



## SAILING THROUGH LISBOA

«Right at the start, you appear to me floating on the Tagus like a sailing city. I am not surprised: whenever I feel like embracing the world, high on a belvedere or sitting on a cloud, I see you as a city-ship, a boat with streets and gardens in it, and even the breeze that blows tastes salty to me. There are open-sea waves drawn on your pavements; there are anchors, there are mermaids. The deck, a wide square with a compass-rose embroidered in stone, has commanding it two columns standing out from the waters, which form a guard-of-honour to the departure for the oceans. They flank the bow or appear as such, it would seem; further back is a boy-king, mounted on a green horse, gazing between them towards the other side of the World, and at his feet one can see the names of the navigators and dates of discovery inscribed in basalt on the sun-drenched ground. In front is the river, which flows to the meridians of paradise. The same Tagus referred to by maddened chroniclers, who populated it with tritons riding on dolphins.»

«Lisboa - Livro de Bordo», José Cardoso Pires



# JOSÉ CARDOSO PIRES

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## THE CITY'S LOG-BOOK

**José Cardoso Pires is one of the most remarkable writers of the Portuguese XXth century. His literary work began in 1949 and ended, in 1997, with the publication of a chronicle on the city, entitled “Lisboa – Livro de Bordo”. It was Cardoso Pires’ last work; he died in the year in which the theme of the oceans served to project Lisboa all over the World through Expo’98**

It does not surprise us therefore that this romantic novelist, essayist and playwright, should portray Lisboa as a large ship and that the Tagus river joins together all the oceans. The essence of the city and its history was, in this way, spread throughout this city/ship which once witnessed the departure and return of the caravels, in which Portuguese navigators of the XVth and XVIth centuries traversed the oceans. It was also with fragments of distant lands and peoples never seen before that Lisboa was made. And because Lisboa is herself a city/ship, Cardoso Pires calls his chronicle a “Livro de Bordo”, in which he talks directly to Lisboa, as if she were someone listening to him.

### ON THE SHIP’S QUARTERDECK

The writer Cardoso Pires starts his navigation through Lisboa from the Castelo de São Jorge. From up there he notices first the colours, the “blue of blues”, the “barsh white of pearl and grey”, the “dark-grey ochres and soft reds”. But the colour is just the first impression because, as Cardoso Pires writes, “no one can get to know a city if he does not know how to question her, questioning himself”. And to question the city by questioning himself,

he descends from the Castle and stops in Rua do Arsenal, before reaching Cais do Sodré. Here “there are voices and smells”. There is the sea breeze, the salted fish, the “smoky smell of chestnuts roasted in the little stoves of the roving sellers”.

Following the smell of the chestnuts and his thoughts, Cardoso Pires reaches Rossio, the Rossio of the florists, of the statue of King Pedro IV of Portugal, and of the poet Bocage who “we can see today at any time at the old Café Nicola, where two centuries ago he held his literary discussion group, and where, with rhymes and pamphlets, he plotted against society”.

### CHIADO: A SCENARIO, A RITUAL

Near the Café Nicola we have the Rua do Carmo, up which we walk through the Chiado and, having passed by Fernando Pessoa sitting on an esplanade, on to the Largo de Camões. Thus, in just a few minutes and not many more metres, we can follow the route of four poets: Bocage, Chiado, Pessoa and Camões.

For Cardoso Pires, the Chiado is “the country’s most important cultural and mundane reference”. Much more than the meeting point of all the great figures of



*Alto de Santa Catarina (Abel Manta)*

Portuguese culture from the last century, walking up the Chiado is “a privilege of the century”.

The bookshops and literary gatherings distinguished Lisboa, making the Chiado “a scenario and a ritual”. Leaving “the bookshops, the literary gatherings passed on to the cafés. All you had to do was cross the street and you were at the “Brasileira”, sitting near tables occupied by masters of the arts and cultural bohemians, not to mention journalists”.

Rua Garrett is the “nerve-centre of the Chiado”, and “for more than a century, the meridian of Portuguese arts and literature: professional dancers from São Carlos theatre, singers from the Academy of Amateurs of Music, all close by; journalists, postponed poets, conspirators; now and then, wandering ladies and violet-sellers passing by; is anything missing from such a lively scenario? Missing, always something missing. With each bit of news, each rendez-vous, came an idea to be debated and another to be born. Realisms, futurisms, surrealisms, and all the many rhymes the arts would launch, passed by in quick succession through the Chiado’s secluded places”. For all these reasons, the Chiado is also an inspiration. This is why the chronicler, sitting at a café table, annotates that “it is possible to define Lisboa as a symbol. Like Kafka’s Prague, like Joyce’s Dublin or Borges’ Buenos Aires. Yes, it is possible. But more than the cities themselves, it is always a neighbourhood or place which characterizes that definition, and the devotion we so often

unconsciously dedicate to them. In this case, the Chiado – its cultural geography, its magnificence by day, the rural-like calm of its streets at night, so much, so much”.

### IN SINUOUS GEOMETRY

After leaving behind “Camões sculpted in bronze in the middle of the square”, we can accompany the writer José Cardoso Pires through the “city of sinuous geometry, hills,



*Largo de Camões (Abel Manta)*

undulations, reflections of a river of varying tones, according to the days and the tides.”

Thus we reach the belvedere of Alto de Santa Catarina, “situated almost vertically over the Tagus river”, and we sit down to listen to the author of “Livro de Bordo” tell us a story about the old men who appear at the gardens “like cats when there is sunshine, but in a group”. What stories these old men would also have to tell about Lisboa, the same ones who can be seen at Jardim da Estrela “which is children’s territory”, or at Príncipe Real, “with that tree in the middle of the garden, maternal and almost sacred”. And whoever listens attentively to Cardoso

Pires’ narrative can still see “sloped streets and stepped alleys on the way to Conde Barão”, or the Bica elevator “which runs monotonously back and forth, in the midst of clothes hanging out to dry from windows and door-to-door gossip”.

### A SECRET GAME

In Lisboa, writes the chronicler, “there is a strange relationship between the pavement designs and the decorative tiles. A person might one day look up from the ground and see on a wall before him the picture he has just had at his feet, but now reproduced in glazed colours and in another form. Mostly flowers”. But it is not only flowers that can be seen on Lisboa’s pavements. There are countless other themes used for “the artistic stone-pavements that are laid on the patios, avenues, corridors of certain shopping centres and even in the cemeteries”. Cardoso Pires noticed the lyres around the bandstand in the Praça José Fontana, the “street speckled with comma-shaped black stone at Junqueira, the mermaid near the statue of Camões, the “famous dolphins cavorting through the most noble Ulyssian waters” that decorate the pavement in Praça do Comércio and the “paving-stone flowers” of Travessa do Loureiro. And also, “in the Lisboa which is covered step-by-step there is so much of intrigue. One cannot but be intrigued for example by that elephant which emerges from beneath the shadow of Rua Anchieta do Chiado: for what purpose is it there? And the pebbled snake in the Praça do Príncipe Real? Is it an irony? A secret game?” The chronicler poses the question but provides no answer, leaving whoever accompanies him to ponder on the mystery.



*Príncipe Real (Bernardo Marques)*



However, concerning the craftsmen of the stone that covers Lisboa’s ground, José Cardoso Pires has this to say: “When someone is lucky enough to meet these masters crouched over the stone, he will be reminded of squatting scribes; or, seeing them inscribing pictures in dotted lines, in the manner of engravers of leather hide, perhaps conceive them as authors of memories which, in almost ritual penetrations, adorn the city’s body with tattoos stamped in basalt”.