

Extract from
PORTUGUESE STUDIES
VOLUME 1 1985-86

Printed for the
MODERN HUMANITIES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
by W. S. MANEY & SON LTD

Time and Voice in the Work of José Cardoso Pires

ÓSCAR LOPES

(translated by Suzette Macedo)

It is a difficult but also gratifying and inexhaustible pleasure to try to understand the reasons why we are so attracted to a work like *Balada da Praia dos Cães*, particularly if we use the study of its internal dynamics as the basis for a review of the writer's career and a consideration of the issues it raises: the kind of literary and historical tradition from which it emerges and how it affects that tradition. For José Cardoso Pires clearly offers us a recognizable representation of a contemporary Portuguese social experience which is reflected not only in his short stories, novels, fables, and plays but also in his two volumes of essays, *Cartilha do Marialva ou das Negações Libertinas* (1960) and *E Agora, José?* (1977).

Cartilha do Marialva traces the characteristics and history of an Iberian-Mediterranean male type with profound social and literary manifestations in Portugal. The term 'marialva', coined by José Bacelar in 1939 and given wider currency by Cardoso Pires, derives from the historical figure of the patriarchal and rural aristocrat, obsessed with his own authority and animal virility, averse to any cultural refinements, free with other men's womenfolk but jealous of the honour of his own. The ideological values of the *marialva* found classical expression in Dom Francisco Manuel de Mello's *Carta de Guia de Casados* (1651), a book which was still studied for its didactic value as recently as fifty years ago.

Cardoso Pires's second volume of essays, *E Agora, Jose?* (a title taken from the first line of a poem by the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade) includes a remarkable analysis of his novel *O Delfim* (1968) — originally intended for students of Portuguese at King's College, London — as well as an impressive study of Portuguese political censorship before the democratic revolution of 25 April 1974, and a moving account of the counter-revolutionary aftermath.

Some of Cardoso Pires's most perceptive comments on his own novels (as well as on those of Elio Vittorini) are on the subject of time, understood in the widest sense of the multiple meanings of the Portuguese word *tempo*, which, in its technical musical sense (of particular importance in this context) corresponds to the identical Italian word (tempo as musical pace or movement) but above all designates any form of metric, and hence measurable, time. But the Portuguese word also designates the verbal tenses used in the linear flow of a narrative structured in a verbal morpho-syntactical form, and can, in addition, designate the Bergsonian 'temps vécu' or 'durée' (the

experience of time as opposed to the concept of time) with psychological and social overtones inherent in the specific irreversibility of the narration or narrative form. This cluster of meanings provides both the basic reference for this article and its keystone.

Cardoso Pires's comments on time are related to the impulses that shaped the development of his writing career, a career in which we can roughly distinguish three periods, or rather three dominant forms of organization. The first form is exemplified in the short stories, especially the best of these; the second in his first two novels, *O Anjo Ancorado* (1958) and *O Hóspede de Job* (1963), and his play *O Render dos Heróis* (1960); and the third in the novels *O Delfim* (1968) and *Balada da Praia dos Cães* (1982). The short stories have been published in four volumes: *Os Caminheiros e Outros Contos* (1949), *Histórias de Amor* (1952), *Jogos de Azar* (1963) (comprising revised versions of stories selected from these first two volumes) and *O-Burro-em-Pé* (1979) (comprising four remarkable stories and the satirical political fable 'Dinossauro Excelentíssimo' originally published separately in 1972). Cardoso Pires's most outstanding quality in these stories is the ability to evoke an atmosphere or dense sequence (in the musical sense) which captures the reader's imagination independently of the story, creating the illusion of a world or microcosm which may be limited in size but which, like all the best literary or pictorial representations of the 'typical', is descriptively inexhaustible. Some characteristic examples can be found in the stories published in *Jogos de Azar*: in 'Carta a Garcia' three soldiers are being taken under escort to a prison fort; the three are sitting with the seven fellow soldiers assigned to escort duty in a virtually empty railway carriage in a train rolling along the Alentejo plain in the heat of summer. One of the three prisoners provides the moral to the story when he says to the guards: 'until you hand us over at the fort, you're as much prisoners as we are.' They are trapped by rules and regulations, by the fear of patrols, even by the unpredictable reactions of the prison keepers. But what we most remember of this story is the lively humour of the dialogue, the image of a beetle dazzled by the overhead lamp, the way a melon is fondled and passed from hand to hand before being shared among the ten soldiers, the caressing gesture with which they feel the keenness of the blade of the Seville knife used to cut the melon, the changing rhythms of the wheels as the train approaches diverging or converging lines at junctions. In 'Caminheiros', the story in which a blind beggar-guitarist is sold by his companion, the most unforgettable details are the blind man's 'non-visual' representations to himself of the vicissitudes of the long, hot journey, the changes in mood betrayed at the slightest touch of his companion's hand, the awful haggling over the terms of the sale before the deal is clinched, a deal the details of which the blind man guesses rather than knows. I have chosen these two stories because of their affinities with *O Hóspede de Job* although, as we shall see, the novel takes a different direction.

In these stories (as in others included in *Jogos de Azar*) an important contribution is made by the use of 'audible' voices in dialogue; but in the four stories of *O-Burro-em-Pé* the narrative itself captures, distils, and organizes remarkable instances of colloquial speech in its most spontaneous registers, often with a timbre characteristic of common speech and, in some cases, in the language of adolescents or children. In fact, Cardoso Pires is a gifted conversationalist, with a style even plainer and more outspoken than his conversational written style, and even more sparing in the use of purely literary effects. But whether talking or writing, we feel that he is all ears (or involuntary auditory memory), attentive to different voices, to communicative resources which neither rhetoric nor linguistics — whether the old or the new — have managed to catalogue or classify. There are humorous modulations which, even in solos, relate to implicit unspoken conversations, elliptical turns creating new mental gestures that arise from the sudden (and more or less metaphorical) change in reference and the transposition to a new context of vivid phrases and expressions lifted from the contexts with which they are normally associated, and coming across, even on the page, as richly melodic. This conversational richness is evident, for example, in the way Cardoso Pires uses two of the most interesting peculiarities of contemporary European Portuguese. The first of these peculiarities is the extreme variety of cleft sentences, which multiply the effects of topicalization, focalization, and other forms of communicative emphasis (in English some of these effects are achieved simply by the use of intonation). The second is the very special use of the particles 'cá' and 'lá' initially used simply as adverbs of place (indicating proximity or distance from the speaker) but which have come to denote some kind of psychological territorial contrast between the speaker and others: 'eu cá julgo', 'ele lá se arranja'. It may be noted that no Portuguese writer since Eça de Queirós, especially in *O Primo Basílio* (1878), has used the resources of the cleft sentence as successfully as Cardoso Pires. Such devices enliven the highly differentiated and complex use of narrative voices in his last two novels, in which he also achieves original and striking effects from the use of indirect free speech (the German term *erlebte Rede* or 'lived speech' is more apt), a stylistic device which was also one of the innovations of Eça de Queirós, who drew on the speech patterns of the contemporary Lisbon bourgeoisie and those who served it.

It is through this lively narrative use of the spoken word and the zestful attention to the little things in which human intentions, fantasies and relationships are unknowingly invested that Cardoso Pires manages to capture the reader's attention in stories with the simplest of plots. Thus, we follow the minor episodes of the day on which a poor young boy acquires a new pair of boots to go and look for work in an area of tourist seaside resorts; or the events of the afternoon on which a building-site watchman meets two old Chinese hawkers, with the mutual discovery of small differ-

ences and unexpected similarities in their manner of greeting, of eating, and of observing and appreciating a wide variety of things; or the gradual changes in the life of a very poor family which goes on hopefully investing its scanty financial resources in various pools and lotteries; or, lastly, the emerging mythology of the games and passions of a group of children living in a neighbourhood full of families returned from Africa, who reveal the colonial ideology of their grown-up relatives in stark black-and-white terms. This last story, entitled 'Celeste e Lalinha' uses a narrative technique which is closer to that of the later novels and which also recalls the expository technique of some of the essays, especially in *E Agora, José?* It is a montage of several small sequences, each with its own heading, the story being carried forward through a number of discontinuous approaches voiced in various tones. And the voices we hear are those of a little girl full of maternal solicitude for her black doll, of boys acting out their daring adventures as cowboys, pirates, or soldiers in the colonial wars, and of the grown-ups whose views are also transmitted through the voices of the children. It may be noted that one of the links between these stories and the later novels is the frequent appearance of nascent mythical fantasy in analogies of perception. For example, Janico, the protagonist of the first of the four stories mentioned, sees some sand fleas leaping about on the beach and immediately thinks of them as 'milk-shrimps' (an image striking in its dual meaning of 'milky coloured' and 'baby' as in 'milk teeth') which will grow up to become prawns and then lobsters. From this he proceeds to divide all fish into hierarchical categories by generation, size, and age. 'Celeste e Lalinha' is full of incipient myths emerging from the children's desires and fears.

The novels *O Anjo Acorado* and *O Hóspede de Job* are organized around very different themes: the first foreshadows the essay *Cartilha do Marialva* and, in this respect, relates to the two most recent novels, while the second centres on the natural and human landscape of the Alentejo, the torrid latifundian region of the south already referred to in connexion with two of the short stories. In terms of their structure, however, these first two novels belong to a particular phase of the writer's career. The reader's attention is no longer focused on individual scenes or a medley of dense sequences which are not limited to any specific event, but on a reticulated network of scenes and self-contained sequences which can be read as multilineal projections around the organizing axis of time (as chronological irreversibility) or as a map showing two or three tracks that occasionally meet or intersect. The reticulated network of action, or the overall pattern of tracks in the geographical space, reveal a set of axiological and social oppositions.

Thus, in *O Anjo Acorado* we sense an opposition between three main plots and two sub-plots based on the strong suggestion that there are as many other pivotal situations. Some of the elements in this novel, such as the

pleasure of hunting, a certain cruelty, the courting of danger at the risk of one's own life, the holding in one's hands of another's life or death, the tensions of self-sacrifice or the sacrificing of others — elements not easily separable from one another — appear in Cardoso Pires's other books and are fully developed in the last two. But in this novel there is also an attempt to incorporate reflections arising from these elements (and these reflections are sometimes contradictory) which run parallel to or converge with the fabulizing or evocative current characteristic of all the writer's work.

This reflective effort is evident not only in the novels, especially *O Anjo Ancorado* and the last two, but also in the essay *Cartilha do Marialva*. Indeed, *O Anjo Ancorado* is in some ways a network of action attempting to accommodate itself within a reflective framework. Its third-person narrative conforms to a strict behaviourism reminiscent of Hemingway in which the dialogues (and even the interior monologues) are of interest only as objectified reactions and never become a choral score for voices, the polyphonic vocal structure characteristic of the last two novels and already prefigured in short stories such as 'Carta a Garcia' or 'Ritual dos Pequenos Vampiros' (originally published in *Histórias de Amor*), a terrible and intense chorus of demonic voices speaking in the language of criminals or social deviants.

The novel's narrative and reflective focus is provided by a protagonist who acts out the conflict between the *marialva* and the libertine which will become central not only to *Cartilha* but also to that blend of repulsion and attraction characterizing the protagonists of the later novels: the 'Delfim' who is the last of a wealthy family of landowners, and Major Dantas, the 'warrior-angel' and 'father to his men' of *Balada*.

João, the virtual narrator of *O Anjo Ancorado*, had been, thirteen years before the action takes place, one of the 'hard-line' neo-Realists (in literature or art) and somewhat schematic Marxists of 1945, in other words, one of the progressive young intellectuals shaped by the circumstances of the Spanish Civil War, the rise of Fascism in the Iberian peninsula, and the Second World War. By 1957 he has become the disenchanting heir of a family of landowning industrialists in the Conservative North, involved in a lukewarm 'amitié amoureuse' with Guida (born around 1934), a teacher who accompanies him to gatherings of artists and intellectuals but whose formative years had coincided with the fading of the puritanical period of 'romantic certainties' marking the end of the war. Guida's generation considers itself 'betrayed by the past and by the unknown future'; it has 'the realism of doubt: it watches and asks questions'.

In *Cartilha do Marialva* Cardoso Pires contrasts the macho *marialva* with the libertine of the Goliardic/Enlightenment/Stendhalian tradition, as portrayed by Roger Vailland, the novelist and theorist of the hedonist intellectual: a man who identifies himself with the 'classe à l'attaque', a 'voluptueux qui raisonne', 'a man alone', who cultivates a 'rigorous style' and controlled

passion, who loves life as the ultimate game and wants women as his peers, free of traditional sentimentalism and erotic taboos. João, however, has certain traces of a 'marialism' that accords with his background: the lordly bluntness of the landed gentry who move through the city with all the assurance of their class, the ostensive contempt for intellectuals — with whom they nevertheless fraternize in bars and on social occasions — and an equal contempt for anything remotely resembling amorous or philanthropic sentimentality. Nevertheless, the novel centres on what is described in a secondary episode as 'a remorseful encounter'. João and Guida spend an afternoon together in a closeness based on misunderstanding, she occasionally showing signs of hysteria, he maintaining a controlled reserve. They have driven, in a luxury car, to a beach near a poverty-stricken fishing village, where the men have no proper fishing tackle and the woman work as lace-makers doing piecework, a village whose only possibly viable hope is that of the tavern-keeper who dreams of having electric light and lots of tourists. The other plots and sub-plots are developed around the basic contrast between the relative luxury of this half-hearted love affair, with its whisky-drinking and bantering conversations, and what goes on around it in the other social strata. João spends some of the time underwater fishing, and manages to kill a beautiful fish, sleeping peacefully in its deep-sea hideout. Meanwhile, on the edge of a nearby cliff, an old man tires himself out trying to catch a featherless baby partridge in a duel between hunger and survival, with its breath of courage and death. Guida takes pity on the chick and ransoms it for a handful of coins, which the old man uses to buy a few decigrams of sugar to suck. Later, when the pair drive home, the chick is released on the edge of a pinewood and, in the light of the headlamps, the disgusted Guida sees it being recaptured by the old man. João's comment is curt: 'Let that be a lesson to you. For seven and a half escudos you can't expect the world to stop.'

The novel leaves us with a vision of a predatory world which is to reappear in all the writer's subsequent novels. Apart from the technically sophisticated underwater capture of the superb fish, and the two clumsy and exhausting captures of the unfledged partridge, there is a whole human chain dependent on the sample of bobbin-lace which a small boy shows Guida and which the lace-maker hastens to finish — using a ball of cotton bought on credit — while the small boy keeps the pair under surveillance, with the husband and the mother of the lace-maker placed at strategic points to warn her if the two show any signs of leaving the village. But the prospective sale was based on a misunderstanding: the boy had received alms, not a deposit for the lace, and he risks being run over as the car speeds through the village after the quixotic episode of the recapture of the partridge chick. Guida herself had felt that, as a woman, she was simply the prey of male hunters when she and João parted from their companions on

the last occasion when they had all met for drinks and the collective exercise of 'choice' humour. In this context, hunting is not simply the allegory of a social structure as visibly predatory as that of Portugal. Guida perceives in her companion 'the disease of the hunter, who kills for the pleasure of killing (or what comes before and after the kill)'. And the stubbornness of the old man, stretched out along the very edge of the cliff to catch the unfledged partridge, is also characterized by the 'temptation of danger that accompanies all mortals'.

The whole novel is deeply imbued with the obsession of hunting, of gambling, of taking a chance, of achieving freedom through risk. But I consider it particularly revealing that Guida should see João's underwater fishing as 'the experience of a different freedom, a different fear'. João, we should recall, had belonged to one of the successive waves of student protest against the dictatorship; significantly, his political slogan at the time had been 'fear is the opium of the people'. But his social background and adult experience have made him immune (and in this he is no different to the much younger Guida) to the danger of embracing any new convictions. In fact, underlying this novel of disenchantment with the revolutionary orthodoxy prevalent before the beginning of the Cold War in 1947 is a nostalgia for fear which can, after all, provide self-fulfilment but which becomes unbearable in the comfortable chains of compromise, an accommodation even worse if the person who has sold out thinks he has been 'clever'. Guida is still an 'angel', anchored to the specifically human landscape of 'the happy few', because in her mild hysteria, she still has something to fight for in the Portugal of 1957: an anti-puritan independence and an anti-*marialva* status as a woman, a battle which is, in fact, at the root of that Portuguese literary phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century: the emergence of a significant woman's literature. Guida is prepared to risk the commitment of an undivided love, which has no place in the libertine 'sexual grammar' of her companion. João, on the other hand, is still a residual *marialva* in the *machismo* symbolized by his whisky-drinking and his contempt for intellectuals, whether male or female.

With *O Hóspede de Job* the narrative structure based on scenes linked in a reticulated network of opposed values ceases to be centred (but only temporarily until the last two novels) on the libertine negations of the *marialva* and, as already mentioned, develops certain motifs present in *Os Caminheiros e Outros Contos*. The lines of action (and of geographical movement) are drawn on the map of the Alentejo, moving between three points: Cercal Novo, a town dominated by a garrison, a hospital, and a prison; a military shooting-range; and Cimadas, one of the many villages in which the big landowners recruit their seasonal workers.

Almost at the beginning of the novel we have two of those unforgettable and densely atmospheric scenes conveying an ethical attitude which may be over-emphasized in a summary description. The first, involving a corporal and

some very raw recruits, is set in a tavern where the drinkers can hear (louder or softer, depending on the wind) the far-off whistle of a train — the kind of train we have already encountered in 'Carta a Garcia' — and where a remarkably picturesque dialogue takes place: an artillery recruit, questioned as to who is the enemy at whom the guns are being fired, innocently replies: 'I know, corporal, it's the mules!' For, as they start firing, the soldiers give vent to their feelings by chanting a refrain graphically represented in the image affixed to the target: 'Fire at the white mule!' In the second scene, we have a situation which is almost hypnotically obsessive in the work of Cardoso Pires (another variant will be found in the opening pages of *O Delfim*); there is a village square (in Cimadas) occupied by a patrol of Republican Guards whose every movement is being followed by eyes (and even ears) hidden in the shadows of the surrounding houses. The reason for the patrol is that the Alentejan day-labourers are, as so often, on strike against low wages and harsh working conditions and have come into conflict with seasonal workers from neighbouring provinces who are prepared to accept the miserable conditions offered — the *ratinhos* from the mountain areas of Beira Baixa, the *Gaibéus* from Ribatejo, and the *Algarvios*.

Cimadas is the point of departure for two journeys: the first is that of an old woman, Casimira, who goes to Cercal Novo in search of her granddaughter, Floripes, who was taken away by the guard. This sub-plot allows us to witness the interrogation of the young woman and the alleged leader of the clandestine peasant movement and subsequently takes us to a picturesque provincial jail, housed in an old sacristy with crumbling vestiges of its monumental and clerical past. The second and more important odyssey is that of an old man, Aníbal, who goes to Cercal Novo to claim the 'allowance' to which he mistakenly thinks he is entitled because his only (and late-begotten) son has been called up for military service. Aníbal is accompanied by a wizened and sickly boy, Janico, who, like the old man himself, is looking for work. This more eventful journey, which recalls two earlier wayfaring stories, 'Caminheiros' and 'Estrada 43', takes in two pathetic hunting episodes (a leveret and a tortoise) and at a certain stage crosses the firing range where an old woman is directing a gang of boys, who calculate the intervals between rounds of firing to run and gather up metal splinters for sale as scrap. For fun they also gather up the residues of unburnt gunpowder. Here the sickly boy is hit by a fragmentation bullet.

From the novel's last chapters, only two episodes need to be emphasized: the first is the tableau which provides the novel with its name, the scene in which Captain Gallagher, the American instructor who is the 'hóspede' of the impoverished Alentejan land, catches a glimpse of little Janico, the 'Job' of the title, who lies convalescing from the amputation of his shattered leg. It may be noted that the patio across which the American captain sees Janico is one of those obsessively recurrent symbolic spaces in the work of Cardoso

Pires: the square as stage, the silently dramatic setting of mute scenes. The second significant episode is the return of Aníbal and Janico to Cimadas where, after a fruitless search for work in various villages, Janico — who is illiterate as well as sickly and now crippled — tries to earn a living by selling pamphlets, propped on his crutch and wearing the military cotton drill trousers which his friend has managed to buy him by selling a hunting gun, his only valuable possession.

Although built around the significance of contrasting situations (which I have barely summarized) and with few passages in which the voices are as audible as those in the work of Cardoso Pires after 1968, *O Hóspede de Job* nevertheless has a number of scenes which reverberate in the reader's imagination. I shall mention only one of these because of the insistence and multi-layered meanings with which the image it contains reappears in the later novels. This image occurs in a dream which Janico has at the beginning of the admirable process in which he regains a stubborn hope after the amputation of his leg: he dreams of a lizard whose tail, repeatedly cut off, is constantly regenerated, the stumps wriggling in the sand while the lizard seems not to mind or even to notice.

The type of structure we find in the novels considered above, that is, scenes linked by contrast (and also by their diegetic relationship and the physical crossing of paths) is more obvious in *O Render dos Heróis*, a dramatic narrative which is among the best of the many historically inspired plays written during the last two decades. The subject is a rural uprising against taxes which took place in the north of Portugal in 1846 and is known as the Revolution of Maria da Fonte. The inspiration clearly derives from Bertolt Brecht, although (as is evident in the novels of Cardoso Pires already discussed and even in the work of Brecht himself) no reasoned critical interpretation can exhaust the dramatic possibilities of conflict. Indeed, despite the exceptional interest attributed by Portuguese historiography to rural movements such as the 1846 uprising in the years immediately before and after the democratic revolution of 25 April 1974, much remains to be said.

The play, in a succession of short episodes, deconstructs different forms of historical idealism, particularly of the heroic variety. Two of Cardoso Pires's Brechtian aphorisms make this clear: 'History changes its heroes every day'; 'A party that needs heroes is not a party'. The inherent contradictions in the historical movement dramatized in the play lend themselves to reflections of a Brechtian epic-cum-dramatic nature. There are circumstantial alliances between a motley group composed of the most retrograde rural clergy, mercilessly exploited but easily manipulated peasants, bourgeois town councils, foreign mercenaries, and Jacobin students, all joined together against the first dictatorship imposed by an emerging financial capitalism (Portuguese capitalism has always been far more speculative than entre-

preneurial and has always preferred a more or less authoritarian state). The whole incongruous movement crumbles before the obstinacy of a Queen rendered untouchable by recent liberal idealism and supported by a corrupt Marshal with the aid of an Anglo-Spanish military intervention. The play ends with the 'grotesque apotheosis' of the victorious establishment contrasted with the weeping of a child, the son of one of the hypothetical 'Marias da Fonte' who personified the crushed movement. The songs and slogans are taken from texts of the period or from sybilline verses by Afonso Duarte (b. 1884), a poet much admired by the neo-Realists of the 1940s.

O Delfim and *Balada da Praia dos Cães* are, for different reasons, Cardoso Pires's finest works, and are also among the best Portuguese novels written during the second half of this century, a period which has been a particularly rich one for Portuguese fiction.

The narrative of *O Delfim* centres on a lagoon which, since the seventeenth century, has been held as an abundant game preserve by an aristocratic family, the Palma Bravos. During the period between two game seasons tragic events have overtaken the last (and eleventh) of the Palma Bravos, his wife, and one of his servants, and the facts of the case are put together and interpreted by a writer-hunter on a shooting trip to the lagoon during the following season. The relationship between the writer and the landowning aristocrat (the 'Delfim' or Dauphin of the title) suggests that the conflicting characteristics of João in *O Anjo Ancorado* have been split into two characters: the libertine and the *marialva*. The very organization of the narrative in a structure which can, as we have already suggested, be described as oral-cum-choral, brings into question the cold and individualistic hedonism à la Roger Vailland which had been the object of criticism or reservation in the last part of *Cartilha do Marialva*. This hedonism is reduced, on the one hand, to features which characterize the last Palma Bravo (the love of hunting, the assertively macho preference for the all-male company of hard-drinking companions), but on the other, it reflects a dispassionate interest in the process of time (in the sense of the unfolding of a musical movement): the process of the local 'destagnation' of Portuguese social time witnessed by the writer-hunter when the tragic events in the old seigneurial house make it possible for the hunting rights of the Lagoa da Gafeira to be legally auctioned off to a group of men from the neighbouring town, led by the Regedor himself.

More than in any other work by Cardoso Pires, there is in this novel an obvious concern to understand and depict time, in the widest sense of the Portuguese word (*tempo*), above all time as the irreversibility of change in social and psychological terms as well as in terms of the narrative aesthetic. The summary flashbacks or exemplary episodes in the history of the previous ten generations of the Lords of Gafeira provide a background to the family's present degeneration and in this the novel recalls other Portuguese

novels in which the fortunes of a family are followed through more than one generation: *A Ilustre Casa de Ramires* (1900) by Eça de Queirós, *Os Telles de Albergaria*, by that much-neglected writer, Carlos Malheiro Dias, and *A Casa Grande de Romarigães* (1957) by Aquilino Ribeiro. The past is carried into the present through the many 'voices' whose intermittent evidence helps to build up the pattern. These include the inscription of an invocation to Isis, protectress of the region's ancient thermal spring, found on some local Roman ruins; the passages transcribed from a regional monograph written by an eighteenth-century Abbot, and some more or less legendary anecdotes. This historical background gives continuity and a kind of choral harmony to the archaic traces found in the social ideology embodied in local habits, sayings, and customs intermittently juxtaposed in the text. But the novel plunges boldly into expressionistic transfiguration and mythical imagery, particularly zoomorphic imagery, in an attempt to 'invent truths' that reflect the real density of human behaviour. For, as we know, there is no room for a mechanical Laplacian determinism in the understanding of human complexities, an understanding which always requires some consideration of alternative 'possible worlds' within reach of the apparently real. Writers and theoreticians of contemporary fiction may not yet have fully grasped that it is following the same tracks as formal linguistic semantics. The logic of the simple assertion has given way to that of the 'tensed assertion', linked to a multiplicity of *propositional attitudes* or *possible worlds*, making it difficult to establish which of the many possible worlds is the 'real' or 'zero point' world so that the option becomes a practical or temporary one. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cardoso Pires's novels should be so larded with meta-narrative reflections. Indeed, the author himself uses the term 'meta-narrative' in his excellent analysis of the novel in *E Agora, José?*

As a counterpart to its flights of expressionistic visionism or mythicizing fable, *O Delfim* (like other narratives by Cardoso Pires) piles up what French narratology calls 'the effects of the real'. We know from the beginning of the possibly criminal deaths of a woman, Maria das Mercês, and a servant, but, until the last piece of the fabulatory dome has been set into place, we know nothing of *what* really happened or *how*. In fact, many doubts remain unanswered, since we are always involved in the 'investigation' of the presumed crime which is being carried out by the writer-hunter for his own purposes and at his own risk, and what we hear is the evidence of characters (depicted in broad impressionistic brush strokes) whose voices come across as stylistically distinct. Contributors to the vocal chorus include a lottery-ticket seller and a beater, who are both malicious gossips and indulge in mythicizing fantasy; a conservative and tender-hearted landlady who hates to see so much misfortune among the gentry; a young priest who may have a tendency to embrace *aggiornamento* ideas (or at least the petit bourgeois aspects of the movement); an old priest, once a keen shot but now an invalid,

who had followed the fortunes of the last *marialva* generations of Palma Bravos; a barman (Cardoso Pires's novels are full of delightful snippets of 'barman's wisdom'); a petrol-pump attendant; a prostitute who upholds the ideology of the system on which her livelihood depends; and the main protagonists themselves: Tomás Manuel Palma Bravo and Maria das Mercês, whom the writer-hunter had met during the last shooting season and had subsequently come to know from gatherings at the big house and casual encounters on journeys and other social occasions.

In addition (as in other novels by the author), we have occasional but important footnotes, which purport to be factual, and a constant shifting between the present tense of the investigation, notes taken by the writer during his reading of the regional monograph and other sources, and facts jotted down the previous year, sometimes referring to a photograph or to some documentary or circumstantial evidence. In some cases, items are highlighted by headlines which may isolate them from the text or place them in a specific context, whether in general long-shot or a more detailed close-up. One such long-shot acquires a particular symbolic charge: the description of a motionless lizard, almost invisible against the stone of the ancient ruins, which, like the *tempo* of the human world around the Lagoa da Gafeira, may continue immobile but may, equally, begin to move at any moment.

Almost at the beginning of the novel, we have a scene which crystallizes the (relative) immobilism of the rural-seigneurial-*marialva* world which the writer is depicting. To be more precise, bearing in mind the fact that absolute historical immobility has never existed (not even in the succession of eleven generations of *couteiros-mores* who more or less repeat themselves, even in the Christian name given to the first-born son), we have a *largo maestoso* tempo, recalling, in pictorial terms, the medieval hunting tapestry of *O Anjo Ancorado*. In the square opposite the boarding-house room where the narrator (also described as the 'writer-ferret') is staying, the last of the Palma Bravos leaves the church after Sunday mass and climbs into his luxury car, with Maria das Mercês at his side and behind them the one-armed servant, holding a pair of mastiffs with his only hand — a remarkably firm and skilful hand which functions as the 'third hand' of the 'Dauphin'.

'Sovereign to time', Palma Bravo is the image of patriarchal authority: lord and master of his wife (as his ancestors, in several forms and guises, had been lords and masters not only of their lawful wedded wives but of other women in various versions of the 'droit de cuissage'); master of his servant-cum-'squire' (as his ancestors had been of their bondservants), a servant whom he has virtually 'made', a social cast-off, crippled in an industrial accident and rescued and re-trained for a more traditional form of dependence; master of his hounds, who are extensions of a servant characterized as canine in more ways than one; and master of his Jaguar (the make of

the car and the name of a hunting animal which can sometimes be domesticated), the modern equivalent of that other traditional element in the seigneurial retinue, the horse. His dictum on the handling of animals, servants, and women is: 'a ration of wine, a tight rein, and a smack on the rump'.

But this emblematic scene had been witnessed by the writer the previous year. In one of the narrative's inter-connected present-tense passages, this same square (where have we encountered it before?) is animated by a new scene: the festive preparations for a different kind of hunt. On this night (the most extensive and dense present-tense narrative in the whole novel) the atmosphere is full of smoke and glare from roasting eels, brought from the lagoon by the villagers on their return from work in a procession of bicycles flashing their lights and ringing their bells. The lizard has begun to move against the stone. It is still a confused and turbid world, as if the smoke from the open fires were imitating the mists which have shrouded the lagoon from time immemorial. But it is also a hybrid world: the men are peasant-workers; the last Palma Bravo 'Dauphin' is a silviculturist-engineer, whose rural income is supplemented by his earnings as manager of a cellulose factory, emblematic of a regional (and national) destiny now moving towards a polluting and subordinate industrialization; shooting rights on the estate are still granted only annually to a mere handful of petit bourgeois locals; the abstract official dryness of the Regedor, the conservative sentimentalism of the landlady and the exaggeration or superstition of the lottery-ticket seller intersect in the contradictory and zigzagging versions of the presumably criminal case at the centre of the narrative investigation; the *vox populi*, based on allegory and proverb (in this novel, as in *Balada*, there are many sayings which could be genuinely traditional but could equally be the author's invention) moves into the domain of legend in the making.

In any event, the last Palma Bravo has no children (because he cannot?). His last Christmas supper with the servants goes grotesquely wrong, with events hovering on the edge of a manifold Oedipal transgression, involving a surrogate son — the servant, whose mixed racial origins give the relationship a colonialist dimension. His wife is drowned (commits suicide?) in the Lagoon 'like a Portuguese provincial Ophelia'. His car (his 'steel penis') is wrecked in a drunken frenzy of speed. All the attributes emblematic of his seigneurial status disintegrate in current mythological terms, a Portuguese regional version of a synchronous 'astronautical' event.

But it is impossible to guess the next step in the historico-social process. Once dead, the one-armed servant acquires the legendary features of a werewolf; the heraldic dogs, caught in the ridiculous position of 'post coitum caninum' and jeered at by the villagers, run wildly through the rush-grown marsh like malignant spirits; and the narrator dreams that their flesh is turning into eels, slithering, writhing and hissing in the smoke. The

Dauphin-engineer had himself once dreamed of a legendary description of the great fish who sink into the mud of the lagoon when they feel death approaching so that the smaller fish cannot feed on their bodies. The musical tempo has been speeded up, but in what new movement? Time continues to weave its historical web but the web is not yet complete and we cannot begin to understand what form it will eventually take. What we are left with is a polyphonic score, composed in verbal tenses that link the actual 'lived' events with the narration of those events, intermeshing narrator and narrative through the 'internal subversion of the real by discourse' (*E Agora, José?*). Open to a variety of readings or interpretations, like a mathematical formula in physics or biochemistry, it can be applied or verified in a number of ways. The difference is that it is made of far more complex syntactic and linguistic material, which is much more difficult to axiomatize.

Cardoso Pires's most recent novel *Balada da Praia dos Cães* is interesting and important from a number of viewpoints. It won the 'Grande Prémio do Romance e Novela' of the Portuguese Association of Writers in 1982, has had a remarkable number of reprints since then, and has become one of the country's most widely discussed books. The novel presents itself as a 'disquisition on a crime': the real-life murder, in 1960, of an army officer who had escaped from custody after his arrest in the aftermath of an abortive military coup against the authoritarian regime of the time. Its deliberate 'conflicting confluence' of documentary truth, conjecture, and fictional reworking gave rise to considerable controversy and led to the publication of detailed newspaper and magazine articles on the twenty-year-old crime. Above all, however, it is a narrative work of exceptional quality crowning thirty-three years of a career in which the quality of the writing has been constantly refined by the author's own demanding standards.

A number of Portuguese readers prefer *O Hóspede de Job* or *O Delfim* to Cardoso Pires's latest novel and would have awarded the 1982 prize for fiction to another fine novel published that year: *Memorial do Convento* by José Saramago. It should be borne in mind that Portugal lived through almost half a century of a conservative (and colonialist) dictatorship, with the backing of the so-called Western democracies, and that its problems are somewhat similar (although not identical) to those of the so-called Third World. These facts have led many Portuguese readers to apply certain criteria to the appreciation of a literary text, an approach which became particularly evident with the neo-Realist generation of the Spanish Civil War and World War Two. The three novels usually contrasted with *Balada* come across in more clear-cut democratic terms, despite the complexity of values organized in their respective fictional structures. *Balada* is much richer in its vocal polyphony, especially when we consider the chorus of voices whose intonational phrases and alternative narrative perceptions superimpose themselves on our reading of the narrative. Moreover, these alternative

perceptions are always present and, despite the novel's linear syntagmatic arrangement, women of different social classes and backgrounds are given voices which, in sexual and personal terms, are more highly individual (and at times more rebellious) than any hitherto encountered in Portuguese fiction.

Balada also seems to take much further the earlier obsession with death and impotence in males of a certain type: latter-day *marialvas* in the throes of the male menopause whose roles, at least in terms of their masculine social responsibilities, are also similar.

The latest *marialva* is a Major, a 'warrior angel' and demanding 'father' to his men, a professional soldier who has become indignant at the army's submission to the dictatorship of a fascist civilian, who has been imprisoned for his part in an abortive coup but manages to escape from custody in a military fort and is hiding out in an isolated beach house, shuttered up at the end of the season. Living with him in the house is his mistress, Filomena (Greek for 'beloved'), a corporal, and a conscript officer who is an architect in civilian life. Peremptorily refusing any contact with the organized resistance of workers or students, abandoned by the few officers and establishment contacts on whom he had relied, the Major becomes prey to an authoritarian and male chauvinist mythomania, which leads his three companions to murder him, not only in self-defence but also in order to protect any fellow-conspirators whom they fear he may betray in one of his mad rages.

There is also a narrator, or rather a compiler and personalized organizer of narratives: Elias, the senior police inspector who leads the investigation into the crime, discovered only a few days after it was committed when the body, which had been buried in a shallow grave in the sand dunes near the beach, is exposed by the tides and attracts the attention of stray dogs. The relationship between this investigator and the Major is as important as that between the writer-hunter and the Dauphin in *O Delfim*, but is far more subtle.

Inspector Elias of the Homicide Squad, nicknamed 'Covas' ('Graveyard') is a bachelor, whose sole companion at home is a lizard, kept in an artificial state of vegetative and asexual semi-hibernation in an enclosed glass case containing a layer of damp sand. With twenty years of murder investigations recorded in his 'Book of the Dead', Elias, with his black tie, his gastric ulcer and his depraved tastes, has an analogical and funereal outlook and imagination, as degenerate and sordid as his own sexual life. Like various other characters created by Cardoso Pires, Elias shows a professional skill and a worldly experience which he expresses in vivid quips and almost proverbial sayings, often couched in morbid terms since it is with murder victims that he keeps up a running interior dialogue. He enjoys looking after the family tomb, as we learn in a remarkable scene set in the cemetery, where the sole contrasting note to the cemeterial quiet is provided by a pack of dogs in frenetic pursuit of a bitch on heat. Smelling out a corpse, excited by a bitch

in heat, or, in the sleepy reverie of Elias, transformed from a seal (half-fish, half-dog) into the mythical sea-bitch (siren temptress to the average, untravelled, domestic dog), the dogs in this book correspond to the harriers who function as canine extensions of the personality of the last Palma Bravo. (It is interesting to note in passing a curious inversion of values: in one of the stories in *Histórias de Amor* canine animality serves as the basis for a woman's erotic cries: 'Dog-Lord, Dog-Master, Dog-God!')

'Graveyard's' professional rounds take him past a street of shops specializing in prosthetic surgical appliances and wheelchairs and through a square where, amidst heaps of ex-votos and miraculously discarded crutches and orthopaedic aids, stands the statue of a famous nineteenth-century spiritualist doctor who continues to prescribe cures through the agency of mediums. It is hardly surprising that Elias should see one of Lisbon's central squares as an alley of windowed tombs in a cemetery. These local touches are strikingly apt, reinforcing related allusions to a country which, in 1960, was living under a special kind of fascism: melancholy, nostalgic, and clerical, with a fervent belief in miracles, a sentimental version of Mussolinism in the minor key, in the shadow of an empire which any rational person could see was doomed. The other side of the coin is, of course, missing: the dogged resistance of the student movements and of the rural workers of the South (which we find in *O Hóspede de Job*). This is precisely the side that Major Dantas chooses to ignore.

Inspector Elias is entitled to interrogate Filomena during the time she is held in secret solitary confinement in order to avoid alerting the other two fugitives still at liberty (and also to allow the criminal police to steal a march on the political police). He unconsciously takes over the dead Major's desire, in an obsessive mental acting out of the physical details of the imagined acts, gestures and signs of a passion which, in fact, had already burnt itself out in Filomena before the Major's murder. This is the great encounter of the novel: between an indirect masculine desire disguised as curiosity or voyeurism, and a feminine passion which, proverbially 'is unto death', in this case through the last possible form of expiation, not in the form of a bloody sacrifice (which had already been made) or of an auricular catholic confession *ad divinum*, but in the form of a completely frank, revealing, and shameless confession, as though a badly bruised and sickened subjectivity is baptized anew in achieving objectivity and social awareness through the 'other' — Elias — the listener to whom the girl is as indifferent as possible.

The character of Filomena documents that rare phenomenon: a strong personality at the very limit of her social and historical condition. She had really loved the Major, a man old enough to be her father, and had wanted to bear his child. She is wracked by terrible remorse when, on one occasion, his amoral hedonistic remarks drive her into going to bed with someone else. But for the Major, Filomena is simply his own property; like his martial authority,

she belongs to him. She is the assertion of his own identity and power, attested by the gold chain he has given her to wear around her ankle and by an eroticism which consumes itself in excess and sophisticated pleasures. (The Dauphin apparently goes through a similar syndrome of exhausted masculinity. Both men illustrate the idea of love as the sickly ante-chamber of death, Eros Thanatos. It may be recalled that the servant dies in the bed of Maria das Mercês, unintentionally repeating the 'perfect crime' of a Courtesan with Silver Nails, who causes her ageing lover to die of a heart attack thinking of the androphagous myth of the praying mantis). In fact, jealous impotence is one of the factors that leads the Major to become insane.

Elias avidly follows Filomena's reliving of time, linking it to Major Dantas from the moment of their first meeting and the early days of their affair to the moment of the Oedipal crime represented by the Major's death at the hands of the soldier-son and the architect-conscript officer who temporarily replaces the Major in Filomena's bed. The Inspector's erotic superego is thus exposed to a dual assault. A sexually frustrated man, Elias has two significant experiences in the last chapter of the book: walking home at dawn, he is accosted by a soldier who mistakes him for a homosexual; later, he sees three travelling-circus cages being driven through the deserted streets — chance symbols to be repressed at the end of a process of investigation designed to secure three convictions. And, in the end, it is the degenerate voyeurism of Elias that provides the basis for a musical composition of narrative time as a repeat both of real time and of time experienced or lived through which serves as the pretext for narrative.

The 'musical score' uses discursive material intentionally written in the least poetical Portuguese and a montage of contrasting but surprisingly compatible and skilfully combined narrative sequences derived from extremely heterogenous sources such as police reports and other detailed descriptions of the same type. The banishment of any traditional literary rhetoric and the presence of a new sense of rigour derive from the author's own precepts in *E Agora, José?* and are, in fact, found in his earlier fictional texts, especially *O Delfim*. This apparently a-poetic discursive material includes various passages written in the jargon or slang (real or invented and always extremely vivid) of the criminal police and of certain professional groups and petit bourgeois circles. These passages brilliantly capture the appropriate atmosphere, combining a wealth of nicknames, bantering exchanges in decipherable code and quasi-proverbial aphorisms which sometimes give the book a somewhat baroque figuration, recalling the texts made up of adages and proverbs by the seventeenth-century writer Dom Francisco Manuel de Mello, author of *Carta de Guia de Casados*, which provided the main target for the essay *Cartilha do Marialva*.

We also find the indirect free speech of the statements made by witnesses (by a poultry woman who is also a Jehovah's Witness, by a concierge, by the

architect's frightened mother, by Filomena's bold and imaginative friend, etc.) which may be couched in legally formal language but may also be sentimentally picturesque. But, especially in the case of Filomena, Elias completes and duplicates the written statements with imaginary reconstructions, occasional notes, reminders and documents, which he adds to the case record or collects for the 'baú de sobranes' (box of oddments). In addition, he goes to cafés and cheap night clubs, exchanging jokes and conducting dialogues in the appropriate slang and even in indecent but extremely funny language. (In fact, the dirty and the sacrilegious apparently characterize his habits as well as his imaginary reconstruction of the affair between the Major and Filomena.) He and his fellow investigators also visit the prison fort of Elvas from which the Major escaped and follow the track of the clandestine flight. The reconstruction of events intersects with the narration of the actual events, the actual process of questioning intersects with the writing down and typing of the statements for the police records. We are present when enquiries are carried out in a pawnshop, when the police inspect the hideout for the first time and when, towards the end of the book, they reconstruct the crime with the participation of all three accomplices. The author intervenes by providing references in footnotes or in the Appendix to historically factual information on some of the real-life informers involved, using their real names.

The space which the reader is led to create by these devices is genuinely polyphonic and orchestral (using many groups of instruments) in its effect, rather than four-dimensionally stereoscopic since, as we have seen, the real dimensions suggested by the virtually fictional are difficult to enumerate. We probably lack the abstract mental categories required to encompass everything we can find in a good novel.

In the book's most intense moment of love, Filomena and the Major, 'tie the knot of time' and, on a number of occasions, Elias sees Filomena's body as 'a truth', 'that truth'. The time of the actual narration of the novel rather than that of the diegetic sequence or abstract linear arrangement is a new quality of time or of the irreversible, perhaps not entirely different from the exact order of a mathematical deduction or of anything that functions properly in life. Poetic time is the opposite of the 'dead season' ('tempo morto') which the conspirators spend in their isolated hideout, just as it is the opposite of the hibernating time of the lizard and, to a certain extent, of Elias, the lizard's owner. (This lizard, like the dream lizard of the amputated Job/Janico also has its tail cut off but does not experience the same multiple regeneration of life itself.) A book like this belongs to 'le temps retrouvé', time found and poetically requalified. Despite its undercurrent of paralysis and death, it fills us with joy.

