, it's my power over others.

— Don't say another word — Elvira said —, it makes me so sad, all this...

— It's been a long illness, Elvira...

— A long and terrible illness — Elvira, very serious, agreed.

— Now, don't you want me to tell you about the Commander, too? — João asked, ironically.

— No. I don't want you to tell me anything, what I want is for you to forget everything. And that you let me... you let me do everything I can. Yet I'm no longer sure of myself, I'm so scared...

— Only you could — João said. — Only you can, if you still want to. — He paused. — Look, Elvira... I would like to... — He stopped.

— Say it...

— I would like to... go to bed with you... Just go to bed. If you don't mind.

— I want that too, João. I want that too. If you really want to.

— Look... I don't know, I'm sorry... I would like...

— Say it... Whatever you want.

— I would like our bodies to be naked. I think that perhaps...

— Yes — Elvira said, blushing bright red —, yes, if you wish.

— Then listen — João said in a suddenly very practical and forthright tone of voice —, you go and lie down. Wait for me. I'm going to close the blinds first. Leave the room lights off. — He smiled, ironically to himself: — Sorry, it's stupid, but I want us to be completely in the dark. And that we don't say a word. Words are too polluted, it would just sully everything. I want our bodies to be able to talk whatever language they know. Leave me alone for a while. I'll come to you in a minute.

Elvira waited for João to close the blinds, draw the curtains and return to the living room. Then, she walked solemnly, religiously, to the bedroom.

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[*Scene 3 — João de Távora's Apartment's Entrance* (Lopo Reis and João de Távora).]

Lopo Reis was waiting, sat on the steps, almost asleep with boredom. He jumped up with a jolt. — Oh, at long last!

— Shh — João indicated — don't speak so loud. Look... — And then he appeared to hesitate.

— Well? — Lopo looked at him more closely. — What have you got?

— Nothing — João said. — I'm just all sticky, like a pot of spilt honey. It wasn't easy.... — He smiled: — You know, even though the girl is even dumber than I thought, the truth is I quite like her.

— Ok. If that's the case... — Lopo began, resigned to his fate.

— No, no. She's dumb because you won. It's hopeless. It really is you she loves. — And he added in a tone of afflicted nobility, but ever careful not to raise his voice too much: — We parted company as two good friends. It was better like that. To the extent that she asked me to sleep over tonight. At the end of the day, she ended up confessing the whole truth. It's you she loves. She's always loved you.

— Are you sure? I knew she quite liked me, but more than that...

— It's a lot more than liking, Lopo... Why do you think I feel so bad? I really fell for that girl.

— You had a fine way of showing it!

— I already told you. I was jealous. I got my own back. — Pause. — But let's not talk any more about that. Now, I'm leaving her completely to you. Don't forget, that's down to the great friendship I have for you.

— I know, João. I'm grateful to you. You have my word! — Lopo recognized one of those noble gestures his friend was sometimes capable of, which made up for all the rest.

— Now listen — João went on. — Let me be your guide, since I've experience in these matters. But we must hurry. Go in right away. Undress in the living room or kitchen. Turn out all the lights...

— Undress? Are you mad?

— Well, how else is it going to be? The doll stripped off to go to bed and you want to ride her in a suit and tie? Okay. I give up. The truth is you're a blockhead. — Lopo was reduced to silence. — Listen — João resumed. — For the last time. Get undressed in the living room. Turn off all the lights. It's better like that, it creates a more mysterious ambiance. Don't forget, she's a romantic girl. Then, go into the bedroom. Don't say a word. Approach the bed slowly, lie next to her and, always with the upmost silence, pound her.

— Do you really think so? — Lopo thought it was a rather hasty plan. He intended maybe to talk to the girl a little, then take her to the cinema the next day, then maybe to a dance if João slipped him some dough, and if things were going well, then he would suggest they went up to his room for a little, to see how she reacted. But he didn't want to appear naïve in the experienced eyes of his friend. Because the truth was that João, with his quick-fire methods, got them all. He, with his politeness, only managed to get whores, prepaid at that.

João was becoming impatient again: — Okay, obviously, I'm the one who doesn't understand anything. There's a woman who confesses to me she loves you. Who knows you're here, waiting to go and see her...

— Oh, you told her I was here!

— Of course. What d'you think I was doing in there? Having fun? And that woman, knowing perfectly well she was breaking my heart, after telling me it was you she loves and that she wants to see you, suddenly announced she was tired and wanted to sleep here. With her cousin's house just ten minutes away. Don't you get it?

— Well, it really seems so.

— No. It is. There's nothing to think about. Just go in. But, the one piece of advice I have for you is don't speak. Not a word, even if she's up for philosophizing. Lights out and silence. You need to create some tension. You see, what a marvelous thing, you going in like that, in silence, like a god.

— The way you did with that American woman?

— The American...? Oh yes, of course. Exactly. Everything tactile, everything in the dark. The best fuck of my life.

— But are you sure with Elvira? She's from Porto....

— Oh man! Don't you think you're really stretching my friendship, demanding I convince you to go to bed with a woman whom I also love?

— You're right. I'm being a pain.

— Okay. Let's not talk any more about it. Go on, get in. Lights off. Gob shut. Hurry up, or else she'll fall asleep on you. See you later.

Lopo Reis went into the living room. But he returned to the hallway, where João de Távora still was, thrilled.

— João... I've got to say it you, old boy. You're a great guy!

— I'm just your friend, Lopo, that's all...— And he pushed the door open gently.

First Intervention of the Non-Author

I have tried not to intervene and promise I'll do my utmost to reduce my interventions in the fragment of my friend Luís Garcia de Medeiros's novel to a minimum. But there is a minimum, and the minimum currently imposing itself, as his reader, is to endeavor to share with my reader and his a perplexity that has been growing bigger and bigger with my rereading and transcription of the said text.

In the opera, as whoever knows knows, Don Giovanni swaps clothes with Leporello, and makes him go through the motions of an amorous deceit directed at Donna Elvira, who can't see him but can hear him as she sees Leporello, thinking that he is the Don Giovanni she can hear. All very simple and more humorous than not, a little like the prompter in Medeiros's play, *The Ham-Eater or Love that Kills*. Donna Elvira believes in Don Giovanni's repentance, comes down, falls into the arms of her pseudo-Don Giovanni, who in turn gets excited ("la burla mi da gusto!"),

and both leave arm-in-arm in that blind and hilarious deception of the soul that Leporello was going to make work for him for as long as fate would let him, all the while leaving the coast clear for Don Giovanni's next hoax. Up until here, there's no problem: Medeiros's transposition is ingenious, the dramatic nucleus of the confusion in identities acquires an amplified, novelistic correspondence. However.

However, that very amplification process brings with it a qualitative change, when João de Távora makes his great confession of impotence Elvira believes because its patent lack of verisimilitude could only mean it was true, besides the fact that its truth suits her. Above all, it should be humorous, while not necessarily being just funny, as in the opera. But it isn't, because from there, we're faced with supposedly probable reasons for this lack of verisimilitude: mum, dad, cousin Luísa, all very Freudian, horrors that really are, sincerity that really appears sincere, even if it isn't. And here is where, as a reader, and maybe like other readers, I begin not to find it funny, because I feel the author is treating me the way he made his character of João de Távora treat the character Elvira. In other words, my dear Logaritmo, if you want my reading complicity, don't take the mickey. Of course, I realize I'm being a difficult reader, but you deserve no less and, as I've already trained the best among my readers to be thus too, and your readers happen to be mine, please don't screw up this up-until-now so meticulously uncrafted book into which I have inserted you. The idea, you say — and I think it's you, as author, who says it, and not just your character who suggests it — is that we should believe in a kind of impotence exercised as rape, in the lack established as Power. Conceptually, it's fine, we agree, we may even have talked about this on occasions, and, as a metaphor, it's well suited to my *Parts of Africa*, at least until we know better. But what we don't yet know better, what you, as an author authorized by me have still not furnished for us, is the necessary metaphoric elbowing that transforms the stale apples of your character Távora into the proper political, ethical, metaphysical, in sum, Salazarist oranges of all of us. Or could it be that in those days it was so like that that it was neither possible nor necessary to say more or say it differently, and that it's just me who no longer remembers?

[*Scene 4 — Steep Street in front of Helena's House; Then Helena's House* (João de Távora and Helena; then Zulmira on the Phone; then Macedo and Extras).]

João de Távora stopped in front of Helena's house. There was light in a window. The street was deserted and there was no danger of Elvira turning up that early. Everything was going to plan. Now, he just had to sing.

He fingered the wailing chords of a minor fado song for a few minutes, until the window opened. Helena leaned out, with a huge grin on her face. And João's voice, full of low and velvety tones, echoed, splintered by sobs, in the silent street.

My beloved come to thy portal
come console my lamentation
if you don't come, oh beauty immortal
of death be my incantation

Of death be my incantation
as of death my life now whole
in your sweet accommodation
receive this most lost soul

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During the last *réprise*, Helena disappeared from the window, ran to the door, which she threw open to show her complete availability to receive João, body and soul, saved or preferably fallen.

— I'm all alone — she announced. — Elvira's gone out. Come in!

João immediately obeyed. He seized his guitar in his left hand while his right was busy seizing Helena by the back of her neck, an arm's length away. Pretending to be hypnotized, she approached him, step by step, with tiny paces. She pursed her lips, waiting, half-closing her cat-like eyes. She was wearing a navy blue dress with a schoolgirl's white collar. At first glance, she was an adolescent. But her body was made of experienced sensuality in each of its movements. João, with a small bow, deposited a chaste kiss on her lips. She immediately drew back and cart-wheeled, showing herself:

— D'you like my virginal air?

— Really hot!

— I worked out straight away you're into Lolitas.

— When Lolita is you, I can't help it. Helena, spare me, you're making me depraved!

— Come on — she said, with satisfaction —, let's look after your soul. That's what you asked for, isn't it?

— And today, I really need it. You've no idea.

They were in the living room. João sat down. Helena opened up her wine cupboard and started pointing to several bottles until João nodded his agreement.

— Port? — she queried with surprise.

— I'm a real traditionalist — João apologized.

Helena poured him a glass. — So, the world's treating you really badly — she affirmed more than asked. — That's right, João. Tell me your secrets, tell me about your life from when you were small. But hurry up, there's not enough time for every detail, with Elvira, you never know. She might turn up any minute.

— I was with her less than half an hour ago.

— She told me you'd rung. I was burning with jealousy.

— But it was so I could come and visit you! How ungrateful!

— D'you swear? — Helena said, rubbing her hands together with glee.

— You know, she thought you'd mended your ways?

— And she probably still believes that right now. In fact, her calling is to believe. For that reason, she must be explaining to Lopo, at this very moment, the pleasures of conjugal love.

— To Lopo Reis? What bad taste!

— In his capacity as my larger-than-life proxy, it goes without saying...

— It all sounds treacherous to me. Tell me more.

— You're right, I'm a treacherous monster — João declared, smiling. — It was like this: when she reached the apartment, she still had doubts. So, I decided the only way forward was a dramatic confession. I began by hinting I was a magician without a wand... — The phone rang. Helena didn't move a muscle. — Answer it.

— Let it ring. The magician without a wand. Tell me more, I'm hooked.

— No, answer it first, there might be some problem.

Helena answered it, and signaled to João to come closer. He did and placed his ear next to her free ear, as if he wanted to listen through it.

Helena said: — No, Elvira isn't in. I'm her cousin.

— Oh, I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm afraid a huge disaster might happen! I'm Zulmira, I don't know if you know who I am. Elvira gave me this phone number yesterday...

— Yes, I know who you are. You were very present in João de Távora's house, yesterday. Would you like to leave a message?

— Oh yes. The thing is my fiancé stormed out this evening, a loose cannon, with six of his mates, saying he was going to kill João... I thought Elvira... but since you also know João...

João had moved away once he realized who was on the phone. He signed to say he wasn't there.

— Yes, I know him very well... Kill him? But why? — She placed the receiver in João's ear. She covered its mouthpiece and said: — The sepulcher's wedding.

— Trifles... — João smiled.

In the meantime, Zulmira explained that Macedo, consumed by jealousy and humiliation, had spent the day fuming until he suddenly decided to go and look for João. His six mates were tough, and they were carrying blades. Zulmira was terrified. She'd never seen her fiancé in such a state. She was ringing to ask Elvira, and now Helena, if she could, to warn João to stay at home and not to open the door for anyone. Macedo knew what João's car looked like, knew he didn't live in the house they were in yesterday, also knew where Elvira lived, and he wouldn't rest until he'd found him.

— D'you think he knows I'm here? — João murmured, intrigued, when Helena hung up.

— João, dearest — Helena said —, it's your last night. We have to make the most of it. Unless you prefer to trawl over that woman who works in a factory again. She adores you, there's no doubt.

— Don't you think that's as it should be?

— Absolutely! Now then, did she scratch you much? Was she a virgin?

— Hmm... No, I doubt it. In any case, I read in an American magazine the hymen doesn't exist.

— Oh, I absolutely agree! — But Helena was more worried than she wanted to show. — What are you going to do?

— I don't know yet... But don't worry. Nothing'll happen. Okay, let's see: if I'm not mistaken, Zulmira knows I'm here. She must have seen my car or something of the sort. And the bore Macedo will also end up knowing. And since he's a boar in all senses of the word...

— You're right — Helena said, playing along — he's a Dutch-swine-tiresome Boer. He's waiting for you. You go down and boom — she finished off sticking her finger into João's chest.

— If it were just him, it might even be funny... But seven is too many for a lone Christian. First...

— I know — Helena enthusiastically interrupted. — First, we go to bed!

João smiled. Then, he continued: — First, we'd better spy through the porthole to observe the maneuvers of the enemy fleet.

Helena resigned herself: — At your orders, Admiral. — She martially adjusted her maritime attire, saluted, and marched toward the window. She peeped out, her hand shading her brow. — Nothing on the portside.

— And on the starboard side?

— Nothing, Admiral.

João moved closer, embracing Helena from behind. — You're a sweet-heart — he said. — Promise me you'll never ally yourself with the enemy.

— I promise — she replied without turning round, leaning her head backward and resting heavily against his body. She added with a touch of sadness: — I don't expect anything from you, João. You can't let me down.

— Nor do I want to.

— Please don't!... — She turned round, and took hold of his hands: — Really, please don't, will you? It would be such a shame! You know...?, Elvira told me...

— Elvira's an idiot.

— She loves you, that's all.

— And you?

— I don't fall for that.

— You want guarantees beforehand?

— No.

— Why not?

— It would be a lie.

— Look, why are you afraid?

— Of you?

— Of everything.

— You tell me, if you know...

— No... I only know you use masks.

— And you try and take them off.

— It's part of the game.

— No. It ruins the game. — Helena turned round again toward the window. — Is it true you denounced Ana Maria's father?

— Why do you ask?

— Because I want to know.

— And would you believe me if I said no?

— Answer the question.

— No, of course not.

— Everyone thinks you did.

— Including you?

— I don't know... but I don't think it's your style.

A group of men was coming up the street. One of them went over to João's car, parked in front of the house. — Enemy in sight! — Helena announced, stepping back a little from the window.

— The seven?

She leaned out again. — The seven. — She came back inside: — And they've seen me.

— Ideally, we need to split them up. I'd like to have Macedo to myself. It's years since I've done any sport. At this rate, I'll be getting fat.

— How?

— Let's see... Look, call over Macedo and tell him Zulmira called and you know everything.

— Really...?

— Tell him I'm not here!

— And your car? How many Alpha Romeos are there in Lisbon?

— It was Lopo who brought it over. That's right. Tell him you're with Lopo, and Lopo is your boyfriend.

— Heaven's above!

— He's such a gem of a boy, so useful...

— Then you have him as your boyfriend. He's got sweaty hands.

— Alright. Then say you're discussing politics with Lopo. Say whatever you like. Oh, and that I'm in my apartment. Tell him where it is, in case he doesn't know. Yes, this will be a laugh. And that the other six should go over there...

— And at this point, you think he'll actually believe me!...

— Yes, if you tell him to come in...

— Come in?

— I want to have a little conversation with him.

— To prove you're not afraid? Oof, how primitive men are!

— Maybe, but that's not my only reason. I don't actually find very appealing the idea of them hunting me down on Lisbon's streets. Either I sort it out now, or he'll sort it out. I don't want you to suffer that.

— That sounds better. But bear in mind he has a knife.

— But in our favor, you have a horse.

— Now I'm not following you — Helena said.

— Whoever has a horse, has a whip.

— Oh. — Helena paused. — And if he kills you?

— You'll be the only person at my wake.

— Me and Lopo. That should be fun.

— And if I don't get a move on, not even you. And then, maybe not even Lopo.

— Why? — Helena asked, a little alarmed. — Are you going to turn me over to the enemy?

— No, what an idea. But, I don't know, you get married...

— That never stopped you before.

— As Camões would say, times change, desires change.

— What a really dumb conversation! Look: those misery guts out there have issues. We need to do something to sort them out.

— Do you know why I adore you? Because you have a good heart.

— It's so good to be appreciated. So: I'll send the others to your apartment and tell Macedo to come up. Because Zulmira gave me a message for him. Okay. Maybe he'll buy it.

— He'll buy it if you want him to. But before that, get me the whip. I'll go to the entrance, when the others are on their way, press the buzzer, the door will open and I'll do the rest.

— Are you really going to beat him up?

— Would you prefer me to let myself be killed?

— Of course not.

She returned shortly after, with two whips. João tested their flexibility, chose the shorter, and went to the building entrance hallway. Helena leaned out the window. She called to Macedo.

João turned out the lights. He waited for a few minutes, occasionally curving the whip, listening. The distant dialogue between Helena and Macedo was dragging on. But Macedo's mates began to move away, with the heavy beat of brushed-leather boots on the pavement. Helena

announced in a loud voice, moving slightly away from the window so that João could hear her clearly: — I'm going to open the door! — João paid attention. *Zzzz*. The door was open. João seized the whip more firmly. But Macedo didn't seem to understand how buzzers worked. Helena shouted something to him, maybe that he should push the door. Macedo continued timidly. João, to encourage him, half-opened the door. Macedo got it. João could sense him almost at his side.

— Excuse me — Macedo said.

João opened the door the rest of the way, remaining hidden behind it. The light from the street was not enough to light up the hallway. Macedo moved forward, hesitant. João slammed the door shut. Macedo turned round, scared, blinded with his eyes yet to adjust to the darkness. João threw the first blow. Macedo let out a cry of surprise and pain. He tried to flee, but didn't know where to turn, the darkness was, for him, absolute. João, however, could see well enough to follow his movements. The whip hissed again. Another shriek from Macedo. He was completely disoriented, crashing against a mahogany table propped against the wall, under a baroque mirror. The whip cracked in the air, this time missing Macedo and striking the mirror instead, which crashed onto the table top, and shattered. Macedo, thinking it was another attack from that side, jumped forward, stumbled on the carpet and fell over. He gasped for breath like a hunted animal in a trap, still unable to understand what had happened to him, not really knowing where he was nor seeing who attacked him. He groaned. João let fly some more blows, coldly. Some struck their target. Others hit the floor, around a wincing body that responded to each strike with a long, hoarse cry.

Helena, who had remained all this time in the living room trying, at first, to feign indifference, had covered her ears with her hands and coiled up on the couch. She suddenly got up. She opened the door.

— That's enough! — she shouted, almost hysterical. — That's enough!

João stopped. Macedo remained motionless, groaning softly. João opened the front door.

— Get out!

Macedo strained to get up. He couldn't. João cracked the whip on the floor, as if he were taming an animal. Macedo bolted for the door, on all fours.

João dropped the whip. He closed the door. His whole body trembled. Helena turned the lights on. João's hands covered his eyes, stung by the brightness. His face was covered with sweat. — I hate violence — he said.

He spoke with such conviction that, in the circumstances, it had a comic effect. But neither he nor Helena could muster much more than a smile. — Come and rest a little — she said.

[*Scene 5 — Cut and Corresponding Scene from the Opera* (Masetto solo; poi Zerlina con lanterna; Macedo e Zulmira).]

[Masetto (gridando forte):] Ahi! ahi! la testa mia!
Ahi! ahi! le spalle... e il petto!

ZERLINA (entrando): Di sentire mi parve
La voce di Masetto.

MASETTO: Oh Dio! Zerlina....
Zerlina mia, soccorso!

ZERLINA: Cosa è stato?

MASETTO: L'iniquo, il scellerato
Mi rompe l'ossa e i nervi.

ZERLINA: Oh, poveretta me! Chi?

MASETTO: Leporello!
O qualche diavolo che somiglia a lui.

ZERLINA: Crudel! Non tel diss'io
Que con questa tua pazza gelosia
Ti ridurresti a qualche brutto pàssò?
Dove ti duole?

MASETTO: Qui.

ZERLINA: E poi?

MASETTO: Duolmi un poco
Questo piè, questo braccio e questa mano.

ZERLINA: Via, via: non é gran mal, se il resto è sano.
 Veintene meco a casa:
 Purché tu mi prometta
 D'essere men geloso,
 Io... io ti guarirò, caro il mio sposo.

.....]

Zulmira stroked Macedo's hand, raising it to her breast, and placed it on her left side.

— Can you feel it? You're going to see how quickly you get better...

— Yes... — His fingers tightened over the rhythmic pulse of Zulmira's pliant, firm breast.

— It's yours. It was never anyone else's.

— Let's go — Macedo said —, let's go home. We're not doing anything here.

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[*Scene 6 — João de Távora's Apartment (Lopo Reis and Elvira).*]

Pitch black. Now it's just a question of opening the bedroom door and walking slowly over to the bed. Not a word. Just like with the American woman. A romantic to a tee. Her breathing fills the room. He feels his heart beating nervously. But what's needed is calm.

He moves closer. She wants to feel his body next to hers, she wants to envelop him in her arms, make him forget his fear and humiliation. She wants to be his nurse and his lover. If she only knew the required caresses! She cannot see his face. But his figure seems shorter, he must have hunched his shoulders, he drags his feet. It can't be easy, for him...

She lifted up the bedclothes to receive him. The sheets, skimming against each other, hissed like a snake, exciting him. Could she already be naked? Okay, calm down. Do everything slowly and without a word, it's what's wanted. But what an awkward person! A guy can no longer obey his natural instincts, with all these scientific-fuck fads. He stopped next to the bed. His idea now would be to gaze into her eyes for a long time. But, they would have to go without that, given the darkness. She murmured: — Come here. — Against the rules. As for him, not a peep. Erecting tension.

Erecting tension in her, because he was already erect with a tension that could hardly be contained! Take note of the pun!

He lay down. His body shuddered. He felt hers wrapped in a great calm, as if it ceased to be a body or only was outside of her. But her hands shook a little when they took hold of his hand and guided it to her breasts.

She's a real expert! What a fine pair of breasts! What a pity he couldn't turn the lights on, feeling them in the dark was such a waste, never in his life had he had anything of the kind in his grasp. They seemed to have a life of their own. They swelled and shrank. They were soft but not shapeless. They were firm, but not hard. They scarcely fitted in his hand, spilling through his fingers. Oof, but what a great woman! There was now enough tension, it was just a case of entering as quickly as possible, enough romantics and civilities, he had begun to feel a tingling in his stomach, what a fiasco were he to splurge onto the sheets.

A miracle had happened. — Yes — she said —, yes... — But her sex contracts, her belly closes, in atavistic horror. And yet she wants him inside her, she wants him inside her...

God, what an effort to get inside! At least, she's moist, which is a good sign. Maybe she's used to a few licks first, but he wasn't into such things down there, just thinking of it made him want to throw up, everything has its place, it was just like going to a restaurant, ordering a steak, and beginning to eat it with your dick. He got inside a little. That's right. It won't go in any further. It has to be with brute force. Good! Deep in there.

She groaned, softly.

He didn't stop. Until, all of a sudden, his whole body contracted, shaken up, and dilated into a long spasm.

She rested his inert head on her shoulder.

— A miracle has happened — Elvira said.

— Hmm.... — Lopo grunted, listless on top of her body.

— It's as if the two of us have just come to life.

Lopo thought it was an encouragement to begin again. He still wasn't sated. Under him, Elvira's warm body turned him on more and more.

— No... — she said, tightening up.

Okay. If it was going to be like that, he'd better dismount and wait a few more minutes. Oh well. Maybe he'd got ahead of himself, entering too quickly, and had hurt her. What a drag.

— I'm now your wife, João — Elvira said.

João? Was it a force of habit? In any case, it wasn't very funny. It wasn't at all funny. In fact, it was offensive. And what was all this sudden talk about marriage? She couldn't even get his name right yet. Deep in her unconscious, she thought she was still with João, and she goes round saying, just like that, I'm now your wife! That took away all his desire for more. Should he point out her mistake? Maybe it was a good idea. Show her from the start that if she was with him then with him she was, that he was no substitute for João. Because he still found it a little difficult to swallow that story about her always having been in love with him, maybe she actually wanted the pair of them, there are people who are never satisfied with what they have. Okay, this time he wouldn't pick her up on it, he'd give her an opportunity to make it up to him. And since the vow of silence was no longer necessary, he'd prefer to ask her if he'd actually hurt her, since that was also bugging him. But she spoke first:

— João, aren't you happy?

Now, it just had to be said: Who's this João? Could she really be convinced she was in bed with João? He believed there were such psychological cases, he'd even heard talk of a book in which a woman, when she went to bed with her husband, thought she was with her lover, who was already dead. In the end, she killed herself, or went mad, perhaps because her husband shook her to make her see reason when, all aroused, she had begun to cry out the other man's name. That's what he wanted to do, give her a good jolt to teach her a lesson! No, something could happen to her and he would be entirely to blame. He was better off pretending to be asleep, until she came to her senses. But what luck he had! The first time he went to bed seriously with a woman, and he ends up with Mad Moll.

Elvira leant over the body next to her, which was breathing rhythmically. Could he be asleep? She gently fumbled the pillow, found his face, and passed her finger tips over his eyes. They were closed. But she so wanted to tell him she loved him, how happy she felt... The thing was this happiness was very different from what she had expected, she also felt a profound sadness, a great fatigue, a strange anxiety, a strange physical anguish. Yes, it was because she'd stopped being a girl and become a woman. João's woman. What a shame it had all had to be so difficult! But she immediately wanted to be free of her negative thoughts:

— My fate, João, is to love you. It's as if I've known this since the day I was born. — It was what she wanted to be feeling.

140 Faced with these words, which Elvira pronounced with such religious gravity, Lopo Reis finally cottoned on to what was happening. There was no psychological problem. That woman really thought she was there with João, that it was João who'd shagged her. What a fucking bastard! He was terrified. What would happen when she found everything out? For example, if she suddenly turned the lights on? Thank God the light switch was on his side of the bed, if she got up in the dark, he would still have time to hide. But hide where? Under the bed and say he was a chamber pot? João really was the pits, what a diabolical mind. His only option was to carry on pretending he was asleep, and see how far her credulity would stretch. And, as quickly as possible, to come up with an exit strategy. That's right. Okay, if he ran to the living room, she could follow him and would come face-to-face with him with one leg in his trousers and the other in the air, he had to get dressed, he couldn't go naked for the whole street to see him. Should he go to the bathroom? That would be easy, but he couldn't stay there for the rest of his life. The only way out was for her to go. Of course. Wait for her to go to the bathroom. She would end up having to go, in accordance with the laws of nature, and as soon as she did, he would scarper. What a crappy situation! Only João could conjure up something like this. All that talk of lights out, romantic, silent love, like a god... Was he already planning it all when he gave him his aftershave? Most likely. In the dark, you can't see, but you can smell. A master stroke. And it was quite funny, really, he couldn't deny it. But the bit he didn't like was that João had deceived him too. All this so he could be left in peace with Elvira's cousin. To go and be with Helena, and in part, yes, maybe in part because he'd also realized he always had a soft spot for Elvira. He'd given him the chance to sleep with her. João might have many faults, but he was a good friend. He wanted to try out the women first, but he didn't mind passing them along afterward. He could, however, have done without inventing that whole tale of the girl loving him, of always having loved him. He'd actually bought it. Oh well, patience... The truth was if João had told the truth, he would never have agreed to shag her. How could he! Go to bed with a woman who thought he was someone else. At least, this way it wasn't his responsibility. His only responsibility was to get out, but the problem was she showed no signs of letting go of him to go and pee. Let's see if thought transmission works. Pee, pee, you want to pee... Now what was that? A knock at the door? There was actually a knock at the door!

— João — Elvira said, shaking him lightly —, someone's at the door.

— Hmm — Lopo grunted. A quick decision was in order. If he ran to the living room, he could no longer even get out naked. Nor could he from the bathroom, but at least no one could come in as long as he kept the door locked. Bathroom then. If only because his thought transmission had backfired, and he was desperate for a pee.

He jumped up.

— Are you going to get it? — Elvira asked.

Lopo said nothing. Fortunately, he knew that apartment like the back of his hand. He ran to the bathroom and shut himself in. Only after turning the key twice did he turn the light on.

Elvira was a little puzzled by his sudden disappearance. Where could the light switch be? She fumbled around, and couldn't find it, she got up and fumbled her way along the wall. She found the window. She drew the curtains and raised the blinds. The room was inundated with the soft, white light of the full moon. She turned the lights on. If he'd got up, it was because he may have wanted to know who was at the door at that time of night. She knocked on the bathroom door.

— D'you want me to see who it is?

Lopo hesitated for moment deciding if he should say yes or no. How could he speak without his voice betraying him? He stuck three fingers in his mouth and squeezed his tongue down.

— I'm cleaning my teeth!

— Do you want me to go and open the door?

Great! She didn't recognize his voice. He'd better say yes, whoever was at the door didn't seem minded to give up, they'd knocked again. Fingers in his mouth:

— Ess! — he gurgled.

He could hear Elvira's steps moving away. Whoever it was, please let them take her away.

[Scene 7 — Entrance to João de Távora's Apartment (Ana Maria, Octávio and Captain Mendes Ribeiro); Then João de Távora's Apartment (The same, Elvira and Lopo Reis).]

Faced with Ana Maria's accusations, Octávio had reluctantly decided to go and talk to the General who, even more reluctantly — "Please understand,

sir, I don't want to get involved" —, since it involved his old friend Diogo Salema, had agreed to talk in person with João de Távora. Go and fetch him, take his adjutant.

— Ring again — Ana Maria said.

— It's not worth it — Octávio argued —, he's obviously not in.

Ana Maria just shrugged her shoulders and rang again herself, impatiently. The adjutant had already begun to go down the stairs. He stopped a few steps down, to see if Ana Maria's bell ringing obtained better results than his and Octávio's. Taking advantage of the officer's moving away, Octávio said in a low voice to his fiancée:

— You need to get a grip, Anita. The state you're in, you could end up doing something that instead of helping, makes things worse for your father. I still think you shouldn't have come. Just the Captain and I should be here. Your being here makes this personal, which it shouldn't be.

— It concerns my father — she said, in a loud voice, rejecting the whispered complicity with which he had spoken to her — This isn't the time to give in to your obsession for good manners.

— That has nothing to do with it... — he murmured again.

She interrupted him, raising her voice even more:

— My father was turned in by João de Távora. Run along if you wish!

— Ana Maria, for God's sake, don't talk to me in that tone of voice.

Her sole reply was to ring the bell again.

— I think it's a waste of time — the Captain, who'd remained discretely aloof, said. — You know better than I — he added courteously, — but I'd better get going.

— Wait — Ana Maria said. — Someone's coming.

In fact, steps could be heard inside the apartment, coming toward the door. Elvira, who had taken some time to get dressed, finally opened up.

— Elvira! — Ana Maria exclaimed.

— Oh, Elvira... — Octávio said.

Only the Captain thought her presence quite normal. Determined to complete the mission for which he had been sent, he began: — I'm Captain Mendes Ribeiro...

— What on earth are you doing here? — Ana Maria interrupted, bristling against Elvira.

— I came to visit João — she replied, trying to act normal.

— What for? — Ana Maria's tone was quite sharp.

— Ana Maria! — Octávio reproached her.

The Captain coughed, uncomfortably waiting for the next cue to break in. The two women had become rivals. Elvira, looking Ana Maria right in the eyes, said coldly:

— João's my fiancé. Didn't you know?

Ana Maria smirked. She pointed to the Captain as if he were her trump card: — This is Captain...

— Mendes Ribeiro — Elvira finished off. — A pleasure to meet you.

— The pleasure is all mine, madam — the soldier declared, extending his hand. But it was clumsy, as if he had committed an indiscretion. He looked at Ana Maria, seeking advice.

— Tell her why you're here — Ana Maria ordered.

— I've been instructed to come and get Mr João de Távora...

— So that he can confess to denouncing my father — Ana Maria interrupted.

— Anita, let Mendes Ribeiro speak — Octávio intervened.

— For... — the Captain went on — for an interview with my General. — He smiled, pleased with the diplomatic word he had come with.

— We're wasting time — Ana Maria spoke again. — Where is he?

— João's inside — Elvira said coldly. — Why don't you come in?

By now, Lopo couldn't pretend he was still cleaning his teeth. Even if he cleaned them one by one and then polished them, it wouldn't take so long. Should he pretend to be in the shower? As far as he knew, water doesn't change people's voices. Should he pretend to be taking a dump? That wasn't very refined.

— João! — Elvira called out for the third time, increasingly alarmed. — Ana Maria Salema is here with her fiancé and Captain Ribeiro. João, answer me! Are you okay?

— Lopo replied: — Hmm —, which at least was an impersonal sound.

— João!

— Hmm!

This sounded inauspicious to Elvira. She tried to open the door. It was locked.

— Are you alright? For God's sake, answer me, say something! — He could have slit his veins, or opened up the water heater's gas valve, that "hmm" could very well be his last sign of life. — João!

— Hmm!

— Help! — Elvira tried to break the door down. She wasn't strong enough. She ran, terrified, into the living room: — He's killed himself!

The three of them jumped up. Ana Maria had gone completely pale.

— Where is he?... — Octávio asked.

— In the bathroom! This way! The door's locked! He isn't answering!

— Could it be fear?... — Ana Maria forced herself to say.

Meanwhile, Octávio was already in the bedroom. — Is this the door?

— Yes, hurry, please, hurry — Elvira began begging.

Octávio tried to break the door down with his shoulder. Despite his considerable weight, he couldn't. His glasses fell off. He bent over, in an effort to find them, clumsily, fumbling around.

— Excuse me — the Captain said. He took a swing, striking the lock with the sole of his shoe. The door flew open.

Lopo Reis had put João's dressing gown on and was sat on the toilet seat lid. Everyone rushed in.

— Lopo Reis! — Ana Maria said.

— Lopo? — queried Octávio.

— He's alive! — exclaimed Captain Mendes Ribeiro, who still hadn't noticed the difference.

Only Elvira said nothing. She had run straight through the door and stopped dead in front of Lopo Reis. She stared at him, her huge eyes filled with shock and terror. She opened her mouth, she was going to say something but a hoarse sound, seemingly not of her making, rose up through her throat, a sound that grew in intensity until it became a long, childish whimper that threatened to suffocate her, breaking into a sob, which then began all over again in the same continuous monotone. She raised her hands to her stomach, began retreating little by little, always looking at Lopo, shaking her head, went out of the bathroom, turned around suddenly, ran for the living room, and from the living room to the stairs, which she flew down with panic-stricken urgency.

In the meantime, Ana Maria had gone over to the unmade bed, ripped off the sheets, and analyzed them. — Go after her — she said to Mendes Ribeiro. She had understood something monstrous had happened. — Take her home, don't leave her alone until she's inside.

— But don't you think... — the Captain began.

— Go right now! — Ana Maria ordered.

This time, the Captain just clicked his heels, and marched.

Lopo had got up and was trying to find the appropriate tone for the circumstances. His present company looked like they were expecting an explanation. The worst thing was they were blocking his exit, he couldn't just leg it and disappear.

— Where's João de Távora? — Octávio asked.

Lopo's throat was bone dry. He hadn't uttered a complete word for ages. He could no longer remember what it was like. He coughed to clear his voice.

— I don't know — he said.

— Why did Elvira get into that state when she saw you? — Octávio continued his questioning.

— Now... — Lopo blurted. What were they expecting? Wanting to leave, he went on: — Excuse me, please let me past.

— Listen — Elvira interjected with an icy threat. — You're not going anywhere without explaining yourself. Why didn't you answer when Elvira knocked on the door?

Oh, how could they still not know? — Because she thought I was João!
— Then he realized that might have been a blunder.

— Had she gone to bed with you? — Ana Maria asked.

— And she thought she was with João? — Octávio persisted.

— The room was dark... — Lopo was apologetic.

Octávio still couldn't understand. He turned toward Ana Maria: — What happened?...

— Octávio — she shouted at him. — Leather him! Leather him! Leather him! — She advanced toward Lopo with such an uncontrollable rage that he, without thinking, took two steps back. But not quickly enough to avoid a shower of slaps and blows.

— What are you doing, Ana Maria! — Octávio cried out, restraining her. — Have you gone mad?

— You're a gelded slob! — she said to him, exaggerating her vulgarity in the tone of voice she adopted.

— Oh! — Octávio mumbled.

With his hand still protecting his face, Lopo tried to justify himself: — I didn't know either! João told me she was waiting for me. When I got here, everything was dark, and I didn't say a word because João'd told me it would be better like that, I didn't know she thought I was him, who'd have thought it!, it's that diabolical mind of his, it's not my fault... — He stopped. His excuse sounded lame. — You don't believe me... — he concluded sadly.

Octávio finally understood what had happened. He took his glasses off, Lopo Reis's plaintiff expression blurred, but even so he averted his eyes. He left without another word. Ana Maria went after him.

[*Scene 8 — Garden in front of Ana Maria's House (Octávio and Ana Maria); Then Viewing Point (Octávio alone).*]

— Ana Maria. — They were at the door of her house, she had put the key in the lock, she remained silent, without turning round. Octávio had stayed a few steps behind. He moved closer. — You go up — he continued, — and if you can, phone for news of Elvira. I want to be alone.

Ana Maria was surprised and hurt by her fiancé's words. But she went on without saying a word. She just squeezed her lips together and gestured her consent.

Octávio slowly crossed the garden of the huge palatial house. The moonlight was white, an electric cold, a winter's moonlight on that hot, oppressively tropical night. Insects buzzed around. The air was sticky, humid. The sky was heavy. The stiff palm tree's pointed leaves projected refracted reflections on the flowerbeds.

He left the garden, and crossed the street to the public viewing point on the other side. Adamastor's grotesque statue kept vigil over the small, rippling city, which, with the vague and scattered sound of cars, wended its weary way home. The Tagus, in the background, swallowed up the buildings sullenly sprouting from the badly lit streets and in return spewed forth boats rarefied in the vast reflection of the moonlight. He sat on a bench facing the river. That night marked the end of his youth.

He no longer doubted João de Távora had betrayed, had raped, he doubted nothing they could say he'd done. Someone he knew. A friend. Crimes beyond anything he'd previously been able to imagine as part of a plausible reality. Mere abstract exercises at Law school. Carelessly performed work duties at the Boa Hora court. Newspaper headlines. He raped the daughter and stabbed the father. He raped the daughter and denounced the father. But now, not even the denunciation, not even that rape, if he did in fact rape Ana Maria... not even these things were any longer his worst crimes. And this latest crime, tonight's crime, he knew he still hadn't been able to begin to grasp its true horror. It was surely with such things in mind

that his old nanny, in the long nights of his childhood, would stop, trembling, in the middle of a story and say: “Mum’s the word if your life you’re to keep, from your lips, of this story you’ll say not a peep!”

He got up, walked adrift, tried to organize his thoughts, putting everything in chronological order. The denunciation — he thought about that first. The denunciation, consciously, in cold blood. It wasn’t something that could be explained as an impulse, it involved concrete actions, steps to be taken, words to be articulated, names, driving a car to the door of the PIDE or, worse still, leaving the car at the corner. Getting out, walking toward the building, greeting the guard, or doorman, or whoever happens to be at the entrance, saying he wants to speak with the inspector on duty, waiting, looking around, knowing that at that very moment, in the room next door, they are torturing someone. Well, maybe nothing so melodramatic. But, then being taken to the inspector’s office, articulating the words: I’m here to denounce Mr Such-a-body, presenting reasons, giving proof, being interrogated about the details, knowing all the time that man who is being denounced is going to be arrested in a few hours, maybe tortured the next day, maybe dead in a few days since he’s an old man, he cannot cope with the humiliation of insults received with his hands tied behind his back nor with the physical pain of the beatings, a man who had power and scorned it, an old man who could not, who did not know how to be humiliated. And even if he didn’t die, wasn’t tortured, and not even beaten: a friend, a young man in whom he had believed, had betrayed him.

If, at least, it had been a crime of passion! If, for example, João had lost his head when confronted by the Commander, and attacked him, killed him. A man kills another man in a fit of rage. It’s human nature. At it’s most brutal and primitive, but it’s nature nonetheless. It’s a natural crime. And who are we, in all conscience, to condemn a crime that belongs to all of us too? He remembered, from Joyce, the soliloquy in which Leopold Bloom renders his wife’s infidelity trite by comparing its seriousness to that of really grave crimes. How did it go? Not as bad as voluntary manslaughter... But the crime of informer was worse. The murderer faces his victim, striking the blow in person, at least his crime doesn’t have the bureaucratic cowardice of a denunciation. He tried to remember the rest of the list. He stopped. Larceny, cruelty to children and animals... Blasphemy. Well, that one, these days... Mutiny on the high seas, plotting with the enemies of the king... Yes, but for that one you first needed to respect the king, to believe

in the state, to accept in the legitimacy of the PIDE. There were more... How did it go?

Someone, passing by, shoved him slightly.

— Sorry — Octávio murmured, without thinking.

— Are you sleepwalking? — came the reply.

And Octávio came to. He wasn't sleepwalking. He was trying to remember a passage from a book, stood up in the middle of a public viewing point, looking at the stars, cataloguing in order of preference the crimes of someone who'd been his friend. But what's happening to us, to all of us? Could it be we still believe in something? That we're still capable of feeling? And then he remembered the news he'd received that morning, and that he'd let become submerged in the more pressing world of others.

He remembered he was due to go to Angola within a month. Maybe in three weeks. The date wasn't certain, but what was certain is he would be called up. His father had been informed. He'd told him that morning. In the Ministry, they couldn't do anything, the police report was negative. His diplomatic career was over before it had begun.

Ana Maria had not really heard him, when he tried to prepare her, before going to see the General. Well, it hadn't been the right moment, she had more pressing concerns. What would become of her? What future could they have, together? She'd lied to him, he no longer doubted his fiancée and João de Távora had been lovers. What's more, he could never tell her he knew. That he was deeply hurt but accepted it, understood it. For her, it would be a weakness, yet another weakness. Why wasn't she able to understand that no one owns anyone? Yet it would be useless, she wouldn't respect him. The truth was she'd never loved him. Yes, unfortunately, he couldn't do much for Ana Maria. The little he could do was to be there for her, for as long as she let him, if she still let him. The war in Angola and her, he ended up thinking, finally allowing himself to feel a little self-pity.

Second Intervention of the Non-Author

"Amplification," I think was the word I used to characterize how the mix-up in identities in the opera was transposed to the maneuvers João de Távora perpetrated against Elvira by passing her along to Lopo Reis in Medeiros's novel. Given what followed, monstification would be a more

appropriate word. But my confusion remains, because the author only let me know this with my head.

The scene of Elvira in bed with Lopo Reis is potentially, — I underline potentially — one of the most grotesquely horrendous I've ever read. But what is the author doing with it, what is his tone, what does he want to say? Authorial intentions don't count, someone pretentious might say straight away, in an effort to deconstruct me. Okay, they don't count, do they? But what do you think style is, then? I go back to what I was saying: should this scene really be how it is? Is it done like that on purpose? Are we meant only to think of its potential without feeling it, to feel it inadequately since when we move to the level of the characters we feel them as only potentially tragic, like Elvira, or only potentially comic, like Lopo, or only potentially both, like João de Távora? And what about Macedo? He gets a flogging, gropes his girlfriend's boobs, they go to bed, and everything's okay?

Once again, it's the metaphors that escape me. The thing is Medeiros was not like my father, he was always as given to metaphors as me, only more so. Yes, Professor, information beyond the text and fare thee well. Because knowing this is perhaps beginning to make me see the huge ethical and literary trick he's trying to play on us, withholding the metaphors, so that each one of us can place them depending on the love we have, not wanting to let us feel, and so making us insecure accomplices of the very expectation of being accomplices. If that's what's going on, then the idea would be remarkable if it worked. The only thing is it doesn't quite work. Oh, if this were my novel, how I would turn it around! As its mere circumstantial executor, obviously, I can't, I just have to transcribe it, like a prompter, even more like a turtle than the one I've already mentioned except that I also took the opportunity to correct a ton of his orthographical errors. Which, at the end of the day, was perhaps the lesser of two evils since what is best about this novel is perhaps what is worst.

But there's also this other element we need to take into consideration — the expectation of complicity. In the opera, as in real life and in the novel, the reader is, at the outset, more than inclined to side with the libertine hero, the libertarian hero who, in principle, João de Távora should be. But in his case, there's no way. The reader should also find Lopo quite funny; and pity Elvira, while agreeing she would be better off returning to Porto and complaining about her convent education at the Slaves of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; maybe agreeing with Hoffman, famous for his fantastic tales, that the only woman who makes the cut as a hero, which in this story

of near misses actually doesn't quite make it, is Donna Anna, and it's there the true hero would have been undone, since her daddy's punitive phallic hand would be no more than a frostily transposed uterine undoing. And the reader would certainly not think twice of the sacrificial Octávio. Well I for one, in Medeiros's novel, find myself in agreement with Octávio, thinking like him, dignified, chubby, confused, and with glasses, like the author.

[Scene 9 — Steep Street in front of Helena's House (João de Távora and Helena; Then João de Távora and Bernardo).]

João and Helena made a sinister pair, carrying the broken mirror out to the car. João had insisted, he wanted to get it fixed the next day. Each took hold of one of the ends, João walked backwards. The cautious steps of both, the brief directions Helena gave, half-whispered, on the way, even her heavy breathing caused by the weight of the load seemed to amplify dissonantly in the narrow, deserted, poorly lit street. The moon was hidden behind the houses, but its soft clarity was enough to reduce the small lights of the street lamps to the task of merely making their presence known, like in theatrical night scenes, when you know it's night because the lamps light but it is an invisible bulb that actually lights the stage.

João had put his guitar on the big baroque frame, Helena covered everything with a sheet to protect against the shards. It looked like they were transporting a bulging belly on a stretcher.

— This reminds me of that romantic painting that appears in books — Helena said —, *The Little Angel's Burial*.

— And since we're in the era of mechanization, my car is the lift that will take the coffin to the depths of the earth.

— And the depths of the earth are this street — Helena continued.

— No, this street is the passage to the depths of the earth. Can't you see how steep and narrow it is? Because the depths of the earth are this city, and we're the only two survivors.

— Which of us will be next?

— Yes, and who will bury the last survivor...?

— I'm scared! — Helena suddenly said, unintentionally terrified.

João laughed, rousing muffled echoes in the clammy night. By now, they were next to the car and João, plain-chanting in Latin, dropped the

load onto the backseat. He retreated three steps and made the sign of the cross: — *Requiescat in pace.*

— Stop it — Helena asked. — I swear, I'm scared!

— Come here... — João said softly, stretching out his arms.

— No, you're going to take me to hell, with you. I've discovered who you are: you're the devil! — And she laughed nervously, as if she believed what she'd said.

— No... — João smiled broadly but sadly —, I'm a trapped soul. Wasn't that what I told you in my serenade?

— No. You said you were a most lost soul. There's a difference.

— And I asked you to take me in....

— And I took you in, but you were very busy with class issues.

— But I'm not any longer and you can no longer get away from me. Come here... — João stretched his arms out again.

Helena went to him, excited but really nervous. She trembled slightly when João embraced and kissed her. She freed herself with a sigh. She grabbed João's arm tightly. — Tomorrow — she said. — Not today. — She ran toward the house, stopped at the entrance, looked back for a moment and saw that João was still looking at her. She smiled an apologetic smile. She closed the door.

João was going to get into his car when he thought he heard footsteps close by. He readied himself, anticipating an attack. He couldn't see anyone.

— My friend's enjoying himself! — said a man's voice, clear and well toned, coming from a dark recess of the building's entrance.

— Who's there?

— And he doesn't seem to have a particularly clear conscience! — the voice continued, now in a sarcastic, droll tone.

— Who's there?

The figure began to emerge from the darkness.

— A friend... — It was Bernardo.

— Man, you scared me!

— Is that all you have to say to someone who risks his life to come and talk to you?

— To come and talk to me... A great honor, no doubt! — João smiled, by now recovering his composure. — So how did you know I was here?

— You're asking that at a time like this... — Bernardo said, with one of his automatic gestures of a professional conspirator.

— Have you been here long?
 — Since those other friends of yours arrived...
 — You mean Macedo?
 — They chose the wrong night. They could still be taken for conspirators...
 — That's right, poor wretches... — João said, without knowing how much Bernardo had seen.

— Which, in one of their cases, wouldn't necessarily have been a worse fate... Oh well. But as you can see, you're quite in demand. And not always by women or because of women.

— Variety is the spice of life... Shall we go to the car?

— What about the corpse? Don't you think we could make him feel uncomfortable...

— The little angel would be delighted for you to take part in his vigil.

— A strange way to get a woman excited. I would never have thought of it. My clandestine life's turning me into an old fogey... Can I see his little face?

— Please go ahead... — They got in. João leaned back and lifted the sheet up.

— Oh, how touching! — Bernardo cried —, *The Malhoa Fado*: a guitar and a picture.

— It's not as touching as all that — João apologized —, it's a mirror. A broken mirror.

— Are you superstitious?

— Should I be?

— You never know, the times we live in...

João turned the engine on. — A trip round the city?

— No. There are patrols in the center.

— This car's too expensive to fall under suspicion. Don't be a scaredy-cat.

— Yes, my child, but if by some stroke of bad luck, they catch me, they wouldn't just take me in or waste time with security measures, it would be a shot like what happened to the painter Dias Coelho. Turn just here, at the next corner, go that way.

João obeyed. And when he parked again, said:

— So, tell me.

— Have you got a cigarette you can give me?

— Of course. — João passed him the packet.

— Abdullah Turkish Number Eleven — Bernardo read. — Don't you think they're wasted on me?

— For the Party, nothing is too much.

— Just as well you think that... — He took the lighter João had passed him. — So, did you turn in the Commander? — Bernardo said, casually, as he lit his cigarette.

João replied slowly, with calculated disdain:

— What? So your party has now adopted the PIDE's interrogation techniques?

— No, my dear, these are not the PIDE's techniques. An example of those is the Commander who has been standing like a statue for the last twenty-four hours. His legs must have begun to swell by now. And since he seems to be one of those who won't talk... And since he's an old man...

— He always had a vocation for heroism — João interrupted.

— Which is why the PIDE let him realize his vocation and commemorated it with a statue. So everything's okay then, isn't it?

— Of course not — João murmured between his teeth, enraged. — But what on earth are you doing coming here to accuse me of having turned him in?

— That's how it looks. And it's your friends, not mine, who say so...

— Yet you, who are always so well informed that you even know what's going on at the PIDE this very moment... João began.

— Surely I should know it isn't true, right?

— Obviously!

— Only God can know for sure — said Bernardo in a grotesquely unctuous tone of a voice. — God and his most holy agents and inspectors. Now God is mute, and the PIDE have, until now, kept the secret.

— So you've come stumbling along like the Archangel's sword with the Commander's ghost on your tip.

— No, what an idea! Nothing so biblical. I've just come to remind you of the promise you made to me. The money's urgent.

— From an informer?

— God works in mysterious ways.

— Did you attend a seminary?

— No... — Bernardo revealed sadly —, I lost my faith when I was fifteen and graduated in Law, like everyone else...

— How much do you want?

— You decide. Well, the maximum possible... The Party has decided to intervene, the strike must go ahead, the people...

— I couldn't care less about the people! — The interruption was curt.

Bernardo hesitated, unsure whether to respond or not. — You care enough to not just let things run their course... — he ended up commenting with a smile.

— A psychiatrist explained to me it's to get my own back on my dad.

— There are probably other ways...

— Shagging his wife? I've done that.

— Your own mother? — Bernardo was not easily scandalized.

João replied, as if he were apologizing: — No, I was too young when she died. — Silence. — Do I make the check out to the Communist Party?

— Endorsed to the Central Committee. Seriously, you aren't going to give me a check!

— You haven't given me time to go to the bank, I'm almost out of cash. And there may not be another opportunity in the near future. With a check made out to cash, there shouldn't be any problem. — He began to write it. — You'd better cash it straight away, before I repent of my good will.

— Okay... — Bernardo had to agree.

The night guard crossed the street, lazily jangling his key-chain.

— It's extraordinary — said Bernardo —, everything here's so peaceful that no one would think half the armed forces are on alert. Peace in the streets and tranquility in the heart... It's not appropriate to frighten the kind of person who lives around here.

João handed the check over. Bernardo whistled with shock when he saw the amount.

— Are you sure?

— Why not? — and after a pause: — Listen, could something be done to get the Commander out?

— I doubt it. Only your friend the General could maybe, if he's the balls to negotiate terms for an armistice...

— And you think it's right he does.

— And you don't? Did you ever actually believe in this baby revolt of naughty boys in uniforms?

— I don't know any more — João said. — D'you think I should talk to him about the Commander?

— You? — Bernardo fidgeted a little uncomfortable in the car seat. — Listen, old man: according to the General, it was you who denounced the Commander. Don't you get that yet?

— But it isn't true!

— You're a very strange man, there's no doubt... That isn't the point. Look, the whole city of Lisbon knows, with or without any basis, it doesn't matter, but they know, they know you were the one who denounced the Commander. To tell you the truth, as far as I'm concerned, even though... how can I put it?... because I like you, or because I want your money, or for whatever other equally bucolic reason, I want to believe in your innocence, I myself can't stop entertaining the possibility of your guilt. Even now. All the evidence is against you. The only thing is I can't understand it... But, I must confess, I was very reluctant to come and find you. I also must confess I've crossed off the list the safe house where you met me. Well, that's protocol...

— Thanks for coming — João murmured, without irony. But then: — Be careful, yours might still be the kingdom of heaven!

— Get lost! — Bernardo replied, impatiently. — For the last time, I'm going to explain to you, you're politically finished. As well as morally. Either you committed suicide turning in the Commander, or else they did it for you, which, for all intents and purposes, amounts to the same. Often, appearance trumps reality.

— You're preaching to the choir — João exclaimed, trying to be ironic — Don João de Távora, *the martyr*. Does the nickname suit me? Does it fit with my profile as a messianic viceroy?

— Look man, go and posture for some other bloody fool! I'm neither a woman nor a queer, your performances don't turn me on. — But I'm still your friend, God knows why...

— We've known each other many years...

— One reason less. — Bernardo pretended not to notice the change of tone. — Just as well our conversation took this turn, because I didn't know how to tell you. Look, it wasn't just for the masses I came to see you. Especially on a night like this, with a full moon and machine guns all around. I also came to tell you the following: go away, disappear for a while, be dead for a while. Maybe we can rehabilitate you later. If that's possible. But even if it is, it would take time. And in the meantime, everything you do, can only hurt you. What was your political usefulness, the unlikeliness of someone like you being mixed up in things like this, is now going to be an aggravating circumstance, a confirmation of suspicions. Which, let's face it, isn't without a certain logic. In any case, a guy in your position always ends up falling apart. You're completely on your own and, what's worse, done for

on all fronts. Just so you know, this is the last time even I'll be with you. — But then he said, less harshly: — Until everything's sorted out, of course...

— I understand... — João said. — Only the Commander could clear everything up...

— Are you sure? Might exactly the opposite not be the case? Do you think the PIDE will tell him who it was? Are you sure when he gets out, in the state which he's going to be in, he'll rush straight over to the radio station and communicate to the nation that João de Távora's a great guy after all?

— You're right... And worse still, there were some complications with his daughter.

— Tales from the bedroom, were they?

— Something like that.

— What do you expect, if you mix with the bourgeoisie. Well, I've said all I have to say to you. It's getting very late. I'm going to scarper.

— Why don't you stay a little longer?

Bernardo hesitated, faced with the vehemence he sensed behind the request's casual tone.

— Only if you give me another of those capitalist cigarettes.

— With great pleasure.

They lit their cigarettes. A muffled echo of what sounded like a shot could be heard in the distance.

— Listen.

It was followed by what was more clearly a spasm of machine-gun fire.

— Where's it coming from? — João asked.

— Difficult to say. Let me listen.

But everything returned to silent calm.

— Something I can't stand — João said after a minute — is not being the cause of what happens to me.

— Like everyone else... — Bernardo said.

— And, it's really strange, but because everyone keeps telling me I turned in the old man, I'm beginning to feel responsible.

— We all do — Bernardo retorted. He looked at the time. He flicked his cigarette out. — Sorry, I've really got to go. Until whenever.

[*Scene 10 — Out-take and Summary of Cut Passage. Immediate Vicinity of João de Távora's Apartment (Lopo Reis alone and then Two Extras).*]

[Lopo Reis descended from João de Távora's apartment, contemplating the injustice of the world, after the way he'd been treated by Ana Maria and Octávio because of Elvira's mistake: he wasn't responsible and no one was bothered about his feelings; the first woman who'd gone to bed with him out of love, had done it for love of someone else. At the exit, he is faced by Macedo's friends but manages to get away.]

.....

He was almost at the end of the street, running and gasping for breath, when a military police jeep appeared from the street on the left, with its headlights on full.

— Stop!

Lopo heard a bang and a bullet zoomed in his direction. He tried to turn back. Two of Macedo's friends came chasing after him. The jeep had ground to a halt and several policemen jumped out. A round of machine-gun fire. But not in Lopo's direction. He had crouched down and, on all fours, had managed to slip into a street on the right. He hid there in a doorway, listening. He thought he heard groans, he heard footsteps and then, more clearly, he heard a voice, saying:

— They won't be doing any more running.

More steps. Another voice:

— Put them in the car.

More steps.

— What about the other one?

— Let him go.

The jeep took off.

[*Scene 11 — Ana Maria's Room (Ana Maria Alone).*]

It was clear Octávio was not coming. She'd waited for him, at first resentful for the curtness of the way he'd left. Then, she'd waited a little worried, even alarmed, footsteps could be heard in the street or a vehicle

stopped close by. Then, she didn't wait any longer. She went to bed, without feeling sleepy.

She felt totally alone. Not with any sentimentality. Just as a fact, like being a woman, or being taller, or married or single, widowed, orphaned. Her big, dark, old house amplified the silence of the night in the occasional cracking of parched wood. There were mice in the roof. Through the window, an excessively white, swollen moon could be seen, the moonlight bathed half her room in the obsessive light of a mortuary. In the days when there were witches, the witches would dance under that moon.

Ana Maria wanted, for a moment, to play at scaring herself, to be the very witch that frightened her, dancing under the moon. To get up without a sound, to walk without a sound, to go out into the night without a sound, without anyone noticing... Without anyone noticing. No one would notice. She covered herself up with the sheet and crossed her arms, squeezing her shoulders.

She had also ended up without a father, when her mother had left them. Her father ended up with nothing, with a small daughter, excessively similar to the wife he'd loved, a sad child with whom he didn't know what to do. Whom he ordered to love him because he didn't know what else to do with her, ordering was his way of protecting himself from his feelings, even when what he ordered was love. He grew old, she grew up, they shared their solitude. They never spoke of that afternoon when her mother left forever, nor of Ana Maria's memory of the veil which scraped her forehead when her mother bent over to kiss her, the scent of powder on her mother's face, her red lips trembling a little as she tried to smile, and then, when she ran over to the window, the car at the door, the maids with her baggage, her mother drying her eyes with a pink handkerchief, a man she'd never seen before opening the car door.

And now, her father had been arrested. He had struggled all his life. First, to construct the country he desired, then to destroy the hoax he'd helped to construct. A hopeless struggle now, with no hope for a future he could share. And Ana Maria felt she was to blame. For his imprisonment, for a shared antipathy, for everything. Because all she could feel for her father was guilt.

[*Scene 12 — Another Out-take and Summary with a Brief Intervention from the Non-Author. Immediate Vicinity of Helena's House (João de Távora and Lopo Reis).*]

[Lopo Reis met up with João de Távora near Helena's house. They filled each other in on their respective adventures since they'd split up. Lopo realized the appearance of Macedo's friends had been, how did he term it, "another of his friend's pranks." But this time, he didn't think it was very funny. He accused him of trying to kill him. On a roll, he took the opportunity also to accuse him of having denounced Commander Salema to the PIDE. João de Távora told him, since he was like that, he would also denounce him. When Lopo thought his friend was carrying on with his jokes in bad taste, João declared in all seriousness that he was joking so much that he would do it in the very presence of the Commander, at a commemorative banquet at which the other guests would be none other than all the PIDE agents who had tortured him, so that Lopo could begin there and then to see what he was like. And he wanted Lopo to be the one to write the invitation to the Commander to greet him at home as soon as he was released by the PIDE, straight away, no more discussion, or else his denunciation would not even come with a meal, it would be tonight, for being a communist. And he concluded:

— Now you know what the PIDE do to communists: they kill them. But, first, they skin them. Literally. — How João de Távora burst out laughing was what most scared Lopo.]

The corresponding scene from the opera is the one in the cemetery, with the following directions in the libretto: "Cimitero circondato da un muro; diversi monumenti equestri, fra cui quello del Commendatore. Chiaro di luna."

Medeiros cleverly transposed the scene to the steep street in front of the also equestrian Helena's house; he folded it into the converging sequences that are "the little angel's burial," with its latent premonition of death, and the conversation with Bernardo, which effectively marks the civil death of João de Távora, while linking the Commander's torture by the PIDE to the image of the statue; and finally he returns to the operatic matrix for the fatal challenge to the "stone guest."

In the opera, the mocking threat Don Giovanni makes to Leporello, forcing him to send his invitation to the Commendatore's statue, is "O qui

t'ammazzo e poi ti seppelisco." The words in the novel are thus virtually the same, there's just a detective-story reversal in their order of precedence: skinning comes first, then killing. A wasted nuance, without this note, if the author was trying to characterize in this way the times and the country in which he lived.

[*Scene 13 — Helena's Room* (Helena Alone; Extras; Elvira's Voice).]

Helena couldn't sleep. She was shaken up by Macedo's whipping which, at the time, she'd forced herself to accept with an indifference in keeping with the picture of herself she tried to construct for João. She understood that acting on impulse, she too was incapable of behaving any other way. But she was unable to understand a deliberately cruel act. Cruelty appalled her, especially coming from someone she loved. That's how she realized, with a deep, uneasy shock, the extent to which she was captive to João. It was no longer just a game of more or less erotic complicities. It was love, the first she'd ever felt, total, overwhelming, full of anxiety, served by an excessive force of febrile enthusiasm she'd always dispersed in inconsequential acts, which now had crystallized with such intolerable urgency that her whole body shook and she plunged her face into the cushions and bit them hard, pulverizing her lips until it hurt.

She calmed down. She turned over, lay down on her back, listening, with attentive and very voluptuous abandon, to the beat of her own heart and the condensed, muffled sounds that came from the sleeping city, wrapped in a tepid silence, followed by a more expectant silence: the monotonous crackle of a cricket... The slow steps and lonely jingling of the night watchman's keychain... A car almost stopping and then moving on before stopping again further away... A far-off rattling, like thunder still rarified by the distance... And also, so low that she only began to notice it later, what sounded like the drawn-out whimpering or soft crying of a child, crying in their sleep.

She went to the window. The night was still hot, close, with the metallic, white moonlight transfiguring the long, steep cobble-stoned street, with its low, narrow houses lined up over the passageway. A lukewarm, humid breeze gradually invaded her near-naked body she languidly spread out, stretching her arms. The continuous weeping appeared to get louder

for a moment. There was no one around. She leaned out the window. Just two figures, still blurred at the end of the street, who were slowly making their way up. Almost three a.m. Whoever walked in the street at that time must feel like the lord of the city. Helena wanted to go out into the night too, to walk through the empty streets, to sit by the river on the deserted quay, to tread barefoot on a sandy beach, to go naked into the sea as the sun rose. But what about that weeping that didn't stop, broken up by ever longer, more weary sobs? The two lingerers were now almost in front of the window. They spoke in low voices. Helena moved back a little, straightening up. But one of them saw her, drawing his companion's attention to her, pointing her out with a nod. They stopped. The one who'd seen her first said to the other, in a voice that echoed:

— You ask her.

The other moved forward a few steps, looking up at the window.

— Can we come in, gorgeous?

Helena closed the window and drew the curtains. She lay down. But, a moment later, she got up again, abruptly. She opened the window. The two friends were still laughing, now further away. Helena undressed and pressed her pajamas, which retained her own body heat, against her breast. She lay down again, naked, on top of the quilt, unable to rest, aware of her own body, slowly tensing each muscle in order to feel it, then stretching out, supple, surrendering herself to the light touch of her fingers. A sudden interruption in the weeping or desolate sobbing that until then she'd been able to hear, and that now blended into the tense tranquility the night itself seemed to spread, brought a weight of solitude and abandonment to the expectant silence that followed. When, a few minutes later, the crying started again, Helena realized it came from the room next door, from Elvira's room. Which immediately made it dominant and then unbearable. Her sultry, sensual vigil was transformed into insomnia. She got up several times to go and ask her cousin why she was crying. Something stopped her each time. She covered her ears with the cushions. She turned on the light. She flipped through some magazines. She smoked some cigarettes.

It was almost day when she managed to fall asleep, a little after, it seemed to her, Elvira had also fallen asleep or, at least, stopped crying.

[*Scene 14 — João de Távora's Apartment (João de Távora Alone).*]

Almost daybreak. João de Távora hadn't gone to bed.

The moon paled, scattered diffusely over the irregular mass of sleeping buildings. Only the river, in the background, still shone, but with a thick, vegetable shine.

Suddenly, the street lights all went out. The sun was scarcely but a promise, and yet the sky already began to bulge into an almost black blue, only perceptible through its contrast with the darkness into which the city had plunged and which the rarefied texture of the moonlight was not enough to tone down. The Cathedral emerged from between the lightless buildings, imposing its precarious majesty.

The first cock crowed, with the raspy voice of a cock kept in a cage on the roof tiles, immediately provoking a reply from another cock further away, and the scattered barking of stray dogs, followed by a sudden outburst from blackbirds and sparrows. A vague phosphorescent pink infiltrated the sky's blue-black.

And the city began to move bit by bit. In some windows, lights were lit, from place to place, the first on another hill, and then several, closer by, until they spread all over. White, hasty figures advanced through the street, distributing bread and milk to houses. An empty tram shrilly crossed by in the background, with a flash of light.

Workers passed by, in silence, lunch boxes in their hands. A patrol on horseback thundered their hooves on the cobblestones. Newsagents could be heard in the distance announcing first editions. A lottery-ticket seller, still without much conviction, tried out a number. Then a woman hawking wares came up the street, launching her high-pitched cry. Some windows opened, from which chilly women's bodies leaned out. A blind man, tapping with his stick, positioned himself on a corner.

João de Távora left his house shortly after.

[*Scene 15 — Elvira's Room in Helena's House (Elvira Alone).*]

Elvira woke up suddenly, with the brilliant sun striking her straight in the face. She let out a frail whimper, and turned over to the other side of the bed. She suddenly opened her eyes, heavy and glazed. Her body ached. Her

chest weighed down when she breathed. At first, she couldn't remember why such deep anguish throbbed through her, like a wound.

She got up. Immediately, she was struck, both in her body and in her memory, by a sharp pain in her stomach, or at least, it appeared to concentrate there as it spread. Shivering, she put her dressing gown on, as if she was trying to hide her body from her memory. She grabbed hold of her hairbrush, and brushed her hair mechanically, to her shoulders. She went to the mirror. And she looked with bitter indifference at the disfigured face the mirror reflected, with deep and swollen wrinkles, like pimples, imposing a childishly startled, unbelievable old age on her.

She felt really old. Suddenly, really, really old. She flopped back onto the bed, without crying, shrinking herself up in a corner. Why, why, why? Why her? She was being asked for so much, far too much! Because she understood, because she always understood, because she'd been born old and always accepted everything. And because she was still so young and always believed everything since she couldn't imagine anyone could wish her harm.

She knew, she felt it to be a self-evident truth, that much of what João had said to her the night before was a lie. Yet not everything had been a lie. Only her naivety, only her desire to believe, her will to serve him, didn't let her understand straight away the impossibility of his grotesque confession. Yet... Why? What for? What he'd said about his mother, could that also be a lie? Everything else maybe, but what he'd said about his mother could only be the truth. So what for? Why tell her things that could only be told to someone he loved, and then, then do what he did? More than her, he was destroying himself, destroying everything on the way. Like a blind body. Like a body on fire.

Like a body on fire. Elvira remembered a cat she had when she was little. One day, the lads in the street got hold of the cat, poured petrol over it, and struck a match. Then, they threw the burning cat to her, and she managed to catch it, and tried to put out the fire. She got burnt. The cat scratched her. It got away. She couldn't do anything other than watch it run madly, hissing with pain, amid the lads' jeering, until it suddenly stopped, now hairless and dead. For days, she only spoke of her cat. For months, she only thought of her cat. For years, she had nightmares from which she woke up screaming. Then, she forgot everything. And now, she felt a superstitious terror rising within her.

[*Scene 16 — Immediate Vicinity of the Riverside Market, Downtown, etc.*
(João de Távora, Prostitute, Octávio, Extras).]

João de Távora was sat at the end of the thin hulk of rock that juts out over the river next to the Riverside Market, curving like an elbow and forming a small dock for fishermen. The sun had burst the red mass of clouds that seemed to have borne it and it was starting to rise. It was six o'clock.

At six thirty, he went to the market. He had an espresso at the counter of a café, amidst workers who were beginning their day and night owls who were ending theirs, having just poured out of the neighborhood bars. A prostitute came in, accompanied by a man. She excused herself, and went up to João.

— D'you know about Clotilde?

— No... Please, sit — he pointed to the bar stool next to him.

— I can't, I'm with him. Didn't you come from the Texas Bar?

— No. But is something up with Clotilde?

— Oh, so you haven't heard, then? She killed herself.

— What!

— Yes.

— But just this last Saturday... Why?

— No one knows. She took rat poison. Her burial's tomorrow. In case you want to go, since you were so close...

At seven o'clock, João drove on the ring road to Estoril. The beach was deserted. He swam, and lay on the sand until the first tourists arrived.

At nine thirty, he returned to Lisbon.

At ten, he went into the Brasileira Café. Octávio was at one of the tables with the poet António de Navarro and two students of Fine Arts. The poet, who'd been a colleague of João's father at Coimbra, waved vigorously, calling him over. Octávio was killing time before a meeting with the General, who had news about Ana Maria's father.

— I'm off — he said as João approached.

— You're neither going nor staying — João ventured without looking at him, an expression that provoked admiring bursts of laughter from the two youthful artists and, when Octávio left, the benevolent protest of the poet.

— The expression may be clever, João de Távora, for he who neither goes nor stays, isn't here even when he is, but it's very cruel, you know! And the lad doesn't deserve it!

From eleven o'clock, the downtown began to get crowded: groups of men, leaning against walls, followed women with collectively wide-open eyes; youths in shirt sleeves waved at one another from both sides of the street; a man of stature hailed taxis with passengers, taking great offense; a round lady skipped down the street with a box of cakes from Bénard's; a convertible zoomed with virility as it changed gears; a blind man played his trombone; two policeman; a painter arrived from Paris; a newspaper boy running, suddenly stopping next to a fat man on a broken set of scales with its needle pointing to zero and shouting "the bloke's hollow!" before running off again; more women; a beggar showing the leg he once had; two more policemen; a democrat exiled abroad but with acquaintances in the government; written in pitch on a wall, "Angola is ours" and next to it in chalk, "Bread"; two Republican guards on horseback; a solemn couple, she with her eyes lowered, he with a proprietary hand on her arm as he moved his spiritless gaze over the world around him; shop-assistants hurriedly running errands; men following them until the effort became too much; clamor, proclamations, cars, shrillness, more police, school boys, fishwives, ladies in black with and without puppies, well-born young lasses, many of them, out shopping, in the sun, at large, hair exposed and breasts excited by American bras ready to salute the arrival of summer.

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At eleven thirty, João flicked through the latest arrivals at Bertrand's bookstore. A leftist intellectual spitefully caused him to say hello so that he could turn his back on him.

At noon, he went to the barber's, where they were talking about the state of emergency and the strike that hadn't got off the ground. The chair next to his thought it was ridiculous, it only served to take bread away from those who already had next to nothing.

At one p.m., he was eating alone at Gambrinus, lobsters and half a bottle of *Bucellas*.

Then he went to the phone booths in the Rossio, and called Helena. She'd gone out. — But if it's you, she left a message for you, she rang this morning but no one answered and if you rang, to say she was at the beach in Estoril, please go there.

He peeped into the Gelo Café, where he knew the painters and poets to wave to, three were already there, he waved and left.

He went back to the downtown, on his way to the Brasileira Café, but he didn't go in. A voice, discreet but audible, said from inside:

— Traitor!

He went to Martins & Costa. He bought food for his dinner. He stopped at a street café, ordered a glass of white wine, a plate, a spoon and a knife. He took a peach out of his bag of shopping, peeled it, cut it into pieces, drank a little of the wine, and soaked some of the pieces in the rest. But then he gave up halfway through.

He got in his car. He stopped by Lopo Reis's room, who wasn't in. He left him a note. He went home.

[*Scene 17 — Ana Maria's House* (Octávio and Ana Maria).]

The oblique afternoon sun began to spread over the irregular mass of houses, bringing to the tiles and rooftops paler tones, defining outlines, freeing up colors hitherto obliterated in the lone stridency of white reflections, tracing out shadow lines around boats anchored in the vast river of radiant scales.

Ana Maria had not asked Octávio to come up to the first floor, where she had staked out her own enclave in the large house she did not own but where she'd lived all her life. Mumbling apologies, the maid had taken him to the reception room kept as Ana Maria's mother had left it and, since she'd gone away, never used. The room was cool, the semi-darkness of the drawn curtains would be welcome were it not for the smell of humidity that emanated from the walls lined with aging brocade. Octávio could feel his linen suit stuck to his body, his broad face shone with sweat. He took his grimy glasses off and cleaned them, then wiped his brow with his handkerchief. He sat down on the edge of a chaise longue with a frame carved in brazil-wood, and dark-red velvet padding, with two small pink silk cushions softening the angle between the seat and the bulge. Above a grand piano partially covered by a brilliant Indian throw-over, a picture of a still young woman, in a large frame with golden indentations, dominated the wall in front. It was Mrs Ana de Castro, Ana Maria's mother. Octávio looked at the picture in minute detail, scrutinizing the similarities: the same drawn-out eyes in the shape of almonds, which the painter had highlighted shading heavy eyelids over their light brown; well defined cheek bones; an elevated, thin nose, full lips drawn out in a smile. But where there was a severity in Ana Maria's expression, in her forthright gait, in her straight skirts and

neutral-colored blouses, in the portrait there was a spoilt sweetness the painter seemed to have hesitated over whether to make more dominant than the touch of daring gallantry he had vividly captured from the belated Lisbon charlestons of the 1930s.

When he heard Ana Maria's footsteps approaching, Octávio leaped up, as if he'd been caught doing something wrong. He became even more confused by the unbelievable apparition he saw at the door. Ana Maria was wearing a red silk dress, with a dropped waistline, uneven hem, chiffon patches embroidered with sequins. She had lipstick on, as well as eye shadow and her hair clamped in a tortoise *barrette* on the left side of her head. It was her mother who'd come in. Octávio averted his gaze, as if from an obscenity. Then, he looked at the portrait again, discretely, and then at Ana Maria again. He struggled to say rather clumsily — Were you going out? — as if apologizing for the intrusion he genuinely felt his presence there was, but also aware that Ana Maria would never have gone out dressed like that, that he'd stumbled in awkwardly on something very secret, that excluded him, and that he didn't know how to interpret since he didn't know what role he'd been assigned in that scene, pretending to speak as the background for the character who belonged to the scene, without himself knowing which play he was in.

— Were you going out? — he repeated.

Ana Maria replied, in a neutral tone: — No... — and barely hinting at an explanation as to why she'd received him there: — I was going through some old things. Sorry for not asking you upstairs, it's all a complete mess up there. — Clearly, she was not going to say anything else about her appearance, nor let Octávio say anything. — Is it very hot outside?

— Yes, very. But here inside it's cool.

She smirked at the ridiculousness of their dialogue and it was enough for Octávio to smile too, in a vaguely apologetic gesture. — Please, sit — Ana Maria pointed, as she sat down on the chaise longue leaving a space for Octávio. But Octávio sat on an armchair next to it.

— I've some good news — he said, without looking at her. — Well... if everything goes to plan.

That morning, he'd seen the General and would return in the afternoon to find out from Mendes Ribeiro the results of the *démarches* he'd later undertaken with the minister. To cut a long story short, these meant the General would accept a discrete move to the Reserve, followed by

some resignations of lower-ranked officers and the deployment of others to Angola. In any case, he was sure he'd guaranteed the Commander's release as part of the bargain. In fact, the minister went so far as to think the Commander should never have been arrested, even the Prime Minister may have suggested the police acted with haste, and without his knowledge, over-dramatizing everything more than desirable. There were still some problems of jurisdiction to resolve: did the Commander fall under civilian authority, as an ex-officer, which was the PIDE's interpretation or, as an ex-officer, was he still under military authority, which was the minister's view? Of course, the PIDE would do whatever the Prime Minister decided, but it insisted on its legal position in order to justify the action it had taken. An action it claimed to have been forced to take because of the Commander's contacts with the Communist Party.

— With the Party?

— It seems so. — What made matters worse was that some workers appeared to be obeying the Party's order to strike. The General felt the communists were trying to rest operational control from him, and take things in a direction with which he didn't agree. In fact, he said that was the reason he'd decided to put a complete halt to his involvement.

— He accused your father of having deceived him.

Ana Maria didn't know of any contacts in the Communist Party and she refused to believe her father had them.

— The General's in no doubt...

— But if they accuse him of being a communist, they won't let him out!

The accusation wasn't that serious, it was that he'd allowed contact with communists. A mere technical nuance that, in this case, should give the police a pretext to back down, while saving face.

— Especially since, although your father's acted with huge courage and hasn't said a word, the PIDE already knows everything it wanted to know. Names, barracks involved, all the plans. Someone kept them informed, possibly from the beginning.

— João de Távora — Ana Maria murmured succinctly.

— It doesn't appear so. Mendes Ribeiro, very reluctantly and all torn up by his *esprit de corps*, led us to believe that it could also have been one of the soldiers.

— Look, Octávio — Ana Maria replied coldly —, if the truth is my father was in touch with the communists, there are only two people in the world

whom he would tell: me and João de Távora. And he didn't tell me — she added with a hint of offense in her voice.

— How d'you know? — said Octávio, trying to argue logically —, how d'you know he didn't tell someone else? Or commit some kind of indiscretion? We all now agree it was an error of judgment to trust João de Távora. In fact, I could never really understand how you all ever took him seriously as a revolutionary, but what can I say? I know, you've already told me, disguises... Well, don't you think you father could also have made other errors of judgment? — and as Ana Maria, already enraged, got ready to reply: — Listen, Anita — Octávio went on wearily —, I'm not trying to defend João de Távora. I've no doubt he could've turned your father in, I no longer doubt anything, I think it probably makes the most sense in light of everything else. But that's not what matters. What matters is your father's possibly going to be freed, even today.

— So, by today he will confirm that it was João — was all that Ana Maria said.

Octávio just shook his head sadly. After a silence, he began to speak again, with difficulty, while feeling ever more disturbed by the bizarre beauty emanating from Ana Maria.

— There's just one more thing. Please brace yourself. Your father... — He stopped.

Ana Maria froze: — What?

— They treated him badly. They interrogated him using a technique in which they make people stay standing for hours in the same spot...

— Yes, I know, the statue torture. Tell me! — Ana Maria almost shouted, using her aggression against her fiancé as a brake on the terror invading her.

— Physically, he coped with everything... — Octávio continued, without looking at her. — The pain, the swelling in the legs... But mentally, he doesn't seem too good. One thing this kind of torture provokes, after a couple of days, are hallucinations. At least, that's what Mendes Ribeiro told me...

— I know. — Ana Maria's tone had turned chilly.

Octávio hesitated over whether he should continue. He breathed in deeply. He went on: — It's normal that your father has begun to have them. The General is going to insist they free him straight away, but he feels it's vital he be placed under medical supervision. It would be a good idea if you...

— I know how to take care of my father — Ana Maria interrupted, abruptly. — Thank you.

— Very well — Octávio said, getting up.

Ana Maria got up too. Octávio looked at her, to say goodbye, feeling once again the disturbing incongruity of her flapper outfit. But now, with a shadow of pity, he also felt there was in all this something quite grotesque. Once again, he averted his gaze. Ana Maria accompanied him to the door of the room.

— Oh, that's right — he said in a forced casual tone of voice —, naturally, Mendes Ribeiro will be coming with me to Angola. In the same regiment.

— Angola...? — Ana Maria queried as if trying to remember. — You? And what about the ministry? When?

— I've already told you, Anita. I told you yesterday. They won't accept me. I'll probably go in about a month, maybe a little earlier, well, I just don't know...

— But why?

— Ana Maria, I've already explained this to you. Where have you been? Or can't you hear me any more, when I speak to you?

— With all that's been going on with my father... — she began, humbly. But then she stopped herself. — It's my fault — she said gloomily. And as Octávio tried to gesture his disagreement: — It's my fault and you know perfectly well it was my fault. And you're trying to accuse me of ruining your life. And you don't even have the guts to say it out loud! — Ana Maria was almost in tears.

— No, Anita — Octávio said. — You're very wrong about me. Believe it or not, there are things in this world that have nothing to do with you. — Octávio had spoken curtly rather than ironically. His words had the immediate effect of calming Ana Maria down.

— How far away from me you are!... — she said, in a hurt tone.

— Me?

— Yes, you. Only that can explain why you don't get anything... Wasn't it you who would tell me, who told me so many times that with you I could be exactly who I am, without masks or disguises?

— Without masks or disguises, Ana Maria?

— Why are you asking me in that tone of voice? — She lowered her eyes toward her dress, with a hand movement as if she were trying to hide it, as if Octávio was referring to it, as if she'd only just noticed that she was wearing it.

— Because I want you to think about what you're saying — Octávio continued.

— I thought about what I said.

— And that's all you have to say? Didn't you want, for example, to tell me again about what happened between you and João de Távora? Look, maybe that wouldn't be a bad place to start...

— What are you trying to do to me? — she said, recoiling. — What are you hoping to achieve? — Suddenly, her expression changed, the stiffness of her movements transformed.

Octávio could sense the change. He looked at her puzzled, without understanding. — Anita... — He had never seen her so beautiful, so illuminated from within, so sensual.

Ana Maria's words flowed out in an easy, calmly happy, gush, with a radiant smile on her red lips and her seductive eyes: — Finally, what I've always wanted, finally, I don't need you, I don't need anyone, it's like having woken up from a nightmare...

Octávio, lost between what her words said and the calm splendor with which she said them, once again murmured — Anita...

— You can all go, please — she said. — I was getting so sick of you all, of you, of dad, of that whore of a mother waking me up at night like a witch... — she stopped, exposing herself, drawing her skirt a little above her knees, showing herself off as if to her mother's body —, ... and when I'm alone, finally alone without having to pretend I'm not, free of all your love, of all that pity everyone has for me, my father finally dead, if God wills it, you also dead, João... — she didn't complete what she was going to say. Instead, she said: — Oh, goodbye. You can go now. Clear off to Angola. — Raising the hem of her dress delicately, as if she were about to dance, she rushed up stairs while Octávio followed her with his eyes, astonished.

END OF THE *DRAMMA GIOCOSO* AND IMAGINATION'S LITERALISM

Let's leave the fragment of my old friend Luís Garcia de Medeiros's *Dramma Giocoso* like that. For the rest of it, the reader can go and see the opera if you still haven't seen it, you can only gain from the experience, or listen to the record, or at least read the libretto. And then, pretend to be an author, there are others with less skill who do, and transpose metaphysics and politics, the avenging statue of the Commendatore into the grotesque obscenity of the Commander's statue torture, his icy hand on a revolver shooting a round of bullets.

The actual author, a prudent navigator of improbabilities, didn't make it very clear if Lopo Reis really took the invitation round to the Commander's house João de Távora had forced him to write, to have fun by frightening him, as would have been his intention, or, if the Commander turned up there of his own accord when João de Távora was half way through his packed lunch from Martins & Costa, watched by Lopo Reis, mouth-watering, because he'd stupidly said he'd only read his friend's note asking him to come after having dined on an excellent steak with egg on top. But since he suffered from rapid digestions — or RD, as the yet again repeated joke goes — he still helped out with a sneaky piece of partridge breast. Elvira also turned up, still trying to understand and, if possible, forgive, but she was treated badly once again, as in the opera. And João de Távora's death? Suicide by proxy, like Elvira's rape (is that the right word)? An accident at work? A "mystery," as Mário de Sá-Carneiro would say, the author's double without the glasses, disguised as Octávio with glasses and the wars in Africa, "a disturbing mystery." But for whoever thinks it possible or desirable to tie up loose ends, the author took out of his rosette box the following, in various colors:

Elvira returned to Porto, uninformed. Helena had spent the day at the beach waiting for João and the night at home, waiting for a call from

him; she decided to ring, Lopo answered, and told her what had happened; she commented on the way back from the cemetery that only the pair of them should have attended the burial; but João's father was also there, with his wife. Lopo didn't know what to make of Helena's phrase and he ended up thinking, after several minutes meditation, that the appropriate reply would be to invite her out for dinner, then the movies, maybe a walk along the river and, if everything went well, a nightcap in his room; but he didn't have the money, nor anyone to borrow from; besides, he'd decided to be much more careful with the company he kept. Zulmira and Macedo found out about João de Távora's death from Bernardo, in one of his quick secret trips. Bernardo recruited Macedo to the Party; Zulmira was afraid she was pregnant. Commander Diogo Salemo died nearly a week after João de Távora, and his funeral led to an enthusiastic pro-democracy demonstration, which the police broke up without much difficulty. After, it was said there had been many injured, later, it was also reported there were fatalities. Octávio proposed marriage to Ana Maria before going to Angola, but she thought it better to wait until his return.

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P.S. The malcontent reader of this unlyrical prose might well now ask: what on earth is this Salazarist drama — which has nothing very jocular about it if the sample is anything to go off, by some bloke called Medeiros, who is more missing than ill-fated King Sebastian lost who knows where — doing as one of the parts of Africa promised on the cover of this book? And since the pseudo-author credited on the cover has been stretching out and making the most of his sabbatical with essays for the *Colóquio/Letras* journal, his father's civil service reports, if what was transcribed was actually his, and now even a recycled novel penned by another, why doesn't he use what's left of the paper he brought from London to copy out Sintra's local telephone directory, which his friend Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos must have left lying around? To which I will respond, with the weary patience of the classroom, in line with good teaching protocol, after having repeated the inappropriate question in a suitable tone of voice, in order to make you feel as much a reptile as the pimp bouncer at the Texas Bar in the time of adult education: what is Luís Garcia de Medeiros's novel doing in this book? What does it have to do with my parts of Africa? Everything, of course, control your unreasonable indignation a little and think just a bit harder, everything. What were you doing while you pretended to be

reading? Explained well or badly in its contemporary logarithm, that was the vile cocoon from which we all emerged, you and I, blacks and whites, male and female, cats and dogs, which is like saying, we end up all stripes. Above all, think about it vice-versa, like in a mirror. As for the rest, as for the mosaic floor between the mirrors, let the encrusted fragments of other mirrors suffice, reflecting in each other plausible fictions, fictitious plausibilities and mere facts related to the fragmented world around us where all and none of this happened. Well, as at the end of the day, you still seem to prefer the literalism of the imagination to the imagination of literalism, very well then, I've nothing against it, let's return to Africa proper. You just have to turn the page to begin to hear once more the wild drums.

THE RHETORIC OF IMPOSSIBILITY AND THE DRIFT OF HOPE

Imagine a small desert surrounded by water on all sides. What would it be called in rhetoric? An oxymoron? No, an oxymoron is when the desert is fertile, the wet drought, the sun black, the dark clarity. The oxymoron is dynamic, and brings with it the possibility of change, there's always some hope in an oxymoron. It's not like a chiasmus, which just fakes change to keep everything the way it is, to restore the past in the future, like in *Mes-sage* by Pessoa, who thought that was a good idea, or the messianic ghosts of Garrett, who didn't. I think it's just a paradox. The paradox in question is the Island of Sal. And we'll get there shortly.

In the meantime, I don't know if I got round to telling you that in one of my London incarnations, I worked for the Brazilian consulate. I don't think so since this book is not about me but from me, its conductor who is biographically qualified in factual fictions. Let's face it, those impersonal, objective narrators are a fictitious ground that has already borne its fruit, and up until now, they have proven unnecessary for our story. In those already harvested novels, the authors are disguised even when they are not. In this book, which never knows when it is a novel and when it isn't, my disguise is not to be disguised, just like Bernadim Ribeiro before Pessoa came along to explain what was going on. Now pay attention, this is an example of a complicated chiasmus. In the Brazilian consulate, I had good and bad bosses, with the majority being so-so. The job was given to me by a wonderfully generous lady who was the consul-general, and who also loved opera. We met during the intermission in *Don Giovanni* (yes, I know, a repeated literary effect, but it happens to be true), afterward, she took us out to dinner, the fast necessitated by the price of the tickets had been two days long, the *Gevrey-Chambertin* loosened my tongue, helping me to talk about a novel I was then trying to write, she asked me if as

a writer who needed to make a living somehow, wouldn't it be better to have more stable employment than the odd program for the BBC? I began the next week, in the recently created department of information, charged with explaining to hypothetical visitors to a country to which I'd never been what they should see and do in Rio and São Paulo, which was relatively easy because there are books about them, but also in Recife, Salvador, São Luís de Maranhão. Using these place names, I spoke to them about Quelimane, Braga, Barcelos, Madragoa, Luanda, São Tomé, the Island of Mozambique, and then I actually recognized bits of all these places when I finally got there myself, after the military dictatorship was over. And so my job went on, worse than I wanted but better than it could have been, until two consul-generals down the line, a madman arrived who forced the staff, particularly me, to explain to any lady who came to ask for a visa that Brazil didn't need any more whores, "but don't say whore, say courtesan, or in the worst cases, harlot." Also, when he wanted to insult someone, he would call them a "novelist," which I thought a bad omen for my then somewhat dejected literary ambitions. So, my best boss was my last boss, precisely because he wanted to be the last. He couldn't understand what I was doing there, I explained it to him, and he simply said, "I want to help you." Thanks to him, I could return to university. He was called Ovídio de Andrade Mello and he was the first Brazilian ambassador to Angola. I just don't understand why they still haven't made him an honorary citizen, or named a street after him in Luanda, because if there's a non-Angolan who personally contributed to the very existence of Angola which despite everything still exists and could actually exist beyond all ideologies, it was Ambassador Ovídio. The Portuguese had just signed that shameful Alvor Accord, in which they implicitly accepted (desired?) that their main colony be transformed into a tribal patchwork blanket and neocolonized by others. And no, it wasn't just the soldiers' fault, it wasn't even mainly the soldiers' fault despite the all-encompassing blame now attached to them by the civilians who followed them and owe them their power. The fault also belongs to the usual suspects, in their latest reptilian metamorphoses. And just as colonized and colonizing Africans have always managed to construct in their Angolas and Mozambiques against the grain of some, it is against the grain of those who used to be Others that there and in some other parts of Africa, Portuguese is still spoken as the sovereign language of new nations.

Ambassador Ovídio came, saw, and understood which of the parties in the struggle seemed most committed to turning Angola into a nation, and Brazil was the first country to recognize that party as the legitimate government. I don't know if he consulted anyone, but I do know the Brazilian regime at the time was an extremely rightwing military dictatorship, and the other two countries that immediately recognized Angola were Cuba and the Soviet Union, the ideological confusion was huge, the invasion was delayed just long enough to be less easy than it should have been; and later, between wars and scares, even the countries that continued to push for an eventual division of the nation between Zaire and South Africa ended up recognizing that version of Angola; and Portugal was one of the last to do so. Ovídio de Andrade Mello finished his professional life among stolen glances, now lives in Rio, I meet up with him every time I go there: we have lunch, we chat, we drink draught beer in the street cafés of Copacabana, we laugh a lot about the big prank he played on the world. He was already painting when he was in London, he does naïve painting, full of delicate touches, ever more similar to himself, ever more in tune with the complex simplicity with which he knew how to move in the course of History.

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My visit to the paradox that is the Island of Sal and two or three others in the Cape Verdean archipelago was because I couldn't go and see Ovídio in Luanda when he was the ambassador there. It was the Civil War at its most intense, the airport was closed and, even before it was, the few planes that went in and out had to cower to avoid the bullets. But before not arriving in Luanda and arriving in Sal instead, it's worth doing a brief chronological recap.

On the morning of April 25 1974, S. had got up earlier than I and turned on the wireless. She woke me up: "Revolution in Portugal!" And I, half-asleep, mumbled: "In favor or against?" The question continues to be relevant, because there really are chiasmi. João Vieira had come to spend his holidays with us, got straight on a plane back to Lisbon, getting there the same time as the Communist leader Álvaro Cunhal. He saw the Socialist Dr Mário Soares embrace Cunhal at the airport, and their posing together on top of a revolutionary Armed Forces Movement car, then he arranged for himself a girlfriend who was trying to further the sexual revolution, offering herself to old men, sad men, and men in need. I didn't have a passport, so I stayed in London to see Dr Mário Soares speaking to émigrés on top of a piano in the embassy. I also saw on British television the release of prisoners from Caxias and the ear-to-ear smile on Cardoso Pires's amazed

face. I believed in everything I'd always wanted to believe in and lectured those Brits who didn't believe. The evening of May 1, a communist who had spent years trying to control me, rang me from Lisbon (I must have been the only person who wasn't there, and he, the only person who was there and who still wanted to control people), announcing cryptically, the habits of a lifetime rendering him congenitally secretive, that "this, my friend, is not 1820, but 1383!". He must have had Cunhal's essay in mind, putting the ideological dots on the chronicler Fernão Lopes's "i"s. Having missed the best part of the celebrations, I defended my doctoral thesis and went to Lisbon in June, at the height of the Palma Carlos crisis. For me, it still counted as a celebration. My brother had also come from Lourenço Marques (by then Maputo?) to see what it was like, and we all met up at our parents'. He spoke to me distinguishing between "you" and "us": I was Portugal and he was Mozambique, I'd never seen him so patriotic. That must have contributed to the fact that this time, in our usual argument, my father and I were almost in agreement, reconciling, although through the language of a reiterated conflict, Medeiros's *Dramma Giocoso* (or what from it I came to change into my own metaphor) and Governor Ferreira Pinto's theories of governance against the grain (or what from them my father had transformed into in his own program).

When all is said and done — I proclaimed with the dubious morality of a provocation — Salazar had not been consigned to the hell of History because of his tortures, his prisons and his murders, not for the excesses he had committed but for the lack he had imposed as the norm for his excesses. The Marquis of Pombal had committed even more excessive crimes and a few generations later he warranted a monument at the top of an avenue named liberty. The greatest mistake, the unforgivable crime of Salazarism was not having known how to, nor wanted to, nor allowed for the pimping out of the colonies. Thus, it had achieved what was most difficult: a small country with a population no larger than a city like London, with the richest colony in Africa, forgetting about the others it had besides Angola, had remained one of the poorest countries in Europe. My father disagreed in order to agree.

"No, you're wrong. The problem was precisely the pimping out, as you put it in your trooper language. Instead of developing or, at least, not getting in the way." And with a shrug of his shoulders that was more ironic than melancholic, he looked first to my brother and then to me, and said: "But now... this is your problem."

My problem? Where, in London? So I even agreed to go to Porto, which at the time was trying to attract Portuguese university faculty from the diaspora. I was blown off track by the radicals of March 11. Jorge Correia Jesuino had come back from Angola, become minister for information and culture, heard the criticisms I may have made of his nonetheless well-intentioned public education campaigns and, before being trashed for being more of a philosopher than soldier or politician, which only does him credit, roped me in to going to work with him and João de Freitas Branco in the new Ministry of Culture. But not before having introduced me to some contacts useful to Ovídio de Andrade Mello in Angola, which may have helped him to understand more quickly what was what and who was who. While I was waiting for either Porto or the culture ministry, I persuaded the University of London to send me on a visit to the new Portuguese-speaking African nations, beginning with Angola and Mozambique. It ended up being the ministry, but preceded by several African police militantly on my tail with a message I should get on the next plane since they thought I was to be arrested, a week before the government fell and the several weeks that followed without a government, in the middle of the Hot Summer of turmoil, Eduardo Prado Coelho and I, as yet-to-be confirmed, radical-leftist directors-general, forming an incongruent pair the likes of which surpassed Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, directing a ministry without a minister, in which we'd never stepped foot, and whoever had had been purged or was out on a rally. It was fun, but wasn't conducive to great reforms. Instead, as a result, along with João Vieira and Lisa (then Chaves and now a Parisian painter of the grotesque which is the narcissistic vengeance of her intangible beauty), I decided to make some notes on the reforms that could be made, which Ernesto de Melo e Castro published in Saramago's *Diário de Notícias* newspaper so it is his fault that Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, thinking four years later it was worth a try, invited me to be her Secretary of State for Culture in a government that tried to do too much so that the little it actually managed to achieve was credited to others. But you couldn't expect better from these others and, in any case, those are stories for a later date, because for the moment, Luanda's airport was closed and at the last minute I had to decide whether to go to Guinea and Cape Verde instead, and from there to go straight on to Mozambique.

In Bissau, there was a heat I only remembered was possible when I got off the plane and my body exploded into a shower from the inside outward.

Utterly unnecessary since from the outside inward it was raining so much that everything was a swamp, making me notice the full-blooded vegetation there used to be on the road to the airport had disappeared. "It was the war," the brother of my copper-colored girlfriend explained, a minister with the right to a black Volvo (those of less importance were only allowed white cars) and, later, one of those to whom I gave suspicious pacifist embraces on the presidential stop-over following Agostinho Neto's funeral. And my girlfriend? One of her front teeth was missing, she was fat, cooked up a feast of prawns with palm-nut oil, had white hair and showed me a picture of her recently born granddaughter. Since I don't have children of my own (adult measles) and the passage of time only consists in everyone older than twenty-five acquiring my age and I theirs, this made a huge impression on me. I didn't walk around for miles thinking about it, like Cesário Verde might have, just because the heat and rain wouldn't let me.

Instead, I returned in the Volvo to the Pijiguiti Hotel, housed in the former Portuguese navy barracks and now the property of a curved and extremely dear sister of the president. I came across her in low-cut desperation since all the utilities had failed: no electricity, water, or air conditioning, cisterns that wouldn't flush, food rotting, flies, stench, a despair shared by all. So, they called out a Russian, who tried without success to fix the problem. Then, I can't quite remember, maybe it was a Bulgarian, he was certainly ideologically akin, also to no avail. Now, as it happens, permanently sat at the hotel bar for the five days since I'd arrived was an utterly sloshed Portuguese man, who'd served in the war, and must have been in that contemplative militancy since independence, only able to raise his hand to the glass that kept on being filled for him and then raise the glass to his mouth, with a clasp shiver. I'd tried to talk to him on my first and second days there and, since the rest of the population had given up, he'd made a half-baked effort to declare I should know just because he was pickled he wasn't "the great liberator of the homeland" like the four-starred Othello Saraiva de Carvalho. He was supposed to have returned to Portugal at the same time as Othello, "but, as I've already said, I was pickled, I missed the boat, or was it the plane, if it was the boat I went for the plane, if it was the plane I went for the boat, they left without me, but I stayed firmly here at my post, I just don't like that on top of everything else they say I'm a deserter." Given the ideological failure of the left in the repair process under way, the president's sister decided pragmatically to

go to the steadfast Portuguese man to find out if he remembered how the utilities used to work when the hotel was still a barracks. “Okay, mate! You either remember, or it’s *cá tem* booze.” Faced with the terrible threat, he immediately asked for a double to help him remember, but a reiterated “*cá tem*” really meant they weren’t going to give him another drop, and so he began perhaps to remember. Off he went, supported by one person in front, one behind and two on either side, to the engine room, took a look at a cubby hole no one had noticed, did some hammering, tightened some screws, untightened others, and *voilà*, everything began to work again which was a miracle. A general wave of enthusiasm, he received a guard of honor as he came out, and the Portuguese national anthem was sung. He stood up straight, tried to salute, but the effort had been too much, and suddenly he keeled over and vomited.

The following day, the rain had let up a little and I went for a walk on the Pijiguiti wharf, took a stroll around the city, couldn’t work out which was Raquel’s house, and left Bissau my head full of ghosts.

On the flight to Cape Verde, a Sri Lankan UN employee happened to sit next to me, an expert in water and its desalination. Cape Verde was suffering a new drought crisis, this time, it hadn’t rained for more than seven years. The Sri Lankan had achieved good results in the Canaries and was going to Cape Verde to do a preliminary inspection. Now, as well as being a paradox, as we decided a little earlier, the Island of Sal is a lunar platform fit only for boarding and disembarking from planes. And since my TAP flight had arrived even later than usual, there was no longer a plane there to board for Santiago, nor a room in the inn which was filled with South African Airways, nor alternative accommodation, nor any hope of another solution. Except that, for Cape Verdeans, there is always hope, even when it’s transformed by its improbability into a kind of ironic nostalgia for the future. After seven years, the word for rain — “*tchuba*” — had become synonymous with “hope”: “I *tchuba* to see you tomorrow.” “God *tchubing*” was the same as “God willing.” *Tchubing* in the potential prestige of the Sri Lankan, who linguistically was at a loss, I went to speak to the airport director and explained the situation to him. Very pleasantly, he said with irony: “Oh, if you’re bringing rain, a propeller jet can be arranged straight away.” And would you believe it, that’s exactly what he arranged a couple of hours later?

We went from island to island, Boa Vista, Maio, and finally Santiago, because the Sri Lankan, in order to get on with his job, wanted me to ask

the oldest elder who turned up to check out the unexpected apparition of the propeller jet if he could remember his grandfather speaking of some water well that his grandfather's grandfather had spoken of. Maybe that way an underground spring could be located. In the city of Praia, the Sri Lankan went to the inn and I, utterly envious, to a boarding house that I only managed thanks to the intercession of the high school principal, a very ceremonious Goan with ethnic fears, who kindly took me from door to door because the city was already full of international good will, occupying anything that resembled a room. Finally having got one myself, a huge turtle with its head phallically out chiming impotences, past straight by my window, which overlooked the street, carried by two poles on the shoulders of four men, en route to being sacrificed.

I went out and returned late but, despite having drunk good sociable drinks with some writers who took advantage of the opportunity to scold me as if colonialism was all mine and decolonization all theirs, I couldn't close my eyes because my room was full of what I first thought were grasshoppers and only later realized were huge cockroaches with lobster faces. Hundreds of them. No, alright, dozens. The problem, when I went to bed, was deciding whether I should cover up, which might seem like an invitation to intimacies under the sheets, or if I should remain uncovered, my body exposed, to keep the traffic moving. I opted for a chair and a book. At sunrise, I put the book down, slipped on what was left of some cockroaches that every now and then I would try and hunt down, and went to the window to see what the loud roars were all about that came from the street. And, be it through Sri Lankan magic or because hope is always worth the bother, it was raining torrentially. Note: when it doesn't rain for more than seven years, this means all the population less than ten years old, in Cape Verde clearly the majority, has never been touched by rain, or doesn't remember it; dogs, even the oldest and most experienced, start barking from fear because water is falling on top of them without anyone hurling it or trying to kick them; and, in this case, it also meant the metaphor had become the reality, like in messianic religions. My bones were still damp from Guinea, yet I went out into the street like everyone else, shouting "tchuba!" "tchuba!", wading with everyone in the same hope. That night, torrents began, there were no dykes to stop the water, the parched earth was washed out to sea, it would push away the fish, and there would be more hunger. That's what one of the more militant writers explained to me,

as we said farewell. On Sal, it hadn't rained, because there it never rains even when it rains. But they already knew of the rain on the other islands, the universe had been reconstructed in hope, and when I went to greet him, the airport director smiled.

I arrived in Maputo (or was it still Lourenço Marques?) eager to tell this story, but my Mozambican brother had just left, the night before, taking his daughters. There was this fool who happened to share a desk with me in my first year of high school due to the alphabetical proximity of our surnames, and who was now the minister for health. He'd ordered all surgeries to be closed, with armed guards at their doors. He'd obtained a solid ideological education abroad and thought that was the way to nationalize medicine. Oh well, the squandering of a poor country. There had already been other such examples and there would be even more. Even José Craveirinha, despite all his age-old wisdom, seemed concerned. Eugénio Lisboa was still there and invited me to the university to give a seminar on I can't remember what but which always ended up with us saying, no sir, Camões was not a fascist. Adrião Rodrigues, who would later be my chief of staff at the ministry of culture, was still there too. Above all, my Uncle António was there, Dr Pacheco, who would go on being there as long as he could be useful and as long as they wanted him, no matter how. They wanted him until he was in his eighties. He also had a guard at his door, but at home, in any case, he hardly used his surgery any more, and he had a guard for different reasons from other doctors. A soul he'd seen born, had fed, clothed, educated, and brought into his own home when her parents died, to show her militancy had denounced him to FRELIMO for who knows what improbable subversive intentions. President Samora Machel had sent the guard to protect him from the militants and discretely to accompany him, without his knowing, on his daily rounds of patients in poor areas of the city. Let there be *tchuba*!

There are things that benefit from being said more than once. However, they must be said differently. In fact, everything is said more than once, but either with a lot of effort or without noticing it, you say them differently.

I returned to London, returned to Sintra, life got in the way, I returned to London. The weather changed. The mountain ranges disappeared and the sea was softened by mists from the north. The tone also has to change. My sabbatical holiday came to an end, I handed my friend Bartolomeu's house keys over to a neighbor, left a lot of flowers in every vase, knowing nonetheless they would be dry by the time he returned to Sintra again. But at least Yorick is still smiling his Cheshire Cat smile, because even unreason has a perverse way of instating itself as reason, and the inconsequential of regularizing itself as purpose. I think the Stoics would call the cat's smile without the cat, an incorporeal. It must have been in search of incorporeals that Xavier de Maistre completed his trip round his room on optalidon and Garrett took a taxi to the end of his backyard. As a counterbalance, Machado de Assis, who plays for the same team, wrote a story about a man who tried to compose symphonies but could only muster polkas. I've run out of paper although I haven't run out of corridor or photographs. The gallery of shadows in my parents' house will remain forever incomplete. It's better that way, as I've already said about the cinema-house of my Republican grandfather. But at least it was enough for half a century of minimalist historical novels. In London, I started to lecture again and, since these days I can choose, I spoke to my students about my best friends. Medeiros and I liked to play a rather silly game, which for its silliness was undoubtedly pedagogical, in which we divided authors into three fundamental groups: friends, acquaintances and others, something which didn't always have to do with genius or talent although that would help, because it always helps. Friends were those one could take anywhere, like Camões

or Cesário Verde or Teixeira-Gomes, or Jorge de Sena when he bit the flavor of destiny in the mouth of life; acquaintances were, for example, Sá de Miranda, close reading, big respectful cap-donning, formal visits at tea-time around five and nothing abusive; the others were the others, a mixture of the wait-and-see and the we've-seen-and-nice-knowing-you. I thought about this when Menez, interested in the company of friends, suggested I write a small text for the catalogue of her timeless retrospective at the Gulbenkian, in which Fernando Gil would also publish a longer, analytical piece. So, instead of talking about painting, which like love is better experienced than imagined, I spoke of friendship and shared childhoods even when they weren't. I spoke of the incorporeal, of feelings that are enough in themselves. I also mentioned some common friends: Bernadim Ribeiro, Cesário Verde, Camilo Pessanha and even António Nobre, who's more her friend than mine.

Thus, I was once more in one of those stoic complicities when Fernando Gil came along to lead me astray with a project to rethink together perceptions of the real and the imaginary in sixteenth-century Portuguese literature, and relations between truth given as fiction and fiction given as truth. I was dutifully panicked, until I realized his proposal was probably to relate apples with oranges, which left me a lot more reassured because, at the end of the day, here I'd been training for this very task without knowing it. And since, around this time, an invitation arrived to go to a conference in Rio de Janeiro and speak about the so-called Discoveries, and I love going there and the invitation was from Cleonice and therefore impossible to refuse, I took advantage of the opportunity to complete my training with my presentation as a lynchpin, tying up what I've already said in these almost completed parts of Africa of mine with what I may go on to say differently in a sixteenth-century history at a later date, in order to recognize the unknown.

Presentation

The title of my presentation — “Recognizing the Unknown” — assumes a paradox: how can you recognize what is unknown? But this, I contend, was a paradox frequently revealed in the first encounters between peoples of different civilizations, the reason for the deceptive understandings and mistaken misunderstandings that gave rise to the construction of empires. So, in order to speak of the Discoveries — the topic of this keynote address — I'm going to try and show with three or four examples how the pioneers

of the European imperial adventure recognized what they didn't know, projecting onto the things and peoples they came across their own desires, fears, ideals, ghosts, and superstitions — in other words, their imaginary. The Latin word “invenire,” which means to “find” or “discover,” is also the root of the word “to invent.”

In *Alice in Wonderland* — no less a chronicle of discoveries than Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrination* — there is a magnificent syllogism that irrefutably demonstrates cats are mad because, as everyone knows, dogs aren't mad and cats aren't dogs. The syllogism also allows, no less irrefutably, for a second conclusion: if dogs were cats, they would be mad. And there's even a third possibility, the one I prefer: cats are the imaginary of dogs.

The European pioneers took their language with them, and within it, their knowledge, their metaphors and their beliefs. When what they came across exceeded the limits of their knowledge, they resorted to their metaphors. When these threatened to subvert the order of established reason, there was always faith to block the abysses of the unintelligible. It's Camões who says, in one of the most ambiguous professions of faith:

Some things happen that aren't believed,
and others, believed, have never happened,
but the best thing is to believe in Christ.

But even for Camões, and even for Mendes Pinto, too, who, along with Camões, was the most universalist of the Portuguese in the first imperial diaspora, perception of the unknown always ends up returning to being a reflection of the known. Camões brought his dark-skinned “Barbara” into the dignified space of intelligible humanity, giving her as a legitimate name that non-word, that onomatopoeia that sought to signify the incomprehensibility of difference and that in differentiated language meant nothing. But, in bringing difference to the literary norm, which was neoplatonism, it is still with Petrarch's eyes carried within him that Camões manages to describe that beautiful “slave to whom he's enslaved”: he turned Petrarch the wrong way round in order to be able to reinstitute him as capable of dealing with a “a blackness of Love” that “indeed seems strange but not at all barbarous.” Mendes Pinto, in his prodigious, imagined reconstruction of the China he had observed, superimposed onto the concrete maps of difference, the projection of a utopia that is the critiquing image of its

resemblance. Both writers reached their breaking point, which was already surpassing by far what was then possible.

The frontiers between the observed and the imagined are always very tenuous. They would have been even more so for those who, for the first time, came face to face with things that existed that one could not believe, and with other things that did not exist in which one did believe. The iconography of the time is revealing: among representations of new maritime species that were discovered, there is a “bishop of the sea” — a huge vertical fish with a head in the shape of a miter — which never existed. On a par with Dürer’s implausible yet real rhinoceros, there is a more plausible but unreal unicorn being hoisted up into Vasco da Gama’s ship in a tapestry celebrating the discovery of India. And if there were mermaids — how couldn’t there be? — why not Caliban, also with something fishy in his unrecognized humanity, “legged like a man, and his fins like arms”? And men who instead of having their heads on their shoulders, carried them under their arms? And there are more than a few maps that plot imaginary islands with the tag “imaginary” below their names. Whatever was imaginable was better plotted. Thus, what there was as well as what there wasn’t were placed on the same imaginary draft in which expectation preceded knowledge, interpretation was superimposed on observation and analogy neutralized difference. Isn’t it the case we still call “Indians” the original inhabitants of the Americas where we are today, even if they aren’t? Despite expectations being proved wrong, the name continued to plot those expectations, as in the maps of imaginary islands.

But on the heels of those false ethnic and geographic expectations of a Western Orient, Indians were found in a claimed India, and immediately replaced by other, fabulous and timeless expectations. In his “Letter to King Manuel about the Discovery of the Lands of Vera Cruz,” Pero Vaz de Caminha reacts as if he found himself face to face with the human equivalents of the unicorn. Just like Américo Vespúcio in his letter to Lorenzo Pier Francesco de Medici, his mind resorts to European mythic tradition about the Golden Age or the Garden of Eden in order to be able to deal with the vision that confronted his amazed eyes. Vespúcio’s literary metaphors are possibly more explicit, but Caminha’s functional prose eloquently suggests a more profound moral entanglement: how could he reconcile his vision of the world based on the idea of sin with what he thought to be evidence there was in our world an innocence prior to sin. The mythical time in which the earth gave birth without pain had there become an actual

space: “They do not till the soil or breed stock, nor is there ox or cow, or goat, or sheep, or hen, or any other domestic animal which is accustomed to live with men; nor do they eat anything except manioc, of which there is much, and of the seeds and the fruits which the earth and trees produce. Nevertheless, with this they are stronger and better fed than we are with all the wheat and vegetables which we eat.” The bodies he carefully describes are all beautiful and healthy as if illness and ugliness didn’t belong there any more than they belonged in the Garden of Eden. What he vehemently and repeatedly accentuates is the innocence of those people, such “that that of Adam could not have been greater.” The men, according to Caminha, “go naked, without any covering; neither do they pay more attention to concealing or exposing their shame than they do to showing their faces, and in this respect they are very innocent.” And further on, in an appeal to the king at least to try to visualize in his imagination what Caminha had seen there and couldn’t imagine: “There you might have seen gallants painted black and red, and with quarterings both on their bodies and on their legs, which certainly was pleasing in appearance. There were also among them four or five young women just as naked, who were not displeasing to the eye, among whom was one with her thigh from the knee to the hip and buttock all painted with that black paint and all the rest in her own color; another had both knees and calves and ankles so painted, and her privy parts so nude and exposed with such innocence that there was not any shame.” That the dyes with which they painted themselves might have a function equivalent to clothing didn’t, of course, occur to him. He saw, he could only see nakedness and, in order to cope with what he saw, he had to project an idea of innocence taken from his own imaginary. By trying to think the unthinkable, he recognized the unknown.

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Pero Vaz de Caminha’s text can be related in an illuminating way with another text, describing occurrences that happened on another continent — in parts of Africa — fifty-two years later. I’m referring to the narrative of the “The Very Remarkable Loss of the Great Galleon S. João,” the so-called shipwreck of Sepúlveda from *The Tragic History of the Sea*. I don’t know if it’s more unfortunate. It’s certainly not a smaller cultural mistake, as well as being a pernicious example of feminine modesty for obtuse damsels.

As you may all the remember, the outline of the story is as follows: the galleon on which Manuel de Sousa Sepúlveda was travelling back to Lisbon with his wife, Dona Leonor, was wrecked not far from the Cape. The couple

and their children, along with the other survivors and a retinue of slaves, wander for six months through the jungle, in search of other Portuguese to help them in the Mozambican territories recently discovered by Lourenço Marques. In fact, they keep on being helped out, but by successive African populations, whom nevertheless they never trust. Foolishly, — the narrator implies it was by then a symptom of the insanity that had ended up overcoming him — Dom Manuel threatens with rifles the last group of Africans who were trying to help them. And, without him understanding it, he moved to a war footing against them. The Portuguese were ably neutralized and disarmed — betrayed as the narrator puts it — by Africans who pretended to be still trying to help them. Finally, they were robbed of all their possessions, even of the clothes on their backs. Thus naked, the Portuguese — and I quote the most important sentence in the text — since “now they did not look like men” dispersed in a disorderly fashion and were lost in the wild. As for Dona Leonor, “once naked, [she] threw herself on the ground immediately and covered herself with her very long hair. She made a hole in the sand and buried herself in it up to her waist; she never again would rise from the sand.” And, in fact, she let herself die, preferring death to nakedness. The text doesn’t say how the Africans were dressed. Probably they weren’t. A revealing omission.

Returning now in this comparison, to Caminha’s *Letter* about finding Brazil, we can perhaps understand better the potentially subversive nature of the cultural dilemma faced by Pero Vaz de Caminha. Transforming this dilemma into a syllogism equivalent to Lewis Carroll’s about the normality of dogs and the madness of cats, the clashing terms would be the following: nakedness is innocent; but nakedness is not human. The conclusion? Innocence isn’t human? Pero Vaz de Caminha’s conclusion was the following: to dress innocence, to distribute shirts to the men and cloths to the women; to save innocence, and teach these men and women the basics of Christian faith. And he declares: “these people in order to be wholly Christian lack nothing except to understand us.” So, straight away, two exiles — two criminals — were given the job of starting this pious task, “the increase of our Holy Faith.”

Yet the raw material for the increase of our Holy Faith was not always so propitious. There were, for example, the Jagas. Just like Caminha’s Amerindians, who didn’t till the soil or breed any domestic animal that might be accustomed to live with men, the Jagas didn’t practice agriculture

or breed livestock. But no one ever recognized where they lived to be the Garden of Eden. Instead, it would be the Devil's Jungle, since they seemed to live exclusively on the pillage and flesh of their enemy prisoners. Such behavior prejudiced the policy of christianizing the Congo kingdom and an expedition sent by King Sebastian in 1570 expelled many of them to Angola, where they laid down their roots in what would become the district of the Congo. They changed their name according to which side of the border they were on. They are currently the Bacongo and Ibangelas, and their reputation for ferocity remains to this day, as does their reputation for continued tendencies toward cannibalist outbreaks, on both sides of the border. They are, however, rigorously disciplined, making good soldiers and good policemen. It is said there was one, not so long ago, on guard duty in the Congo District, who even allowed his head to be chopped off so the administrator could send it to the Lisbon Geographical Society, in response to an inquiry about cannibals' phrenological bumps. In the sixteenth century, after being turned over by anxious missionaries to the military wing, they became a handy incentive in the slave trade, since more than a few of the local populations preferred to volunteer for perpetual servitude instead of having as their final resting place Jaga stomachs.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the border, missionaries, who were no longer Portuguese, insisted on the salvation of the Jaga, seeking to observe their customs in order to better correct them. However, one of them, a Brit, concluded the Jagas with whom he'd lived for almost two years didn't, after all, exist. He was followed in the seventeenth century by a Dutchman and an Italian who, with the exception of some minor details, corroborated his conclusion: not only didn't they exist but they only existed by not existing. This was because they had, by custom, systematically killed all their children and, having thus assured their own biological annihilation, they then assured their civic survival by choosing the strongest amongst the youth of their enemy prisoners, adopting them in place of the children they had conveniently buried alive, or strangled, or thrown into rivers, or abandoned to wild beasts in the middle of the jungle. As for their remaining prisoners, they ate them. This eugenic procedure without precedent in any other species, either animal or vegetable, including the praying mantis, turned the Jaga into a kind of Cheshire Cat smile, just a smile without a cat, but with ferociously sharp, ravenously pointed cannibal teeth. Notwithstanding, it was a case of observed facts and, as such, they entered History textbooks

without much fuss, up until today. It's just that once more — it seems — who was right was Camões, and these observed facts about the Jagas belong to the category of “others, believed, that have never happened.” In fact, recent anthropological studies — among which a study by my old friend Professor Alfredo Margarido I believe has yet to be published — allow us to conclude the systematic infanticide attributed to the Jagas was in fact an elaborate symbolic staging, in the same way their cannibalism, although probably real, would have an equivalent ritualized magic function. Their symbolically dead children, as if they were buried, or strangled, or thrown into rivers, or abandoned to wild beasts, remained hidden and invisible, as if they actually were dead, for a period of metamorphosis that lasted nearly three years. They were then ready to return with another name, another identity and, having in the meantime lost their child-like looks, another body. They returned as strangers, representing the ability of the enemy to be absorbed, through an initiation process, into the community and magically neutralized in the ritual of return. I want to believe this version of things, this novel way of recognizing the unknown, is the truer. At least, it's the one that requires the least to be so.

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My last example doesn't have anything to do with innocence or modesty, nor with the metamorphosis of souls and bodies, but it does continue to deal with wrong readings of right signs, in relation to more mundane things like the art of war. And it takes us away from Brazil and Africa — where we have seen a group of Portuguese can be at war without knowing it — to India. When the Portuguese got there, they presented themselves as great and powerful lords sent by a great and powerful king. From an Indian perspective, there was nothing more improbable. They came from the sea and lived on boats, and in India, only those who were so poor they didn't have a plot of land on which to park their feet, went to sea and lived in boats. But, as is known, the Portuguese were persistent, and there were wars. War, in those quarters, was an art form even more ritualized than had existed in feudal Europe. It was an enormous game of chess in which huge armies were moved around, avoiding from the beginning any confrontation, taking up strategic positions, from hill to hill, checking each other out on both sides. The better the general, the slower and more elaborate his strategy. Until, weeks or even months later, one of the generals would call the other and advise him to admit, given the excellent positions his army had assumed, the battle was won. Just one last small detail remained: to attack. The other general would or would not argue in favor of the positions

taken by his army, returning the advice. But only when the battle lines had been clearly delineated would both sides consider themselves ready for war. And then they would attack, saving their military honor independently of how fate determined the outcome. At sunset, they suspended the attacks, collected the dead, treated the wounded and all went to bed. At daybreak, they would begin again. Now, as for the Portuguese, with their numerically tiny contingent, we know from the chronicles that surprise was their main weapon. They often interpreted the solid, slow organization of enemy forces as a symptom of indecision and cowardice. They attacked when the other side wasn't ready, and even at night, while they slept. They thus transformed inevitable defeats into implausible victories, making their enemies imagine there were military reserves, which didn't actually exist, behind the few dozen men who ran at them brandishing arms. And the fact their strategy was not the most well-thought-out can be gleaned from this quote composed from several possibilities: "And with many a shout from our men, and many a Hail Mary and cries to Saint James, we went toward them, who were so in awe that their flesh trembled with fear, and with alacrity they hurled themselves from those hills and fell to the sea, and our men finished up killing them all there with our spears, with not one remaining alive." From misunderstandings, empires are made.

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When the misunderstandings began to be cleared up, when the unknown finally stops being recognized for what it isn't, and the norm of difference integrates itself into a norm which differentiates, then it's because the time of the end of empires has arrived, when post-imperialism can turn into the positive consequence of having had empires. And the truth is this end was already contained in the beginning. João de Barros, the chronicler of the foundation of the Portuguese empire, already foresaw it when, in 1539, he wrote as the justification for his *Gramática* that the arms and monuments Portugal spread through every continent were material things, that time could destroy, but the Portuguese language would not be so easily destroyed by time. It's true, for this to happen, other languages, other civilizations were lost along the way. But at least today, the Mozambican poet, José Craveirinha has been able to publicly claim Camões as part of his nation's literature. In Brazil, it really is the Portuguese language that is spoken, as much as it pains whoever thinks it should pain. And the Portuguese themselves have begun to discover their language is not just what they think they recognize.

**IN WHICH THE AUTHOR TAKES LEAVE OF HIMSELF
AND REAFFIRMS THE NON-PURPOSE OF HIS BOOK**

It seems that every beginning is involuntary. That may be the case, but it is even more so with the ending, even when it is voluntarily anticipated, because whatever is anticipated would, in any case, happen involuntarily. I think I already said something of the sort when I recalled my all-night Lisbon conversations with João Rodrigues and Luís Garcia de Medeiros about the legal figure of Absence. For that reason, I concluded, with due apologies to my old friend Bernadim Ribeiro, that it's better never to waste time on things for which we were given it, all of us. As for the rest, as for everything that is more than life or death, the most that can be done is to go by taxi. But it's not always possible to get one or to arrive in time, even by taxi.

There was once a comedian who ended his routine of impersonations and anecdotes, stopping suddenly in the middle of a sentence, looking around like someone who was listening, and saying with great fright to the public: "Here come the cops!" Then, he would exit front stage left. It was a type of free will, his way of subverting authority, of turning an inevitable end into the appearance of a choice that pretended not to be. Because sooner or later, the cops always end up coming.

In the novel I tried to write while at the Brazilian Consulate, — which, at the end of the day, would also be around the time my current character of Medeiros was writing his *Dramma Giocoso* — my project was to narrate not what had happened to the characters, because in any case, they already knew that, but what hadn't happened to them, the multiple alternatives they would have taken if, instead of each choice and each chance, they had made a different choice, or some other chance had befallen them. But then I realized every novel is more or less like that, except that in mine, the author, instead of his usual function of the turtle-necked prompter, like in the theaters, would have the less usual function of not saying as truth

the faked plots. What took me longer to understand was the thing about novels, poems and paintings is they are only really fun when you cannot distinguish between what is fake and what just looks or doesn't look like faking. And vice-versa, with every possible permutation of imagination and memory. I think I already said that too: parallel mirrors in a mosaic encrusted with mirrors.

For example, at this stage of this book nothing any longer guarantees — neither for you dear readers nor me the actual author even when not — that the rarefied Raquel incorporeally suspended above the flaccid heat of Bissau might not be a reimagined young lady I once knew there, strangely ethereal, yes, and in my recollection actually very beautiful, but neither a Jewess nor refugee from Germany (perhaps a French mother), meticulously fucking every bureaucracy, and me, an adolescent, hanging around full of envy. Nor that my copper-colored girlfriend, who now came into existence, with no copper color in her at all, because the girlfriend who actually existed instead of her was, let's call her, M.E. — and as I said in regard to her copy in the novel, I probably wouldn't know what to do with her even when years later we met again in Lisbon — to whom I nod nostalgically, despite everything, to her, whose color would be more a dull white, and because she was tall, she seemed slim, flat chested, solid legs, the downy moustache of a Hussar, hair in a pony tail, and no vet's daughter like the thus described torturing wife of the emblematic PIDE inspector from between São Tomé and Angola. And my mother? Beatriz? Oh, symbols!, as the inbred plural poet used to like to say, who also knew very well that in everyone's childhood, there was a garden, either private or public or a neighbor's. The thing is it isn't enough to render the truth implausible, like Medeiros did, or to transform one implausibility into another, like I might have tried to do in the novel I didn't write. What's essential is to mix everything up or, at least, like me here, to do your best. Because in Portuguese, only Camões and Machado de Assis pull it off. Of course, Garrett, as always, showed how it could have been done, but suffered from multiple employment as well as having that extremely complicated personal life leaving him with next to no time. Plural Pessoa would have got there more comfortably if it were not for his obsession with transforming everything into a British-school exercise as they'd taught him in South Africa, full of outlines and dividing everything by three. Besides, he was so consumed by that hunger to usurp of which Mr Rola Pereira spoke that he didn't even want to leave a space

open for Camões to exist too. And I think it was for that very reason he didn't go any further, he remained at his heels, grasping at his legs. But it was that bad temper of his, ill-resolved stories of mummies and daddies, Pessoa was like that with everyone even when he thought he was speaking well of them, as in the case of Guerra Junqueiro, he recycled himself in all of them, and even when it was to do with the good lads who could never dim his brilliance, as in the great quantity of poetry he continues to write through some who were born after he'd already died. And that's not to mention the dozens of painters he put at his service, doing portraits of his face, his profile, with his pen, in his hat, with his glasses, his other, on his tricycle. Even me, who hasn't written as much as a Polka lately, wouldn't you believe how he wanted to ensnare my involuntary beginning dying at exactly the same time, on the same day, in the same year as I was born? I just got away because on the occasion of my birth he was in Lisbon and I was the one in South Africa, and although the clocks showed the same time, there was actually a difference of two hours. But the shock was immense.

My mother, who always liked poetry and thinks Pessoa has the sad air of an eldest son used to being the only one in the child portraits, perhaps isn't as bothered as she makes out, at least she would have nothing against us sharing. Look, be patient, you can't have everything, although it's understandable the prospect is appealing. My mother no longer tells me stories of what it was like before, now it's me who every now and then reminds her of those she used to tell us. It's been like that since my father died.

That day, I wasn't even in London, I'd gone to spend the weekend with S. in the country, nobody knew where we were, my brother had tried to ring me several times and, in despair, asked Rui Knopfli to carry on trying, every half hour. Rui had known my father well, he knew it was all going to be difficult. The phone rang as soon as we got home, Sunday night, Rui thought the lesser of two evils was having S. answer. What he hadn't foreseen was that her initial reaction would be much worse than mine. Mine was to call a taxi and, without tickets, baggage or having checked the timetables, race to the airport. Of course, there was no plane, we could only go on the following day. But at least, I tried to go straight away by taxi, as was fitting for a friend who had even managed to be a father.

And yes, I know no one was ever brought back to existence by writing or being written, and the only thing left over are maps in which every island is imaginary.

The funeral didn't give rise to any kind of demonstration, as happened at Commander Diogo Salema's. But some friends, some relatives, some shadows from former times were there: an uncle, who was one of the sons left over from my Republican grandfather, appeared without anyone knowing anything about him for years, he sobbed convulsively, disappeared again and we saw no more of him; a cousin, Uncle Pedro's son; two other cousins, whom I didn't know, pretty, the younger generation; the doctor with migraines, very old, trembling and propped up by a granddaughter; an old civil servant from São Tomé who'd found out by chance and, right now, had a towel with him to go on for a dip at the beach; my younger niece as ever taking everything in; my elder niece as ever pretending she noticed nothing; my sister-in-law throbbing a new pregnancy. No more than thirty people. And there was also a very kind lady from the neighborhood, a young mother who in the middle of the general confusion took care of everything, washed the body, dressed it, placed a bandage on his temple, on the left side of his forehead, which my father had cut when he fell. There are times when mothers should have always been younger than their children.

200 The priest on duty — it seems it was easier to get a place in the cemetery with a priest — systematically got my father's name wrong, he would look at a small piece of paper with which he also shooed away the flies and correct, getting it wrong again. And in the background, behind the grave-stones, there was a girl whom no one knew, she couldn't have been more than thirteen, who kept on putting a lollipop in and out of her mouth to say "amen" in time with the priest. She liked burials.

A few days earlier, I'd finished writing the text of my Camões Chair inaugural lecture for the opening ceremony for the academic year. In it, I tried to show that, on a par with the *Aeneid*, the most important source for *The Lusiads* is Virgil's Eclogue IV, the one favored by Governor Ferreira Pinto from Zambezia, the prophetic eclogue. And also that Camões had transformed his epic celebration of the empire into a vision of world harmony at the end of empires. I'd looked forward with relish to the doubtless disagreeing reaction of my father to the complicity of a subtext no one else could understand in this public and supposedly magisterial retake of our unresolved private debates of old. I had mailed him a copy, it was on top of his desk in an unopened envelope.

Yet of all this, I no longer fully know anything today except for a poem that remained from that time, and that goes like this:

I remained with life
left over from you

the bandage stuck
on the temple congealed
the flesh now cold
its paleness revealed
in an incongruity
of suit and shoes
shirt and tie
persistent beard
the next day's
still grew
on the face glazed
the priest half-dazed
who erred with the name
the heat the flies
the nubile child
in the grave yard
no one knew
and who said amen
licking and sucking
a yellow sweet
skewed on a stick
some uncles and cousins
memories diffuse
of a life dispersed
on a modified map
a shovel of limestone
the hinges the ropes

and the earth dispatched
over you and me.

After, for years, as nothing is concealed over time, his story next to mine was better known. And it went like this:

.....



Helder Macedo was born in 1935. The son of a Portuguese colonial administrator, he spent his childhood in Mozambique. He published his first volume of poetry, *Vesperal*, in 1957. An opponent of the Portuguese dictatorship, Macedo went into exile in London in the late 1950s. There, he worked for the BBC and earned a doctorate at King's College, where he began a career in academia. In 1982, he was appointed the Camoens Professor of Portuguese, a position he occupied until his retirement in 2004. One of the most distinguished scholars of his generation, his first novel, *Parts of Africa*, was published in 1991.

Steeped in postcolonial concerns, *Parts of Africa's* central tension emerges from the narrator's maturing realization of and growing opposition to what colonialism really meant not just for Africa, but for Portugal itself. Through multiple dialogues with cultural giants, from Mozart and Machado de Assis to Shakespeare and Stendhal, *Parts of Africa* teases out the ambivalences and ambiguities of Portugal's interaction with its colonies, and by extension, the complexities of all colonial legacies.

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