

Mau Tempo no Canal: An Iridescent Metaphor

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Modernism and Tradition

When Vitorino Nemésio published the novel *Mau Tempo no Canal* in 1944, Portuguese literature—and particularly Portuguese fiction—was at an aesthetic crossroads. From the realist-naturalist novel of the latter half of the nineteenth century, Portuguese literature had retained an interest in skillful composition and a taste for creative, impressionistic style. In the first years of the twentieth century, the tendency toward impressionism enriched Carlos Malheiro Dias's symbolism and contributed to Fernando Pessoa's willful poetic deconstruction of whole verbal edifices in texts like his *Livro do Desassossego*. It manifested itself fully in Raúl Brandão's exceptionally rich and highly original *Húmus*, and contributed significantly to the exuberant work of Aquilino Ribeiro, who wrote during this period as well. Almada Negreiros's *Nome de Guerra* and Teixeira Gomes's *Maria Adelaide* provide early examples of modernity in the Portuguese novel. These texts, both published in 1938, present their narrators' unique interpretations of society and human labor while adhering in broad terms to the aesthetic ideas defended by the modernist generations of *Orpheu* and *Presença*. These ideas would later be adapted by the neo-realism of the *Novo Cancioneiro* and, in terms of fiction, would be taken up by Soeiro Pereira Gomes in *Esteiros*, by Redol in his first novels, and by Carlos de Oliveira in *Casa na Duna*.

Psychologism, social analysis, and rationalized novelistic construction, complemented by the conscious questioning of novelistic form, discursive

creativity, and a variety of narrative and topical locations allowed for the folkloric quality of Portuguese fiction of the 1940s. The factors that contributed to emphasize storytelling converge¹ in *Mau Tempo no Canal* to a degree that has generated a certain amount of retrospective discomfort among critics, some of whom have viewed the novel as an overly formalistic exercise in memorializing, whose innovative intent is relativized and even negated by the virtuosity of expression prized during the period when it was written.

In a recent study,² Robert Scholes analyzes and critiques the various interpretive discourses that have been used to explain modernism in art, arguing against the dichotomies that have been applied to the task. While these dichotomies are frequently utilized as tools for making one's initial approach to Modernism (as opposed to being used to uncover its deeper content), or for determining its dominant elements (without eliminating the possible presence of other elements in the text), Scholes argues for the importance of reestablishing the distinguishing features of a generational sensibility, along with the variational tendencies of aesthetic trends and the composite character of a movement's constitutive components. He writes: "If our goal is to understand Modernism and its relation to modernity, we shall need to consider the shadings and variations within and among the categories—the shifts, the ambiguities, the tensions within the work of individual artists and even within single works of art and literature" (90). Further on he argues that, "[a]s Post-Modernists, which we are now, whether we like it or not, we must sort out what Modernism was and what it should mean to us" (94). In this way, we can recognize the value of evaluating Nemésio's fiction in terms of the opposition it maintains between newness and tradition, or its juxtaposition of modernism to an earlier realism, though we must do so with the knowledge that *Mau Tempo no Canal* is to a certain degree ambivalent with regard to these oppositions. As such, a contemporary rereading of the novel should be sensitive to its conceptual and compositional tensions as well as to its overlaying of various inherited elements and its complex genealogy. Moreover, the reader should be aware of the tendency for the passage of time to inspire new critical interpretations. "New modes of writing," Scholes writes, "do not simply eclipse the old ones, though they may cause a repositioning and revaluing of those older modes" (198). This is true for Nemésio in his relations with writers who came before him, as well as with those of the present generation.

It is necessary, therefore, to identify the form of modernism practiced by Nemésio as well as his relationship with earlier literary forms and his even-

tual consciousness of modernity. In the process, it will be useful to reconsider the old question of regionalism, which was marginalized by the modernist approaches of the twentieth century but has been made newly relevant by the growth of post-colonial studies and by the advance of globalization. Regionalism, which considers local social values not merely as contextual features but as components of a relationship between writing and reading that has implications in terms of genre, is especially important in *Mau Tempo no Canal*. Here I refer to literary regionalism in its two most commonly understood senses: the genealogical sense, which refers to the necessary influence of non-fictional discourses (lyrical, historical, repertorial, epistolary, travel, etc.) on Némésio and his novel; and the culturalist sense, more attenuated though still present in *Mau Tempo no Canal*, that renders the novel's protagonist Margarida (the most elegant representation of a woman, in human and symbolic terms, in all of our twentieth century literature—and I have not forgotten characters like Maria do Céu, Suze, Léah, Maria dos Prazeres, Joaquina Augusta, Paula Fernanda and Blimunda, the last three incidentally more symbolic than realistically human) an interesting subject for feminist studies.

A Fictional Metaphor

I have taken a phrase from Robert Scholes for the title of this study for two reasons: first, because it effectively describes my chosen topic—the forms of iridescence (i.e., degrees of light and shadow) that shape the cognitive and symbolic components of the worldview presented by Némésio in his novel; and second, because the phrase appears in a particularly suggestive chapter of Scholes's book, "Iridescent Mediocrity," a "gorgeous phrase" that Scholes takes from an article by Cyril Connolly on Dornford Yates. In this chapter, Scholes questions the supremacy of elite values and the attendant tendency to view popular or "kitsch" sentimentalism as a lesser creative value, used predominantly to entertain. In this respect as well *Mau Tempo no Canal* constitutes a rich object of study from the perspective of cultural studies; in his novel, Némésio references great works of art from various genres and periods—sometimes explicitly—along with popular and middle-brow culture. If Némésio does not reference high art and the popular in equal degree, they come close enough to parity that we can affirm that the novel defends Scholes's observations that "they are, indeed, only levels of artificiality" and that "the attack on the mediocre hedonism of the middle class [...] reveals a Puritanism at the heart of High Modernism aesthetic." These observations

lead Scholes to the following admission, which is likewise relevant to Nemésio: "I must admit, then, that my 'iridescent mediocrity' is another person's kitsch, and my argument is that we should look more closely [...] at works that offer us textual pleasure mixed with the sort of frailty that I am willing to call mediocrity" (190). Nemésio's novel compels us to focus our attention on the semantics and syntax used by the author in his tonal gradations (of colors, visions, narrative approaches, modes of behavior, etc.), rather than seeking to identify any ordering of these on the part of the author—indeed, this would be beside the point for a novel as relentlessly erudite as *Mau Tempo no Canal*. The novel likewise compels us to explain what we mean by "metaphor" in our critical approach. From Roman Jakobson, critics have tended to analyze the novel in terms of metonymy (a discourse of contiguous formulations, in which meaning unfolds), as opposed to metaphor (which implies that terms be substituted for one another, that one conceptual item is affirmed *in place of* another, as opposed to *along with* or *next to* another). Jakobson's observation might have caused Scholes to advance another sort of argument, one against dichotomies, which are always false if they are generalized, although they can be effective tools for thinking through and understanding a text. A proof of their falseness is the fact that Nemésio's novel can be understood as a fiction built through the construction of metaphors.

Here it is useful to cite David Mourão-Ferreira, from a study on Nemésio's *A Casa Fechada* in which he highlights the "subtileza metafórica e metonímica" ["the metaphoric and metonymic subtlety"] of *Mau Tempo no Canal*. Mourão-Ferreira disagrees with João Gaspar Simões, who celebrated the publication of *A Casa Fechada*, writing that in that text's novella *Tubarão*, Nemésio "voltou a regressar ao mundo das metáforas" [Nemésio "returned again to the world of metaphor"], which he considers "o maior inimigo do novelista" ["the novelist's greatest enemy"] (203). Mourão-Ferreira offers a phrase from Proust as a counter-example—I will follow Mourão-Ferreira in citing Proust, for two reasons: first, Proust, in addition to his frequent use of metaphor as a rhetorical device, was the first writer to conceive of a novel as a metaphorical construction in which two temporal planes (past and present) are overlayed, with the past breaking through at certain moments and narration occurring in the present. Notably, Robert Scholes invokes Proust in his *Paradox of Modernism* as "the enemy of mediocrity," explaining the author's metaphorical use of time with exemplary brevity and clarity:

What had to be done, as he explained at length, involved the capturing of two orders of time: (1) the absolute essence that lies at the heart of a moment, a place, or a character, accessible only to involuntary memory or its artistic equivalent, and (2) the workings of temporality that modify moments, places, and characters, making of every human being a multiple entity, which only literature can capture. (188)

My second reason for invoking Proust is his subtle but significant presence in *Mau Tempo no Canal*.

When Gaspar Simões writes that metaphors are the novelist's worst enemy, he is defending a realist-naturalist conception of the novel that is based on a logical-temporal continuity that works to achieve continuity and consequentiality. The realist-naturalist model was enshrined during the nineteenth century, though writers like Stendhal and Tolstoi, and especially Flaubert, were already making modifications to it. It is interesting to note Nemésio's attitudes toward this model as it was pursued in nineteenth-century Portuguese literature, which he reveals in his readings of texts by Almeida Garrett, Alexandre Herculano, Camilo Castelo Branco, Eça de Queiroz, and Júlio Dinis, and which he analyzes with a combination of critical acumen and readerly pleasure.³ Nemésio admires Eça's style and Camilo's ability to elicit emotion. He expresses particular admiration for the compositional structure of *Viagens na Minha Terra*, although he does not hide his preference for Júlio Dinis over Garrett, valorizing the former's talent in terms of "composição e da análise—a perfeita atmosfera novelística" ["composition and analysis—the perfect novelistic atmosphere"] and forgiving what he considers as Dinis's weaknesses. He insists on Dinis's harmonious composition (citing *Uma Família Inglesa* as a successful example), sharply drawn characters (recognizing, however, the "distância enorme" ["enormous distance"] between Mariana from *Amor de Perdição* and any of Dinis's heroines: "Mariana brota de uma força intensiva, patética, que Júlio Dinis desconheceu") ["Mariana stems from an intensive, pathetic power unknown to Júlio Dinis"], and ethical concern, which he attributes to the author's reading of Herculano. On this final quality, Nemésio writes the following: "é claro que o estilo de Júlio Dinis não tem a nobreza nem a amplitude do de Herculano. Falta-lhe o nervo, a propriedade e a força" ["of course, Júlio Dinis's style does not have either the nobility or the breadth of Herculano's. It lacks the vigor, the propriety, and the strength"]. However, it has "essa espécie de mediocridade vital que é, pelo menos, uma garantia de verdade e de vida" ["that type of vital mediocrity that is, at least, a guarantee

of truth and life”] (*Quase* 159-162). Curiously, Robert Scholes, writing twenty years after Nemésio and working from a markedly different conception of literature (Vitorino Nemésio was far removed from and even hostile to theoretical approaches), comes to the defense of a kind of mediocrity that is not far removed from that which Nemésio defends—both men are certainly guided by the Horatian ethical and literary precept of “aurea mediocritas” in their respective strategies for viewing art objects.

The nineteenth-century novel is a source of inspiration for *Mau Tempo no Canal*, thus distancing the text from modernism’s tendencies toward subjectivism and folkloric storytelling (the novel does not appear related to *A Confissão de Lúcio* or *Jogo da Cabra Cega*). Moreover, Nemésio draws on the examples of Brandão and Ribeiro in giving his novel an emotional depth, and in rooting it in local, telluric values. Notably, these examples do not impact the novel’s construction. In narrative terms, the events of the novel occur over the course of two years (from 1917 to 1919, according to the characters’ statements). *Mau Tempo* is comprised of chronologically ordered scenes, which do not, however, follow each other directly. Seemingly empty spaces in the narrative are retrospectively given emotional content or intensity, with chapters or series of chapters sometimes finding their true sequential meaning after the fact, when they are evoked in later chapters. I view this overlaying of scenes or chapters as an example of narrative metaphor.

With regard to a generic definition of modernism as described by Scholes, *Mau Tempo no Canal* can be considered a text that seeks out its own modernity by way of a tradition that Nemésio clearly valorizes. He does not adhere to a fixed literary agenda, although he clearly draws on ideas from *presencismo* and possesses a good understanding of Portuguese and foreign literature (his fictionalized representation of islands and their inhabitants, both separated and connected by the sea, clearly reveals the influence of Brandão and Ribeiro). Notwithstanding these caveats, we can extend Steven Matthews’s characterization of Virginia Woolf’s *The Years* to *Mau Tempo no Canal*, to the extent that both novels reveal a modern sensibility in their questioning of traditional modes of literary representation: “At the end,” Matthews writes, “we are left with a sense of the inadequacy of former modes of expression to register the extreme experience of the age, but unclear as to the nature of new and better ways of characterizing and expressing them” (4). It was in this spirit that I described *Mau Tempo* in a 1990 essay as an “aliança entre a epopeia moderna e o regionalismo mítico, que confere uma dimensão problemática ao

espaço-tempo romanesco clássico” [“an alliance between the modern epic and mythic regionalism, which lends a problematic dimension to space-time of the classic novel”] (22), and as a precursor to Mário Cláudio and Maria Gabriela Llansol in their “fracturas do inteligível” [“fractures of the intelligible”] (40). Meaning resides in the novel’s syntagmatic construction, reminiscent of traditional and epic forms. Fractures in the syntagma reveal the modes of representation that are dear to the writer, as well as allow elements of meaninglessness to enter into the novel and the use of metaphors (problematic, modernist, regional, mythical) that give the novel its iridescent quality.

Islands and Currents

Vitorino Nemésio’s verbal artistry is apparent in the title of his novel. The author’s ascription of a meteorological quality (“*mau tempo*” [“inclement weather”]) to a place (“*o canal*” [“the channel” or “passage”]) is both sober and suggestive. Nemésio achieves this characterization with a mere three tonic syllables, with two anotic syllables allowing for breadth and movement. The place referenced in the title (the Faial channel, sometimes extending to the São Jorge channel) acquires a symbolic meaning, not merely in its synecdochical reference to the ocean but also in its abstract allusion to any sort of narrow, agitated space that is hostile (“*mau*”) to human life (“*tempo*”). In sonic terms, the title is evenly distributed between a closed *t*, *p*, and *c*, the nasalized *m*, *em*, *no*, and *na*, and a liquid *l* that gives the final syllable a lingering quality that suggests a nostalgic evocation of the vast ocean. The vowels used in the title are mostly variations on the open *a*, which appears in both the title’s open and closed syllables, being made into a somber diphthong in the opening *au* but opened to possible palatalization in the final *al*. The title’s other tonic syllable appears closed and nasalized in *em* and is likewise closed in the penultimate syllable, *ca*. This concludes a series of closed sounds that begins with *em* and runs through the muted *oo* sounds of *po* and *no*. Notably, these *oo* sounds are pronounced in the Azores as *uu*, leaving *po* open to a possible pronunciation as *pnu* and the syllable’s possible silencing by the closed vowel that supports (or does not support) it. The novel’s title is one of sharp but restrained vocal turns. It pivots around the vowel sounds of *a* and *e*, which circumscribe movement, and is shadowed by its frequently nasalized vowels, along with the tonic position of the *u* in the diphthong, this in a unique, (nearly) hidden position. The title’s prosodic features confirm its literal and analogical meanings, and grant it poetic and narrative potential.

A title can relate to a text in a number of ways, particularly in the case of a novel. Titles may summarize, present a program, symbolize, work anaphorically, refer to a character or action, etc. In *Mau Tempo no Canal*, the title's metonymical current of alliteration and assonance creates and initiates a unique mode of metaphorical construction: chapter I tells of a hurricane-force wind that interrupts Margarida Dulmo and João Garcia's romance idyll, staged by the wall of Margarida's house. The cyclone gives way in the following chapters, making way for the true storm of the novel: Diogo Dulmo returns home, intoxicated as usual after his night-time wanderings, and violently hits his daughter with a switch. The real "mau tempo" here is not the cyclone, but Margarida's thwarted love, which is complicated by familial rivalries, social inequalities, and problems internal to the protagonists' families. In this way the title transports us to dark psychological realms and spaces of social conflict that isolate individuals as if they were islands. Characters attempt to connect with each other but they become disoriented, fail to recognize each other, and are tied to the volcano that dominates the landscape (this is the Pico volcano, or the volcano that we each keep inside of us), or are thrust into the channels that can separate or unite individuals, hostile domestic waters that can impede one's access to the wider ocean—which like the channel can be a place of encounter, loss, or separation, as the author states at the end of the novel.

Margarida and João's love affairs dominate the novel from beginning to end, from their first encounter to their final meeting, which takes place after a long period of absence during which they had each married another (Margarida had wed the Baron of Urzelina's son, André Barreto, and João had married Laura Dutra, the goddaughter and heiress of D. Catarina Amélia). Margarida and João meet each other by chance, on a packet boat sailing to Lisbon. On this occasion, Damião Serpa, a mutual friend, insists to Margarida that, "[i]sto é um mundo de enganos e desencontros [...]. O João Garcia afinal só gostou de uma mulher, que foi de si" (*Mau Tempo* 344)⁴ ["This is a world of dashed hopes and missed opportunities [...]. When all is said and done, João Garcia loved only one woman in his life—you"]. After hearing Damião's comment, Margarida, "aproveitando a passagem de um criado que levava uma garrafa de água mineral e um copo numa bandeja, chamou-o [...] —Viu alguém meu por aí? O sr. Barão ou o sr. André Barreto...?" (344) [Margarida, "taking advantage of the fact that a servant was just passing by carrying a tray with a bottle of mineral water and a glass, called him: 'Did

you see any member of my family walking around? The *Senhor* Baron or *Senhor* Barreto...?"]. This apparently insignificant statement, in which the glass and the bottle of mineral water are marginal elements without narrative function, in reality refers to something of great importance. The words “alguém meu” do not refer to the idea of possession—while the question of objects is central to this moment in the plot, the idea of affection as possession does not prevail here—but to a generic affective attraction, directed in the novel toward one’s family, land, and people, and formative of an entire society of which the novel’s characters are part, as Margarida specifies during the *Festas do Espírito Santo* [Holy Ghost Celebrations]. Returning to the glass and the bottle, these point to two narrative features of the novel: 1) the plot’s constant meanderings, which diverge from the classical narrative syntagma that would maintain and respect the integrity of novelistic structure; 2) the use of seemingly unconnected, minor details to effect these narrative meanderings, in contrast to what occurs in the realist novel, where details are incorporated as elements of a “realistic” depiction of the world, though they are granted no further function.

These features of *Mau Tempo* have two logical consequences in terms of the novel’s narrative logic: 1) they result in figurative realities that are created but then abandoned, as potential narratives left in suspense, or islands of meaning—this note of suspense points to an essential incompleteness, or engages in a kind of provisional metaphorical suggestion; 2) they make the novel’s representational content more dense, giving the text a weighty, resistant quality. In the absence of a naturalistic, coherent mode of representation, the novel utilizes chance (no less impressionistic than “realistic” depiction) to create a powerful stream of dispersed fragments of meaning whose connections are only partially visible, but which have strong contextual and representational potential.

Just as the hurricane serves as the novel’s initial metaphor, describing an agitated affective climate (the three successive waves of plague that sweep through the island comprise the novel’s next examples of “mau tempo”), the ship, described in the epilogue, serves as a metaphor for evasion and separation. In reality, *Mau Tempo no Canal* has two endings, or rather, there are two parts to its epilogue: the bullfight (which prolongs the mood of happiness—“islands of happiness appearing periodically over the course of the novel—but ends in the fatal impaling of a bullfighter, which moves the text from a major to a minor key, to use a musical terminology not inappropriate for Nemésio’s writing) and

the departure for mainland Europe, which ends the novel, symptomatically, in transit. This closing scene recalls the beginning of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* and Frédéric Moreau's first encounter with Mme. Arnoux on board the *Ville-de-Monterau*, with a novel's worth of disappointment issuing from their first enchanted meeting. In *Mau Tempo no Canal*, written almost a century after Flaubert's novel, disappointment enters into Margarida and João's maritime reunion, not because of the fact of their encounter but because of the sadness that is tied to such meetings. Margarida's final encounter with João is the opposite of her meeting with Damião Serpa. It implies that Margarida's future will be one of meaningless alienation, a modernist theme—Margarida and André, her husband, rarely cross paths and barely speak to each other in this pretense toward a "happy ending," in which the serpent-shaped ring, which ties together the novel's beginning and end, assumes the role of protagonist. For his part, João is granted a probable cosmopolitan future (another modernist theme), as he plans to travel to the United States and work for the *Sociedade de Metafísica*,⁵ "que montara um escritório importante num arranha-céus de Chicago" (339) ["which had rented space in an important skyscraper in Chicago"]. The importance of this seemingly understated finale on board the packet boat is underscored by the importance in the novel of other maritime scenes, including Margarida's decision to hop on board the whalers' boat to São Jorge in the dramatic, euphoric chapter "Barcarola." On this voyage, Margarida, actively participating in a whaling expedition, unknowingly engages in her life's most significant act and thereafter sleeps in the room of the Baron of Urzelina's son, whom she will later marry. This marriage is communicated to the reader three months after the fact, in the novel's final scene on board the *San Miguel*. The euphoria of the bullfight on Terceira, which symbolizes Margarida's ties to her land and its customs, is past. Her connection with her homeland will now be undone—temporarily as far as her travels are concerned (the ship is traveling from Angra to Lisbon) but definitively in terms of the text's deeper meaning, as she demonstrates by throwing the serpent-shaped ring she has always worn into the sea. This is not a flight from Margarida's past but rather a sign of her estrangement (yet another modernist theme), or better yet an evasion, as Damião Serpa demonstrates in his talk with the servant on board. This scene evokes a second nineteenth-century writer, Eça de Queiroz. While the plots of *Mau Tempo no Canal* and *Os Maias* are distinct, the ending of *Mau Tempo* recalls that of Eça's novel, in which Carlos and João da Ega admit their failed aspirations. Margarida's recollection is less honest and more nostalgic, almost Romantic in

tone, with the protagonist talking with a young passenger who is an aspiring poet, which leads to the final scene with André and the ring.

It is clear that if *Mau Tempo no Canal* is built according to the syntagmatic logic that is generally used in novelistic construction and that relies on metonymy as its most traditional textual tool, Nemésio's use of metaphor is significant in terms of its anticipation of an emerging novelistic style, its opening of metaphors to symbolic elements, and its indication of a new form of novelistic construction that I term *fictional metaphor*.

Iridescence and Symbolism

It is worthwhile to return to the beginning of the novel in order to consider its sequential organization from the opening phrase on, accentuating its *voltas*—the twists and turns mentioned earlier in my analysis—as contributing to the text's predominantly negative tone:

—Mas não voltas tão cedo...

João Garcia garantiu que sim, que voltava. Os olhos de Margarida tinham um lume evasivo, de esperança que serve a sua hora. Eram fundos e azuis, debaixo de arcadas fortes. Baixou-os um instante e tornou:

—Quem sabe...?

—Demoro-me pouco... palavra! Cursos de milicianos... Moeda fraca! Para a infantaria, três meses. Se não fecharem os concursos para secretários-gerais, então aproveito. Bem sei que há só três vagas e mais de cem bacharéis à boa vida... Mas não tenho medo das provas. Bastam algumas semanas para me preparar a fundo... rever a legislação.

Entrava em pormenores. Margarida ouvia-o agora vagamente distraída, de cabeça voltada às nuvens, como quem tem uma coisa que incomoda no pescoço, um mau jeito. O cabelo, um pouco solto, ficava com toda a luz da lâmpada defronte, de maneira que a testa reflectia o vaivém da sombra ao vento.

Estavam quase ao alcance da respiração um do outro: ela debruçada num muro de pedra de lava; ele na rampa de terra que bordava a estrada ali larga, acabando com a fita de quintarolas que vinha das Angústias até quase ao fim do Pasteleiro e dava ao trote dos cavalos das vitórias da Horta um bater surdo, encaixado. (35)

["But you won't be back soon..."]

João Garcia promised that of course he would. Margarida's eyes, deep and

blue under the bold arches of her brows, betrayed a yearning for lands faraway, a momentary spark of hope. She lowered them for a moment and went on:

“And I’m supposed to believe that?”

“It’ll only be a while, I promise! The course for commissioned officers will be over before you know it; it the infantry, only three months! If applications for general secretary to the civil governor are still being accepted, I’ll apply. I know there are only three openings and more than a hundred idle university graduates applying, but I’m not afraid of the exams. I only need a few weeks to know my stuff.”

He went into detail. Margarida listened to him somewhat absentmindedly now, her eyes on the clouds as if she had a kink in her neck. Her hair fell free, receiving the full light of the lamp, causing her face to reflect the play of shadows in the wind. They were so close they could almost feel each other’s breath: she, leaning on a volcanic wall; he, standing on the graded patch bordering the road that divided the strip of small quintas stretching from Angústias up to almost the end of Pasteleiro and muffling the trot of the horses drawing the victorias of Horta.]

Here Nemésio focuses on the lovers’ distinct attitudes—Margarida’s somber expectation, and the redundant, dry, and unsentimental details of João’s speech. More importantly, the author focuses on the following essential details: Margarida’s evasive and distracted behavior, the wall that separates the two lovers, João’s position “na rampa,” able to either ascend or descend, and the description and naming of a land that is enlivened by signs of life (such as the evocation of the “vitórias da Horta”) but that likewise silences these signs (with “um bater surdo,” for example). A hidden but real anxiety with regard to the future manifests itself in a generalized sobriety and closed position toward the world, suggested by the word *encaixado*. Margarida and João’s nascent interpersonal and erotic relationship is described by the phrase “estavam quase ao alcance da respiração um do outro” [“they were so close they could almost feel each other’s breath”], with the word *quase* suggesting an impeded or stunted quality with resonances in Portuguese modernist prose. It is the horses (“os cavalos”) that eventually move, granting the scene a repetitive tone (repetitive with regard to the past but not the future) where it was once inchoate, a tone that harmonizes with the Margarida’s kinetic position, “debruçada ... na pedra de lava” [“leaning on a volcanic wall”].

Rather than insisting on the opening scene’s importance in generating narrative motion, I would like to characterize this portion of the novel as announcing the metaphorical construction to occur in Nemésio’s text, here

centered upon Margarida's eyes, which have been studied by David Mourão-Ferreira (216). Mourão-Ferreira focuses on her eyes' "lume evasivo" [literally, "evasive fire"] as a partial indication of Margarida's future and of the passage of time, further indicated by her hair ("um pouco solto" ["a little loose"]) and her position. Margarida "ficava com toda a luz da lâmpada defronte, de maneira que a testa reflectia o vaivém da sombra ao vento" ["receiving the full light of the lamp, causing her face to reflect the play of shadows in the wind"]. The metaphorical use of the word *lume* and the movements of shadow Nemésio describes as crisscrossing Margarida's face in a random fashion, propelled by the wind, contribute to the outlining of the protagonist's personality and behavior, which likewise oscillate between sun and shadow (Margarida has her "cabeça voltada às nuvens" ["her eyes," literally, "her head, on the clouds"]).

In his long and enlightening essay on Nemésio, Óscar Lopes identifies two stylistic characteristics of the author's writing, "a comparação e a pormenorização" (758) ["comparison and use of detail"].⁶ Having already alluded to both of these features in terms of style and broader narrative elaboration, I will now consider what Lopes enumerates as the key characteristics of Nemésio's writing in *Mau Tempo no Canal*: 1) Nemésio's understanding of "a metáfora, ou translação designatória" ["the metaphor, or designating translation"] as a "coisa física iluminada pela incidência de um sentido, um projecto, um movimento que a orienta, e que apenas analogicamente se exprime" ["the physical thing illuminated by the incidence of a meaning, a project, a movement that orients it and which expresses itself only analogically"]; 2) Nemésio's use of analogy, understood both in terms of comparison and metaphor. Lopes argues that for Nemésio, analogy "funciona como construção de um objecto, abstraído de (mas não necessariamente menos real que) os objectos comparados" ["functions like the construction of an object, abstracted from (but not necessarily less real than) the compared objects"]; 3) Nemésio's use of certain "metáforas irradiantes" ["irradiating metaphors"] that "mergulham em toda a ambiência da narrativa" ["plunge into the entire environment of the narrative"] and have the broad effect of creating modules of equivalence; 4) Nemésio's tendency toward detail, what Lopes terms his "caça à minúcia" ["the hunt for detail"]. This "dom de observação reconstrutora" ["power of reconstructing observation"] is manifested in the author's continual reference to a "chamado substantivo comum" ["so-called common noun"] that "está exactamente ao mesmo nível de abstracção (e de analitismo generativo) das suas determinações adjectivais, referindo-se sempre a uma só

dessas determinações, com exclusão das outras” [“which is exactly at the same level of abstraction (and generative analysis) as its adjectival determinations, referring to only one of those determinations, to the exclusion of the others”]; 5) Nemésio’s use of chapter—the majority of the novel is composed of chapters “que se diriam outros tantos contos com o seu épos, o seu ritmo narrativo próprio, sem prejuízo de constituírem como que unidades celulares do mesmo tecido” [“which might be referred to as short stories, each with its *epos*, its own rhythm, without running the risk of constituting cellular units of the same fabric”], with the rest constituting “uma espécie de enciclopédia romanceada de geografia física e humana, histórica, etnográfica e etnolinguística das ilhas centrais dos Açores” [“a kind of novelized encyclopedia of physical and human, historical, ethnographic, and ethnolinguistic geography of the central islands of the Azores”].⁷

In making his argument, Lopes draws principally on the opening of Nemésio’s novel. As such, I would like to verify Óscar Lopes’s fifth and final observation, which is central to my understanding of narrative syntagma in *Mau Tempo no Canal* and how it is interrupted (or even determined) by Nemésio’s occasional use of more sharply drawn imagery. The chapter-stories (*capítulos-contos*) identified by Lopes can be effectively considered “unidades celulares” [“cellular units”] (Lopes’s term) due to their organic construction, which, as discussed earlier, suspend meaning rather than closing it off. This organic quality conditions the novel’s descriptive chapter titles (“O Despertar” [“The Awakening”], “Uma Caçada aos Pombos” [“A Pigeon Hunt”]), as well as its analogical (“Pastoral,” “Despedidas-de-Verão” [literally, “Summer Farewells,” an expression used for chrysanthemums] and symbolic titles (“A Íris da Aranha” [“The Spider’s Iris”], “Barcarola”). Instead of closing in on themselves, the chapters flow into each other, forming a kind of syntagmatic chain—this obviously being the case as they are chapters in a long narrative. However, the chapters are self-standing in semantic terms, with their titles not necessary relating to each other. This is a quite novel feature of *Mau Tempo no Canal*.

Indeed, the narrative proceeds such that: 1) individual chapters may take on themes that are not addressed elsewhere (see, for example, Mateus Dulmo’s *quattuor*, which is enthusiastically planned for the arrival of Roberto Clark and never referred to again, except for a brief mention of the obstacles imposed by the plague that strikes the island). These themes are like half-sewn pieces of fabric, taking on an appealingly incomplete, sketched-out quality; 2) temporal ellipses obscure portions of the plot (for instance,

Margarida's love affairs, whether it be with João, which is reduced in the novel to their letters and casual meetings, or with André, this being narrated in brief, incomplete verbal exchanges and vaguely described suggestions of mutual affection), frustrating the reader's expectations and inserting him or her into an environment in which certain points are ignored or do not receive satisfactory explanation; 3) the novel exhibits a certain chronological discontinuity, which favors the understanding of plot elements in isolation (for example, the trip to Caldeira, of which only the departure is described, and of which only a brief episode between André and Margarida is narrated after the fact; see also the rebuilding of Roberto's boat, enthusiastically planned but not mentioned again until it is crossing the channel). This discontinuity favors discrete narrative strands, symbolic suggestions, and passing allusions, creating the overall impression of a narrative that is drawn in small strokes, formed piece by small piece. In contrast, the novel presents us with three narrative sequences that obey a strictly chronological order. These are Manuel Bana's sickness and treatment by Margarida and Roberto, the episode of the whaling expedition, in which Margarida accompanies the whalers in their hurried chase across the channel, and Margarida's stay at Urzelina, which the author magnificently describes as alternating between the emptiness of her anxious wait, and the abundance of comings and goings that occupy Margarida on a day-to-day level, though they fail to give her the sudden sense of plenitude she experienced during the whaling expedition.

When Óscar Lopes refers to stories or cellular units in *Mau Tempo no Canal* in the broader context of his analysis of the use of metaphor in Nemésio's fiction, he effectively argues that each chapter has its own *tempo*, with chapters sometimes appearing as brief lyrical compositions, albeit lyrics that are animated by the *epos* that renders the novel a lyrical recounting of the human adventure and its heroic conflicts. It is in this sense that we can designate the novel's chapters as narrative islands (from the perspective of the critical reader, the chapters are complete, self-sustaining entities, even if linked to each other), isolated texts according to a pointillistic conception of the novel, narrative phases simultaneously functioning as nodes and suspense-inducing instances of deferred meaning.

The chapter titles of *Mau Tempo no Canal* likewise work to defer meaning (nearly separating discrete elements of signification) as nominal designations from which the chapter's metaphorical and symbolic intention emerge. The novel's thirty-six chapters and epilogue can be logically grouped, as with

the six “Nocturnos,” as well as the chapters whose titles evoke pastoral-floral or animal themes. This final group, which contains the least number of chapters, references snakes and pigeons and repeatedly alludes to spiders, with the chapters themselves (as opposed to the chapter titles) mentioning other animals as well. Spiders are of special importance in that they contribute to the author’s metaphorical presentation of the idea of iridescence—as does the figure of Margarida who, in one scene, after glancing at a wall, moves her eyes away from the light of a lamp and lets her hair fall over her face, thereby capturing (using the inverse of the spider’s procedure as described in chapter IX) the surrounding light and objects in the “web” of her hair.⁸ The comparison of eyes and strands of hair, on the one hand, to spiders and their webs, on the other, is not without meaning—both pairings are engaged in observation and retention, in relating to the world and eventually capturing elements of it.

The four chapters in *Mau Tempo no Canal* whose titles refer to spiders are: “Uma Aranha e uma Teia” (V) [“A Spider and a Web”], “Outra Aranha e outra Teia” (VI) [“Another Spider and Another Web”], “A Íris da Aranha” (XII) [“The Spider’s Iris”], and “As Aranhas Fecharam as Teias” (XX) [“The Spiders Closed Their Webs”]. It is not by chance that Nemésio follows this final chapter with “Uma Caçada aos Pombos” [“A Pigeon Hunt”], which inverts the animal symbolism by invoking the pigeon’s passivity (though it maintains a focus on the ideas of capture and destruction) and suddenly quickens the pace of the plot, which had moved slowly in the previous, somewhat dream-like chapters. In the first of the spider-themed chapters, which follows the first nocturne, the action begins to quicken from its thus far deliberate pace. We witness the worry Henriqueta, João García’s aunt, feels because she knows that his mother is dying of the plague that is ravaging the island. Upset, she decides to take the apparently unnecessary step of cleaning the house by airing it out. As she does this, she thinks of her former sister-in-law Emília, who had been rejected by her husband (Januário) because he suspected—though he had no proof—that she had been with another man. As a result, João, Emília’s son with Januário, was deprived of a relationship with his mother, though she lived nearby. In this scene Henriqueta is the spider; assailed by remorse, she remembers the false-witness she bore as one of the actions she took to convince her brother to throw Emília out, all because the man who had courted Emília before her marriage to Januário had not chosen Henriqueta once Emília was taken. Bitterness, envy, and remorse give this chapter its dark tone (which Henriqueta’s misplaced desire to clean fails to

remedy), which ends with the woman who had wronged Emília, hidden in her *faialense*-style cloak, praying on her knees before Emília's lonely, closed coffin.

In the second of these chapters Januário, a solicitor, is the spider. Januário will meet with two important clients: the Avelars, who have loaned money to Margarida's father, Diogo Dulmo, who has repaid the sum, and D. Carolina Amélia, who has made unpaid loans to the Dulmo family. Januário, who in earlier years had worked as a clerk for the Dulmos, but who was eventually dismissed, convinces his clients to take legal action against his former employers. Januário later goes to see Pretextato, a friend of his brother Ângelo (whose homosexuality is largely unaccepted by the community), to learn the latest news, and he hears of his son João's love for Margarida Dulmo. Januário declares his support for his son but understands the relationship to be nothing more than amusement, stating the following: "Que namore, que se goze da mocidade! [...] Naquelas idades, quanto mais, melhor [...]. Mas casar?! Tó rola! Não é o filho de meu pai que mandava formar o João para genro do traste do Dulmo." ["Let him sow a few wild oats, enjoy his youth! [...] At that age the more the merrier [...]. But marry? Nonsense! It's not going to be my father's son, who saw to João's education, who's going to let him go and be the son-in-law of that scamp Dulmo"]. But the narrator notes: "Mas havia nos protestos de Januário um timbre agravado, longínquo, como um cristal em que se toca sem querer e que se abafa com dois dedos" (*Mau Tempo* 87-88) ["But there was in Januário's protestations a hurt and distant note, like that of a crystal glass that one unwittingly touches but whose ringing can be silenced with the mere touch of two fingers"]. Januário's dark intentions in this chapter are curiously interrupted by a brief eruption of iridescence, which is announced by a comparison (both auditory and visual) with a crystal. The gradations of light capable of illuminating the shadows, if only to render these darker by comparison, appear and disappear as quickly as they appear, though they reverberate in the eyes and ears of the reader.

Chapter XII, "A Íris da Aranha" ["The Spider's Iris"] is the novel's primary example of dark iridescence; it presents Januário's family in the bucolic environment of their Canada dos Fetos country house, but Januário, the head of the family, is absent, preferring to isolate himself at their other home, Ribeira dos Flamengos, which belonged to the Dulmos during the period in which Januário worked for the family. Januário enters the house's mysterious office, where he opens a chest. Instead of examining the gold bars contained within, he focuses his attention on the contents of a small, green silk sack: dried vio-

lets, seashells, a photograph. The photo is of Catarina Clark, Margarida's mother, the woman Januário intended to marry when he was an employee at her father's firm. The frustration of these matrimonial ambitions has left Januário with feelings of bitterness, resentment, and hatred. The golden vision that confronts Januário is not that of the gold he has accumulated in the intervening years but of a woman he loved but lost, preserved by the photographer's lens and the image hidden away in the darkness of the chest, as well as in the depths of Januário's frustrated desire.

The fourth of the spider-themed chapters, chapter XX, "As Aranhas Fecharam as Teias" ["The Spiders Closed Their Webs"], does not appear until the second half of the novel. Jacinto, the brother with whom Januário had been on bad terms for some time, convinces João Garcia on the Praia do Almoxarife to make his relationship with Laura, D. Carolina Amélia's god-daughter, official. Significantly, Januário, putting aside vengeance in favor of further enriching his family, had already advised D. Carolina to leave the better part of her fortune to Laura. With the chapter's "spiders" having begun to spin their webs, the narrative rhythm proceeds at an even pace, and Nemésio presents us with three pivotal events that mark the rest of the novel: the sickness of Manuel Bana, the Dulmos' old servant, who is struck by the plague and treated by Margarida; the great fire that strikes Horta and destroys Januário Garcia's house (along with his office and its "treasures," which Januário had jealously contemplated); and, finally, the seizure of the boats, the culmination of certain individuals' previously described spider-like scheming.

It is at this moment that the whale appears in the channel, eliciting the islanders' enthusiasm and the preparation of its fishermen. Margarida, who is on the island of Pico, sees the commotion of the men and tries to stop them, since they are legally prohibited from using their boats. But Margarida is consumed by the tide of excitement, and she lets herself be carried on the waves of enthusiasm of these maritime people, who are responding to an epic impulse:

Mas o João da Cezilha, entusiasmado com a manobra, deixava correr. A canoa ia quase à bolina arrasada, e a lancha, embora cada vez mais recuada, parecia andar bem. Margarida, agora embalada naquela surpresa de vento, vela, água e miragem de baleia, ia deixando-se levar. A canoa, às vezes adornada da manobra, roçava a borda no gume fresco e vivo do mar. As nuvens açorianas, a princípio aguçadas e aos pares,

*(Nuvens paradas, cor de cobre,
É temporal que se descobre).*

deslaçavam-se agora finas e leves, como se o Pico fosse um açafate de penas sopradas. Vinha de terra um cheirinho a figueira e a bafo de lava quente. E, como *um belo arco-íris*, armado para os lados de São Jorge, *arroxearse* o horizonte, o João da Cezilha, voltando-se para Margarida com cara de criança apanhada de boca na botija, disse manhosamente:

—Hã... menina Bidinha! Olha o arco-da-velha... A menina estreia-se cum sorte!

Manhã cum arco, mal vai ò barco!

S'ã tarde vem, é pra tê bem!

“Nã s'afreime...! O sr. Robertinho tá caise a chigar à fala... A menina vai aqui a desbancar!... Vai mais a gente...”

Semelhante voz, ouvida naquela canoa comprada com dinheiro dos seus, naquele mar verde e belo que parecia o quintal da sua casa, solta por aquele homem agigantado e peludo e apesar disso dócil como um menino ou como um pescador de Tiberíade, soava-lhe lá de outro mundo, do fim da memória e da vida, como se Maria das Angústias ou a Mariana do Pico cantassem para a adormecer. E o tio Roberto, perdido naquela lanchinha ronceira, pareceu-lhe recuado aos tempos em que uma carta de Londres, com selo de Jorge V, os punha lá em casa à espera dele. Sentada no banco do mestre de uma baleeira do Pico, de costas para Campo Raso, Margarida ia talvez na nau do capitão Fernão Dulmo, o seu tetravô flamengo, aproada ao mormaço e ao fantasma de uma terra suposta, para a banda das Ilhas da Fortuna... (259; my emphasis in main text)

[But João da Cezilha, excited about the maneuver, continued on almost at full sail; the launch, even though falling farther and farther behind, seemed to be holding its own. Margarida, lulled by the exhilaration of wind, sails, and water and by the prospect of seeing a whale, was carried away in the moment. Certain maneuvers caused the whaleboat to heel, its rim skirting the fresh, live waters of the sea. The Azorean clouds, at first hanging in pairs—

Clouds, copper-colored and still

Harbingers of an approaching storm—

now broke up into light, fleeting wisps, as if Pico were a basket of feathers blown by the wind. From the land came a pungent smell of fig tree and a whiff of hot lava. Towards São Jorge, as a beautiful rainbow emblazoned the horizon, João da Cezilha, turning toward Margarida with the expression of a child caught red-handed, slyly remarked:

"Ahn, miss? Look at the Old Lady's Arci... It means you're very lucky on your first whale hunt!

*With an early rainbow, it's hard to remain afloat;
with a late one, you'll fill your boat.*

And don't you be scared!... Senhor Robertinho is almost within hearing distance... And you're very safe here with us."

A voice resounded over the beautiful green sea that seemed like her own backyard, and reached her ears in the whaleboat bought with family money. Coming from that gigantic, hairy man, a man as docile as a child or a Tiberias fisherman, that voice seemed to issue from another world, from the depths of memory and life, as if Maria das Angústias or Mariana do Pico were singing lullabies to her. And Uncle Roberto, lost aboard the slow little launch that could not even be seen anymore, seemed a throwback to the time when a letter from London, stamped with the likeness of George V, brought the family news of his arrival. Sitting on the skipper's bench of a Pico whaleboat, her back turned to Campo Raso, Margarida had the impression that she was sailing on the ship of Captain Fernão Dulmo, her Flemish forebear, heading toward the ghost of a hypothetical land all enveloped in hot mist and lying in the proximity of the Fortunate Islands..."]

The rainbow that appears on the scene is like the sky's blessing for this display of men acting in concert with nature, casting off the dark glances of the web-spinning spiders. Roberto is left behind at the boat launch, and Margarida gives herself "à sua gente" (177) ["to her people"], sailing with them across the channel in the direction of São Jorge. This announces both the evolution of the plot and describes the text's metaphorical construction: the boat represents man, the sea journey, the adventure of the community, and the contrasting clear and stormy skies the iridescence that itself stands as a metaphor for life in both its clear and joyful, its dark and difficult moments. Further, the many colors that appear in the sky over the channel can be reduced to one—purple—as if to evoke the dried violets found by Januário, made cold by the frustrated humiliation he felt before the Clarks, a family now reduced to Catarina in her solitude, and with an uncertain future in Margarida, in whose life there is also much violet.

This is a multiple metaphor, pointing in more than one direction. For Margarida the euphoria of the whaling expedition is followed by a *sui generis* religious experience. After her communion with the fishermen in the cavern on São Jorge, where they all sleep upon reaching shore, Margarida stays at

Urzelina, anxiously awaiting a boat (or following the metaphor, her re-encounter with her own self) that arrives in the form of uncle Roberto, robbed of his life; he who came like Lohengrin to rescue her leaves in his swan boat and is now truly exiled and lost. Returning to São Jorge after experiencing the bed and table destined for her as part of a life with André Barreto, Margarida enters the Campo Raso house (on which she had recently turned her back, during the whale hunt) to pay tribute to her uncle, and thinks: “Afinal continuava presa às suas relações de família como uma mosca tonta à *teia de aranha irisada*!” (320; my emphasis) [“In the end, she was as much a prisoner of family relations as a besotted fly caught in the iridescent spider web!”]

Consciousness of self, of one’s anxieties and limitations, of the contradictions inherent in being a human open to the world and to others, marks Margarida Dulmo, or rather allows her to think through her own existence, which she at once conceives of in the somber purple tones of the bouquet of chrysanthemums she places on Roberto’s casket, or in lighter shades, in a state of constant bodily and intellectual motion, which various other figures in the novel describe as “um mar de alegria” (130) [“a sea of joy”].

Snakes, Spiders, Whales, Pigeons, and Bulls

Mau Tempo no Canal features a great number of characters, though the principal ones can be reduced to a dozen: Margarida and her lovers (João Garcia, her first love in the novel; André, whom she marries; and Roberto, her uncle from London and the illegitimate son of her maternal grandfather, with whom Margarida has a close, formative, affective relationship). In João’s family, the important characters are Januário the father, Henriqueta the aunt, Emília the mother (who, though she dies early on from the plague ravaging the island, continues to influence the thoughts and behavior of many of the novel’s characters). In Margarida’s family, the central figures are Diogo and Mateus, respectively her father and paternal uncle, and Manuel Bana the family servant. Margarida’s mother Catarina, and her grandfather Charles Clark are secondary figures, as are her siblings Pedro and Cecília. In João Garcia’s family, characters of secondary importance include his sister Carlota, his uncles Ângelo and Jacinto, his grandmother Maria Florinda and his aunt Secundina. Other secondary figures in *Mau Tempo* include Laura, João’s eventual wife, João’s friend Damião Serpa, and André Barreto’s parents, the Baron and Baroness of Urzelina. More importantly, there are the whalers (particularly Tio Amaro, Intavante, and João da Cezilha), as well as figures from the past,

including Ana Silveira (Roberto's mother) and, above all, Margarida's grandmother and namesake, Margarida Terra, whom the heroine resembles greatly.

On the level of metaphor, certain characters are evoked analogically, in terms of their behavior, context, or thoughts, through culturally significant animal symbols. This does not amount to an attempt by the author to establish a relationship between animals and humans; rather, it represents an effort to describe characters in the language of animal symbolism.

We saw this with the spider, whose symbolic significance Nemésio acknowledges through repeated textual references. As a metaphor, the spider is frequently evoked over the course of the novel, at times humorously, as when the author writes of the "desolação de João Garcia no meio dos aranhões da família" (153) ["João Garcia's desolation amidst the large spiders of his family"]. Additionally, there is a particularly suggestive moment in the novel when an actual spider appears: João, trying to reestablish contact with Margarida after receiving a letter in which she breaks off their relationship, encounters her and her uncle Roberto on horseback. The three talk, though not to the satisfaction of the spurned lover. Afterward, João wanders aimlessly for a time, stopping by a fountain. As Nemésio writes,

no bebedoiro luzia *uma espiralzinha alaranjada e hesitante* no meio de *uma teia de aranha*: era a primeira lâmpada da rede, num grampo. A água subia escura até aos varões de ferro que serviam de apoio aos potes; a grossa bica de chumbo gorgolejava no silêncio. (111; my emphasis)

[Above the drinking trough and attached to a small hook, there shone a little yellowish, hesitant spider in the middle of a web. The water rose dark up to the iron bars that supported the water pails; the thick lead spout gurgled in the silence.]

Here João's unhappy state is represented by his vision of thirst-quenching water that, flowing from the fountain, is wrapped in a spider's web. This apparently minor descriptive detail confirms the tangled web in which João is caught.

Critics have frequently referenced Margarida's serpent-shaped ring, which she wears throughout the novel. It is the ring that gives the novel's first chapter, "A Serpente Cega" ["The Blind Serpent"], its name, and it is part of Margarida's last important act of the novel, when she throws it into the sea from the deck of the *San Miguel*. The reason given for Margarida's action is the connection she felt to the ring when the serpent had only one emerald

eye. As a surprise, André Barreto has new stones affixed to the snake's eyes, and from this point Margarida ceases to think of the ring as her own—or rather she rejects the new vision (the new eyes) the serpent (or is it she?) acquires. The symbolism here is multiple (there is the snake represented in the ring, the ring as a representation of itself and as feature of the plot, and the ring as the novel's final narrative element). Moreover, the ring allows its wearer to choose (or not to choose) between the snake's Eastern association with wisdom, and its Christian suggestion of sin, as João Garcia observes:

[U]ma serpente cega enroscara-se à sua mocidade; havia uma pedra preciosa sumida no seu destino, sem a qual aquele bicho perverso e encantado não largaria o enguiço. E naquele ninho de víbora—como a maçã rubra, sadia, na boca da serpente do emblema da farmácia do tio—, Margarida parecia aninhada à moda das mulheres do Faial. (203)

[A blind serpent had coiled itself around his youth, and there was a precious stone missing from his destiny, a stone without which that perverse and enchanted creature would not break its spell. And in the vipers' nest—like the red, fresh-looking apple in the serpent's mouth in the sign at his uncle's pharmacy—Margarida seemed to be nestled, in the same way as the women of Fayal.]

To continue João Garcia's line of reasoning, Margarida's ring might alternately represent the will to action of a woman who, like Eve, diverges from God's original plan for creation and chooses *eros* in the form of an apple. In this interpretation, the snake's form adds a phallic dimension and a potency that contrasts with João's weakness and excessive passivity, although it also may suggest a more innocuous, Bachelardian state of repose, with the animal (whether or not one believes it possesses a diabolical nature) curled up in a spiral. Evil represents one of the novel's decisive themes, along with love, the sea, family, and regional identification—with material goods intersecting with the final two themes, as well as proving important to the plot. Unexplained and possibly occult phenomena and objects are likewise important, with the stories of Grete Spiel, the other-worldly lover, and Maria Rosinha da Glória, the nun kidnapped by Margarida's English ancestor,⁹ as well as the heroine's talismans, providing examples.

However, what is really significant in terms of the serpent-shaped ring's symbolic and narrative role is the relationship established between its "eyes"

and those of Margarida. The ring, a “jóia tão bonita” [“the beautiful jewel”], as Margarida describes it to the Baron of Urzelina, has its aesthetic value, but it is in its eyes that its intelligence is suggested (as in the novel’s penultimate page), along with its capacity to see worldly phenomena as they are refracted in its jeweled eyes and to share in Margarida’s vision of the world. As Margarida’s uncle Roberto says, the ring is “um segundo Camões” [“a second Camoens”]. Nemésio, having dealt with Margarida’s eyes at the beginning of the novel, returns to this topic in the epilogue, when Margarida, after her encounter with Damião Serpa and her conversation with the young, unknown poet, rids herself of the ring. It is not the ring that Margarida rejects, but the new emeralds added to it, that is, the serpent’s new eyes, which she, possessed by a “furor irreprimível” [“irrepressible fury”], violently rubs against one of the ship’s ropes and in this way “faz saltar sucessiva e inexoravelmente” [“successively and inexorably dislodged from their settings”]. It is only after doing this, and only because she does not know how to explain the loss of the gems to her husband (she has again blinded the snake, giving the metaphor of the blind serpent new significance, and casting *a posteriori* a new light on the text), that Margarida throws the ring overboard, as if she were throwing herself into the ocean as well. This is the secret Margarida keeps in the novel’s concluding passage, as she lies in the bunk below her husband. The author narrates the scene as follows: “[A] pesar da *veilleuse* que arroxava a penumbra do camarote, sentia-se cega... cega como a serpente do anel [...] que àquela hora jazia [...] no mais secreto do mar” [“Despite the dimness of the night-light that cast a purplish tinge upon the darkness of the cabin, [Margarida] felt blind... blind as the ring serpent [...] which now lay [...] in the darkest depths of the sea”]. Here again Margarida thinks intensely, in purple (*roxo* meaning both “purple” and “intense”), and her thoughts here are a continuation of those she experienced with João Garcia in the novel’s open scene—though back then she was in love, whereas now she is buried in her own thoughts and focused on a pride not so much familial as having to do with her womanhood.

Notably, the novel’s animal imagery is not reducible to snakes and spiders. Other animals, with or without symbolic import, also play significant roles in *Mau Tempo*. A dog named Açor appears in the first chapter, when he senses that João is an intruder and tries to attack him, though later he becomes friendly. The beginning of the novel also features the noise of crickets, their song representing “o queixume da terra” [“lamentation of the land”]. Also in terms of insects, Catarina Clark Dulmo appears like “uma borboleta negra

naquele cachiné das noites longas” [“a black moth wrapped in that nocturnal shawl”] at the end of “Feria Sexta in Parasceve.” There are many horses as well—Margarida rides, her father gives her a mare, Jóia (though we do not know the origin of the first jewel, i.e., the serpent-shaped ring), and, after uncle Roberto arrives from London, he and Margarida frequently go riding through the streets and the countryside. In *Mau Tempo no Canal*, horses function as elements of characterization (denoting a character’s social class and habits) and are only in this way symbolic. And then there is the rat that gives Roberto the plague (perhaps by way of a flea, as Manuel Bana, who manages to recover from the plague, suggests), thereby leading to his death. This represents the power of chance. These are only some of the many animals that appear in the text as elements of the plot, as well as characteristic features of the environment described by the author.

Without a doubt, the most important animal that appears as a plot element in the novel is the whale, with the whale hunt occupying one of the novel’s most significant chapters in terms of the evolution of the narrative (“Barcarola”). While staying at the house in Urzelina after spending the night with the fishermen in the cavern following the excitement of the whale hunt, Margarida thinks, as she falls asleep, about João Garcia. It has been a long time since she wrote to him, explaining that she is being courted by another man; since then she has avoided João, who loved her but not in the way she wanted: “Noiva de quem?... Ah! Agora, sim; agora é que a resposta estava talvez dada para sempre, riscada no mar pela proa de uma canoa do Pico e pela escolha cega de uma baleia trancada ...” (*Mau Tempo* 279) [“I am going to be married. But to whom?... This time there was no mistake about it! The answer had been carved into the sea by the prow of a Pico whaleboat and by the blind choice of a harpooned whale ...”]. The whale hunt does much more in the novel than merely illustrate aspects of regional life; the whale, as the center of life in the channel (in this way additionally functioning as a regional motif), “traces” (just as a destiny is traced in the sky) in a “blind” way (corresponding to the blindness of the serpent-shaped ring) the path that takes Margarida from Pico to Urzelina, where she sleeps in what will become her marriage bed with André. And perhaps in this way we can understand why Margarida wishes at the end of the novel that the snake remain blind, just as the whale was blind, because both animals are instruments, originating in the realm of the emotions, of Margarida’s destiny, of which she becomes aware over the course of the narrative.

At times in *Mau Tempo* animals are referenced in a purely figurative sense, without a corresponding existence in reality. In these cases, the novel's communication of meaning (or rather, the text's metaphorical iridescence) is subtler, and sometimes even equivocal. This occurs, for example, in Nemésio's various, disconcerting references to worms, which are invoked at odd moments in the text, producing a mixture of stylistic registers and contributing to the highly original character of Nemésio's prose. The author describes Januário in his mysterious office in these terms: "[P]ara enganar amarguras, armara aquele coberto de minhocas e metera-se dentro" (134) ["To lay his sorrow to rest, he had dug up that worm's burrow and crawled inside"]. This is doubtless an allusion to Januário's bizarre treasure—the old photos and dried flowers he keeps in the small green silk bag. Later on, Nemésio transcribes Januário's thoughts, reporting that, "[e]ra essa minhoca de palmo que o cegara durante tanto tempo" (191) "it was that span-length worm blinding him for a long time"], in reference to his scheme to marry his son to Margarida in order to take his revenge on the Dulmos. What Januário fails to realize is that the metaphor of the worm—a small animal (*bichinho* in Portuguese)—may refer to young Margarida or to his homosexual brother Ângelo, whose relationship with Margarida's brother Pedro allows Januário to use him as an informant, providing him with information on the novel's heroine.

The worm is also a characteristic feature of the Garcias' discourse, appearing, for example, at an important moment in João's interior reflections. In chapter XV, "Carnet Mondain," João recalls the party during which he danced with Margarida as something between reality and a dream. The scene "parecia o desfecho de uma partida de cabra-cega" ["resembled the conclusion of a game of blindman's buff"], and he feels "a cintura de Margarida na sua mão" ["Margarida's waist under his hand"] and sees "o ombro nu a um palmo da sua respiração, outra vez a serpente cega do anel contra a sua mão esquerda, que conduzia os dedos dela como quem pega numa pluma" (151) ["her naked shoulder a handspan away from his lips, and again that blind serpent on her ring against his left hand holding her fingers as one holds a feather"]. Note that by contrast, and only two pages earlier, Margarida felt "a mão de Roberto firme e aberta" on her shoulder (145) ["Roberto's firm and open hand on her shoulder"]. João concludes:

O amor não queria confissões explicadas no vão de uma janela, nem alegorias literárias de um querer-bem concebido como matéria de um mito, ligado à rocha das ilhas e às noites de mau tempo no Canal. Assim perdera o segredo daquela ocasião de uma valsa, como quem deixa cair uma minhoca inevitável debaixo dos pés de uma rapariga que tinha mais com quem dançar. (152)¹⁰

[Love did not demand confessions at an open window. Nor did it call for literary allegories of a love conceived as the stuff of myth, a myth connected with the shores of the island and with stormy isles in the night. And thus he had lost his chance during the waltz, like one who obtrusively drops a worm at the feet of a girl who has another dance partner.]

Whatever the meaning attributed to the worm that is contrasted to the serpent here, whether figurative or more or less concrete, what is apparent is that João's dreaming collapses under the weight of Nemésio's characteristically sharp and even desolating (albeit light-hearted and well-intentioned) commentary.

Gulls are given special mention among the birds that appear in *Mau Tempo no Canal* and are described not only as beautiful and poetically linked to the sea but moreover as “cruéis e implacáveis, animais de luta e presa ... bichos de mortulho!” (317) [“cruel and implacable animals, equipped for fighting and preying... Ruthless predators”]. Nemésio makes this characterization following the news of Roberto's death, on Margarida's return voyage across the channel to the “ilha fantástica” [“fantastic island”] of Pico, during which she contemplates the gulls and listens to Vidinha, who tries to distract her. Gulls¹¹ are also mentioned in ironic and dream-like terms, during a scene in which João Garcia is confronted with an envelope with his name on it. To João it appears that:

concentrado naquele G de caligrafia elegante e um pouco espreiada de Margarida, apertado em seis letras que, por um movimento absurdo das suas associações mentais de acordado e daqueles traços de tinta ora enovelados ora firmes, lhe representavam o corpo e o ser dela, ficando apesar disso com uma significação absolutamente civil. [...] [E]le era aquela coisa arredondada ali no sobrescrito, aquele substantivo que parecia tirado do nome de uma ave—*Garcia*—para designar uma qualidade abstrusa (talvez uma doença das garças, que são bichos de vento e das ilhas...) (163)

[concentrated in the G of Margarida's elegant and sprawling hand, tied together by six letters which by an absurd collaboration of his conscious mental associations and her strokes of the pen (now coiled, now firm) represented for him her body and her being but nonetheless retained a meaning that was absolutely civilian. [...] [H]e was but that looping upon the envelope, that noun that seemed derived from the name of the "gull"—*Garcia*—used to designate an abstruse quality (perhaps the disease of gulls, birds of the wind and of the islands...)?

These are curious images, from which one could make pertinent stylistic and narrative inferences based on the names, markings, and bodies mentioned. Indeed, one could construct a whole structure of signification from these references and the dream (or sickness) that mines them, with an iridescent meaning spreading outward. More important in a narrative sense are the pigeons that appear in the chapter named for them, "Uma caçada aos pombo" ["A Pigeon Hunt"], during which João appears to begin his relationship with Laura. Upon reaching Zimbreiro, João climbs up to a cliff overlooking the channel to contemplate Pico—he is torn, indecisive, between his two "virgins"—"Virgens Loucas e Virgens prudentes: Laura saíra ao vento com a sua lâmpada sem amor: Margarida abrigava a velha chama no seu misterioso afastamento" ["Foolish Virgins and the Wise Virgins: Laura had gone out into the wind with her loveless lamp: Margarida harbored the old flame in her mysterious aloofness"]. At the moment when he looks at a pigeon's nest, he feels a bullet fly close by him, and sees a "pombo ferido, desasado, foi cair a um junçal" (203-4) ["wounded pigeon, suddenly flightless due to a broken wing, dropped in the sedge"].¹¹ André Barreto, who fired the shot, approaches him, and the two rivals face each other, both mourning the pigeon in a civilized (and metaphorical?) way. A woman is heard "a gritar," "em baixo, num bote" ["yelling out," "down below in a boat"], which causes João's eyes to fill with tears (203). From this point the pace of events accelerates: Manuel Bana becomes ill, there is a fire in Januário's house, Margarida is quarantined, the whale appears and the fishermen sail after it, with Margarida, toward São Jorge. Margarida stays in Urzelina, after which she returns to Pico to confront her uncle's death. After she places the chrysanthemums on Roberto's casket, all that remains of the novel is the epilogue. Never again is João Garcia seen by the reader, or by Margarida—except for the scene in which he explains to his uncle Jacinto, in the final chapter that deals with Januário's family, that his father ruined his life, and that Margarida

is the woman he loves (226). This said, there is one more doveⁱⁱⁱ that appears, and is literally figured, in the text, the dove on Margarida's tablecloth, which she embroidered while caring for Manuel Bana, and on which she drinks tea with Roberto when André and his sister come to visit them. Roberto drew the dove "e o seu raminho no bico ao largo de uma tira de pano riscada a papel químico" (208) ["with a little branch in its beak, repeated along a strip of cloth stenciled with carbon paper"] and, as his niece explains, "juntava-lhe filoseles de várias cores para o ponto cheio que faz o bico da pomba e o raminho" (238) ["she added multicolored filatures to thicken the stitch and fashion the dove's beak and the little branch"]. In sum, we have one pigeon killed by André with a bullet that narrowly missed João, and another (a dove) represented by Margarida with flowers in its beak. Instead of metaphor producing the narrative we have in *Mau Tempo no Canal* a narrative composed of pure images, book-ended by a pigeon and a dove, which registers the varied tones of the novelistic landscape as well as those of the cloth's iridescent floral design.

With the tenderness of the pigeons described, Nemésio presents us in the epilogue with the noble strength of bulls. As we will see, it is from the bulls that Margarida finds the power to consummate her own self-effacement.

The Mallow-green Dress

In a certain sense, *Mau Tempo no Canal* ends with Roberto's death. Margarida Dulmo's feelings for João Garcia change from the impassioned and reflective love she experiences at the opening of the novel to the exuberance (felt from a distance) that she displays in the epilogue, and which the author fails to explain except with reference to the bullfight she attends, in yet another narrative ellipse, in Angra. In this scene Margarida is presented as part of the audience and we view her largely from the perspective of Damião Serpa, who is among the spectators and is removed from Margarida's marital and existential conflict.

Here the bulls represent something both specific and localized: the community of aficionados (to which Margarida belongs), and the noble conduct of a noble animal, who confronts the bullfighter head-on (the importance of this detail is signaled in the text by the characteristics of the corral, which are discussed by the crowd). For the aficionado of the bullfight, to be noble is to be untamed (being tamed amounting to being trapped and fearful, moving secretly and seemingly at random, and courting betrayal), with the conduct of the bull and the bullfighter at the culmination of the contest belying the sincere, formally aesthetic dialogue between man and animal embodied in

the bullfight. Margarida's happiness at the bullfight derives from various sources—from the contagious atmosphere of the *corrida* (with Margarida being swept up in the experience as she was during the whale hunt) and from the nature of the event as a situation of risk, which appeals to Margarida's impulsiveness and courage. Though Nemésio describes the spectacle in depth (with the knowledge and sensibility of a true aficionado), down to its individual details, which he presents in painterly touches, from the movement of the horses to the bullfighter's individual passes and the tackling of the bull, he does all this in order to present his heroine as part of a joyful scene. Recall that at the Peters sisters' gathering, during which high-minded topics like classical music and knowledge of Latin are discussed, Mateus describes his niece as “uma menina que pegou à unha uma vaca brava, nos pastos do pai!” (68) [“a young lady who grabbed a wild cow by the horns in her father's pasture!”]. And Nemésio, who moves from major to minor key with great narrative ease, places the reader in a festive environment of sunshine and bulls in order to then turn Margarida's happiness into a “pesadelo” [“nightmare”] as the bullfighter is gored (337). This change takes the reader by surprise, as Margarida notices:

as atenções de toda a praça provavam que estava nos seus dias—e estupenda! Pusera um vestido de seda cor de malva [...]. E as pessoas debruçadas nos camarotes pegados recebiam do lume um pouco pálido do rosto de Margarida [...] uma impressão de felicidade perfeita, sem pensamentos, que só os olhos às vezes um pouco tristes [...] tendiam a desmentir. (333-4)

[the attention of the whole audience demonstrated, in fact, that she was in her glory. She looked ravishing! She was wearing a mallow-colored silk dress [...]. And the people occupying the box next to hers received from the slightly pale fire upon Margarida's cheeks [...] an impression of perfect, spontaneous happiness, which only her eyes, sometimes a little sad [...] seemed to belie.]

Nemésio does not generally describe Margarida's clothing in much detail, the few exceptions including Margarida's wearing of Margarida Terra's old ball gown at Roberto's urging, or the few instances in which the author describes her mallow-green dress being blown by the wind (specifically, this occurs on the stormy night when Margarida talks to João by the wall, and when Margarida chases after the fishermen on Pico). Nemésio tends to link this brightly colored dress to the

idea of the light in Margarida's face, and in contrast to her pensive way of looking—for instance, in the first nocturne, when Margarida receives the news of her uncle Roberto's arrival while she is “a provar um vestido de seda cor de malva que a costureira, ajoelhada, enchia lentamente de alfinetes” (61) [“trying on a mallow-green silk dress that the seamstress, on her knees, slowly covered with pins”]. Margarida hurries through the fitting, because she has plans to attend the Peters sisters' gathering, where she will receive a letter from João, who has gone to continental Portugal. In this way the mallow-green dress accompanies Margarida in the succession of her lovers and in her romantic uncertainties. Later on, in the box in the bullring, color becomes iridescent when Margarida “pusera-se de pé para recolher melhor o hausto colorido e quente que subia da praça [...] a mancha ardente e movediça do ‘sol’” (333) [“had stood up, the better to take in the warm, colorful gaiety arising from the arena [...] the burning and moving blotch of the ‘sun’ area”]^{iv}—this iridescence fades as the novel approaches its end, with Margarida's transition from being part of the crowd at the bullring to being part of her new husband's family. Her husband calls to her that they should leave (“Vamos, Margarida! Não faça esperar a mãe” [“Let's go, Margarida! Don't keep mother waiting”]), and after the goring, Nemésio narrates the following:

Margarida guardava nos olhos voluntariamente abstractos a derradeira imagem que recolhera nos bastiões da praça empoleirada a oeste como uma aranha amarela: o vulto de São Jorge estirado e tapando a vista do Pico, que ainda assim conseguira fazer-se ver por ela da Terceira, servindo-se da sua fantástica altura para espreitar por trás da ilha refastelada [...]. Pensando na colhida e no beliche que a esperava a bordo, era como se se despedisse para todo o sempre da sua vida e dos seus. (337)

[Margarida, in her voluntarily distant eyes, held as if engraved the last image she had gathered: beyond the dusty arena and off to the west, like a yellow spider there rose the stretched-out silhouette of São Jorge. The island did not entirely block the view of Pico, which, thanks to its fantastic height, could peek from under its leaden cloak over the island at its feet, thus allowing itself to be seen from Terceira. Thinking of the reception and of the cabin that awaited her on board, Margarida felt like she was taking leave of her life and of her family forever.]

These thoughts, which are the novel's final reference to spiders and the last description of São Jorge (where André's family lives) as an “ilha refastelada,” nearly obscuring Margarida's island of Pico, make the transition from

Margarida's *camarote*, or box, in the bullring to her *camarote* (here a berth) on the *San Miguel*, and from the generally celebratory, engaged mood of the bullfight to the somber, more distant feeling of the second part of the epilogue, which might be said to begin when Margarida, "após ter mudado de *toilette*, [sobe] do camarote para vir tomar ar ao convés" (338) ["after changing, she goes from her cabin up to the passenger deck for some fresh air"].

In this second part of the epilogue, whose subtitle reads "Andante, poi allegro, ma non troppo," spectacle gives way to interior reflection as the ship departs from Terceira, and then leaves the Azores all together. The epilogue moves away from the islands but implies movement and music nonetheless, with the latter having a special importance in *Mau Tempo*. At the Peters sisters' gathering Chopin is played and modern music discussed (is it by chance that the Debussy compositions referred to in the chapter are *Ce que dit le vent d'Ouest* and *La Cathédrale Engloutie*?), and Roberto, who in Margarida's dreams and fantasies (both of which are typical for her) is "uma espécie de príncipe de conto de fadas, como o *Lohengrin* de Wagner ou o *Roberto*, o *Diabo* de Meyerbeer" ["a kind of prince in a fairy tale, the Lohengrin in an opera from which she had only heard excerpts played on the Peters' piano—perhaps Meyerbeer's *Roberto the Devil*..."], plays the violin (313). Of course music is related to the question of the novel's sonority, which conditions the composition of sentences, the organization of chapters and plot, and the modular or progressive sequencing of the narrative. See, for example, Margarida's recollection of her love affair with André, and particularly the statement he makes during their expedition to Caldeira: "'Oiça, Margarida...' E o resto. O resto, até que, felizmente, Pedro safu das moitas, lá da banda do lago, com os pezinhos crispados de um belo pernalta na mão," etc. (140-41) ["'Listen, Margarida...' And the rest of it. The rest of it until fortunately Pedro came out of the brush holding the crinkled little feet of a long-legged bird in his hands"]. These are descriptive sentences, though they leave certain things unsaid, sketching out (as opposed to fully describing) points of meaning. This gives the phrases an unresolved, enigmatic air that is later rectified or reflected upon, and in seemingly casual fashion—this is the case with the mallow-green dress,¹² an impressionistic splash of color or a musical tone that Nemésio repeatedly uses to evoke the past. And returning to the issue of sonority, in the novel's title one can detect assonance in the use of a closed vowel as well as alliteration in its nasalized vowels. It is interesting to note that these same sounds reappear at significant moments in the novel,

much like the mallow-colored dress, among other plot elements. This dress, as striking in its semantics (described as a *vestido cor de malva* in Portuguese) as it is in its color, corresponds to Margarida's exuberance during the bullfight; the duller dress she wears on the *San Miguel*—the neutralization of color in her wardrobe—reflects the passing of her exuberance after the goring and her return to the ship. More broadly, one can detect the play of assonance and alliteration in the proper names used in *Mau Tempo*, with the majority of them placing equal emphasis on the closed and nasalized *a*. It would take too long to analyze the novel's complete onomastic record. Suffice it to say that nearly all the character names Nemésio uses feature these sounds (Roberto is the exception) and that the only prominent characters whose names feature a tonic, unnasalized *i* are Margarida and João—though in João's case this applies only to his last name, García. In terms of topographical names and landscape features, the novel makes repeated reference to clouds, with the author at one point describing Pico in terms of “nuvens e nervos” (134) [“clouds and nerves”]. This description points both conceptually and vocally toward the clash of closed and nasalized vowels in the novel.

The mallow-green dress functions as a synecdochic description of Margarida, indicating her svelte, elegant presence. Its color represents one side of the heroine's vacillating emotional state, with the brightness of the dress finding its opposite in the dullness of the sea. The movement of the sea represents the impulse toward departure, which takes hold of Margarida after Roberto's death—his definitive departure. For this reason the prior references to the Barreto children's travels may have featured in Margarida's decision to marry André. The heroine's ultimate departure from Pico may be interpreted as an attempt to fill a lacuna noted at the opening of *Mau Tempo*, when on the novel's first page Nemésio describes the stillness and torpor of the land, writing that “os grilos pareciam, de verão, o queixume da ilha abafada e em que pairava agora um pasmo solto de tudo, menos do mar” (35) [“in summer, the chirping of crickets seemed the lamentation of the oppressed island over which now hovered a torpor relieved only by the sea”].

A Happy Marriage: Silence and Milk-soaked Bread

All of the arts are discussed in *Mau Tempo no Canal*, with particular attention paid to literature. Joseph Conrad, for example, functions as a leitmotif for Roberto, through repeated references to the character of Mac Wurr from *Typhoon*. Portugal's nineteenth-century novelists, like Proust, inserted them-

selves into the novels they wrote (Margarida's mallow-green dress hints at the Duchess of Guermites's red dress and shoes from the final scene of *Du Côté de Guermites*, the second volume of Proust's novel), and Nemésio follows in this tradition, frequently drawing on Camilo Castelo Branco, Júlio Dinis, and Eça de Queiroz for inspiration. The novel's final scene, set aboard the *San Miguel*, is reminiscent of Eça, while the bourgeois atmosphere of Urzelina recalls the domestic tranquility of Júlio Dinis's fiction. Further, the discomfort provoked by Margarida's can be compared to Henrique de Souza's arrival at Alvapenha. Margarida explains her adventure with the fishermen to the Baron and Baroness of Urzelina in these terms:

Eu não posso estar aqui melhor do que estou [...]. Mas a sr^a Baronesa compreende... Isto foi uma coisa horrível ... uma destas histórias que parecem inventadas! [...] Não foi por mal; foi aquela cegueira da baleia... E eu o que queria era servir-me da canoa para passar para a lancha. A dois passos uma da outra... Quem é que podia adivinhar que o motor parava e que a baleia havia de resfolgar ali à vista e tirar o juízo à companhia?!... Mas, enfim... O telegrama do seu filho deixou-me mais descansada. Vou dormir muito bem. (273)

[I couldn't possibly feel more comfortable here [...]. But you understand, baroness... What happened was something awful, something that you only think happens in romances! [...] They [the whalemens] didn't mean to do it; they were caught up in all the excitement of giving chase to a whale. And I wanted to use the whaleboat to then transfer to his launch when the two got close enough... How could I foresee that the launch was going to stall and the whale was going to show up like that and drive the whalemens into a frenzy? But it's all over now... And your son's telegram was really reassuring. I'll sleep easier now.]

Thus begins a period of inner struggle for the Dulmos's daughter, with it taking longer than anticipated for her to find a boat back to Pico, and with Roberto's own "motor" breaking down with his death. Margarida's discovery that one of her uncles has fallen ill (whether Mateus or Roberto, the announcement comes as a blow, as Margarida loves them both) results in a flurry of letters and a premonition of death, termed a "sete-espadas" ["seven of spades"] by Ângelo (158). This is likewise a difficult time for the baron and baroness, who are not accustomed to events like Margarida's voyage across the channel and her arrival at their home:

Ainda não estavam refeitos daquela pedra de escândalo lançada aos fundões do seu sossego. Nos seus rostos fechados por mais de sessenta anos de pasmo e de sopas de leite, à vista dos perfis vulcânicos do Pico e do Faial, luziam olhares desconfiados, que se separavam lentamente para procurarem no vulto de Margarida uma confirmação ou um desmentido. (274)

[They still had not recovered from having that scandalous stone thrown into the depths of the lake of their peaceful life. Their faces were congealed by over sixty years of silence and morning meals of bread soaked in milk, and from staring at the volcanic profiles of the Islands of Pico and Fayal. After having exchanged a cautious look, they slowly turned their eyes toward Margarida for some kind of confirmation or denial.]

The author fills these torpid days on São Jorge with descriptions of Margarida, paying attention to her well-being, emotions, and activities, as well as offering explanations of local agriculture and cheese-making, sketches of local figures, information on the notable buildings of Velas, and details on provincial, discreet habits of the baron and baroness.

The narrator, who systematically adopts a compromised position within the narrative (that is, he both describes what occurs and is observed and described, which gives the novel's characters a certain complexity and density, precludes them from being entirely good or bad in ethical terms, and causes their inner thoughts to appear as interior monologue), does not hide his aversion to the Baron and Baroness of Urzelina. He underscores their ignorance, their tendency to talk too much, their questionable dealings, a somewhat exaggerated confidence in the extent of their resources, and their ridiculous prejudices (though he does so with pleasure and a condescending humor that on more than one occasion recalls Camilo's novels). This depiction has a role to play in the novel: given what we know of Margarida, it is unbelievable that she will live in precisely this environment with André, which, paradoxically, is occupied by the only happy couple in the novel. The baron and baroness seem as if they were taken from Camilo's *Doze Casamentos Felizes* [*Twelve Happy Marriages*], with André's version of how his grandfather Constantino was married to D. Petronilha recalling the book's "Terceiro Casamento" ["Third Marriage"]. It is perhaps for this reason that the Dulmos do not feature in the narrative portion of the novel's final pages; in short, nothing happens to them, aside from Diogo and Mateus's presence at the Candelária cemetery when Margarida is there vis-

iting her uncle's grave. The last time that the Pasteleiro house "cada vez mais se afundava na solidão dos cedros [...] erguida como um andaime entre a lâmpada do poste da estrada e a maré rolando o calhau" ["sank ever deeper into the solitude of its cedars [...] rising like a scaffold between the street lamppost and the rollicking tides"], in chapter XXVII, Catarina, with "resignação" ["resignation"] showing on her "rosto avelhentado" ["age-withered face"], feels *saudades* for her daughter, who is at Pedra da Burra caring for a sick Manuel Bana. With Pedro, her husband and her father with her at home, Catarina glances toward Açor, "velho e cheio de esgana" ["old and suffering from whooping cough"] and recalls, in profound solitude, the night of the hurricane. The marriages of the younger characters are mentioned, though João and Laura's is only described by a third party. For Margarida's part, though she appears happy on the day of the bullfight, she later tells Damião Serpa that her honeymoon is being spent in a small ship's berth, and when she meets up with André, he kisses her on the forehead. Later on, in their berth, Margarida pretends to sleep. As for the novel's final scene, this first centers on the compensatory intimacy of the baron and baroness, who discuss Margarida. The novel then closes with Margarida adrift in the sea of her own secret.

"As coisas têm a sua hora" ["There is a time for everything"]—this is a leitmotif of *Mau Tempo no Canal*, suggesting that frozen, empty time may come to be filled, though emptiness remains in the form of the dreams, encounters, separations, evasive and untruthful letters, frustrated plans and unsatisfied desires that populate the novel.

Here it is necessary to address the issue of gender, that is, the manner in which Nemésio presents Margarida as a woman. The author presents us, in his alternately pensive and energetic, complex and enigmatic heroine, not with the image of a passive or frustrated woman. Margarida is far from a victim subordinated to her environment or family, though Nemésio acknowledges the influence of circumstantial factors. Nonetheless, he allows Margarida to try to transform, overcome, or ameliorate these. Margarida is the model of a thinking person, someone whose actions are informed by her thoughts; they are not exclusively so (Margarida sometimes acts unexpectedly or impulsively), but in general, her actions are the outgrowth of her thoughts. It is for this reason that Margarida rejects a love that she shares, but which is not enough for her, and gives herself over to an emptiness (the "rest" comes later for her, in André's "Oíça, Margarida..." ["Listen, Margarida"]) that allows her room to maneuver. Margarida does this with total lucidity and

undeniable sadness, and for this reason her decision is alluded to, as an elliptical presence in the text.

Margarida is a woman who has made a choice. She neither has João's tears, nor does she protest like a thwarted lover. Emptiness, "esse pasmo solto de tudo, menos do mar" (35) ["a torpor relieved only by the sea"], is announced on the novel's first page. Margarida attempts to fill this hole by throwing herself, so to speak, into the sea. As her grandmother Margarida Terra said, betrayed by her husband and and confined to her home, "a gente não é infeliz de todo senão quando quer" (130) ["We are not entirely unhappy unless we want to be"]. Though Margarida enters into the human adventure apparently defeated, she draws strength by acknowledging the uncertainty of life.

Regionalism: Voice and Place

The topic of regionalism in *Mau Tempo no Canal* is large enough on its own to create a vast bibliography. I could not begin to study, or even properly list, the author's treatment of the land and its specificities, or its inhabitants and their customs and traditions, objects, clothing, language, diet, beliefs, festivals, work and home life, and culture generally. Vitorino Nemésio, author of *Portugal, a Terra e o Homem* [*Portugal, the Land and the People*],¹³ is well-aware of the local specificities of his Portuguese homeland and compatriots, which he presents in *Mau Tempo* in his characters, who he describes with affection, but also with irony and critical distance.

In terms of regionalism, two areas deserve our attention: Nemésio's depiction of culture and of social conditions. The novel is a cultural manifestation par excellence, and Nemésio, as an artist and intellectual, affirms his heritage first by setting his novel in a certain (Azorean) environment informed by certain historical events (including those he experienced firsthand as a public figure and as a member of the community—see, for example, his impressive description of the *Festas do Espírito Santo*) and second through his incorporation of local speech, particularly in the chapters "Uma Taberna de Baleiros" ["A Whalemens' Tavern"] and "Oceano Glacial Ártico (Em Português do Pico: Ariôche)" ["Arctic Ocean (In the Portuguese of Pico: *Ariôche*)"]. Moreover, there are regional references in Nemésio's descriptions of local cultural life (a magnificent example is the gathering at the Peters sisters' house in the first nocturne, which includes notable references, like Francisco de Lacerda playing Debussy in São Jorge, and an ironic allusion to Margarida not liking poetry since, "tinham-na secado com versos de poetas das ilhas—'*pétalas mimosas*'

'amo-te quando à tarde'...—e 'poeta' ficou para ela uma vaga equivalência de parvo, de choninhas" ["they had bored her silly with poems by island poets—'tender petals,' 'I love you in the afternoons.' And so for her, 'poet' had stuck in her mind as the vague equivalent of imbecile and stunted creature"]. Local social conditions constitute the basis for the plot, complicating and even impeding the relationship between Margarida Dulmo and João Garcia, not so much through external causes but (and this is quite original) because of the attitudes of the two lovers, deriving in part from their psychology, but largely the product of familial, provincial, and class-derived behaviors. Cognizant of the tenets of *presencismo* and Portuguese neo-realism, Nemésio balances the two in poeticizing a unique and complex fictive universe and in attempting to articulate a voice capable of expressing the full breadth of this reality.

It is worth touching on the relationship the novel maintains as a work of fiction with the idea of the regional; if each chapter is in a certain sense a narrative metaphor for the whole, this implies that the better part of the novel's narrative information can be located in each chapter and that, by extension, these rearticulations constitute distinct versions of the same novelistic material, which confront the reader as components of a multiform, composite whole. The coherence of this matrix becomes clear if we think in terms of islands, connected by love for one's homeland as well as interpersonal relationships, but separated by departures, which inversely highlight those left behind, as well as the sea—like death, a form of infinite absence that separates those who leave the island.

It is only through departure that we can locate those who remain. Similarly, it is in the unresolved, dialectical relationship between departure and permanence that a place finds its unique voice (through memory and the prolonging of imminently lost images), with the possibility of dislocation and travel according a region its secondary status. To travel is to remove oneself, that is, to pass from one place to another, and it is only from the place to which one travels that one gains a perspective on the place one has abandoned. He who has not experienced departure in both of its component parts (leaving and remaining) is not likely aware of the phenomenon of regionalization. All places are regions (in Latin, "region" indicates a royal or noble house), though the relations of political actors determine how "regional" (i.e., subordinated) a given locale becomes. In the context of *Mau Tempo*, it remains to ask whether it is the characters who experience departure (João, who leaves and returns; Roberto, who returns; Margarida and Damião Serpa, who both leave; and the young poet Pragana, who has left the seminary and is traveling to Coimbra), or if it is

the narrator who departs with Margarida and grants the young Pragana the poetic sensibility to successfully represent departure in words.

Place is palpably present in *Mau Tempo no Canal*. In the end, I do not know if *Mau Tempo* is best described as the story of a richly drawn, attractive, and contradictory heroine or as a novel of the land, itself unique and rich, that blends into Margarida's story and in which she finds solace. Margarida, possessing her dark sense of humor yet nonetheless recognized as "um mar de alegria" ["a sea of joy"], who is for many the picture of her grandmother Margarida Terra (the *terra*, or "land" absent from her name and ultimately from her married life), assumes both the sobriety and exuberance and, above all, the moving singularity, of her homeland. It is as if land and woman were formed from the same substance, with which the reader, in reading the novel, enters into communion.

Notes

¹ See Mourão-Ferreira, "Sobre a obra," and Lopes, "Vitorino Nemésio." Please note that I refer exclusively to Lopes's bibliography, though I make reference to the broader work throughout my analysis.

² Scholes *Paradoxy*.

³ Nemésio, *Quase que os Vi Viver*. See especially the essays on "'Viagens na Minha Terra'" and "O romance de Júlio Dinis."

⁴ I cite the edition of *Mau Tempo no Canal* introduced by José Martins Garcia (IN/CM, Lisbon, 2002). Though this version is presented as the novel's sixth reprinting, it is obvious that it is the seventh edition, the first edition published by IN/CM in 1994. This seventh edition follows a sixth, coordinated by David Mourão-Ferreira and published by Bertrand. I would like to mention for the benefit of readers, publishers, and Nemésio scholars that both the seventh and fourth editions (Bertrand, 1972—the basis for José Martins Garcia's edition) contain a number of substantive errors. See, for instance, "trenó" instead of "tremó," at the end of chapter I; "eles como" instead of "como eles," halfway through chapter XXXI; "pega de cara" instead of "pega de caras," in the first part of chapter XXXVII; "calcada" instead of "calçada," at the beginning of chapter XXIV (in this case, as with some additional examples, the seventh edition errs, though the fourth is correct).

⁵ I believe this to be an additional error: *Metafisica* should read as *Metapsíquica*. For supporting evidence, see chapter XVII, particularly page 166.

⁶ Lopes, "Vitorino Nemésio." The references I make in the present paragraph are chronologically ordered, running to page 766 of Lopes's text.

⁷ This passage remains relevant for understanding the novel, though it moves way from the question of metaphor: "Há uma entrevista em dialecto sobre a técnica e a economia social da pesca em fins do século XIX, descrevem-se as Festas do Espírito Santo no Faial, interiores populares e burgueses (como o de um *morgadio queijeiro* de S. Jorge); e então o Epílogo contém quase um guia turístico impessoal de Angra (a que o autor tiraria de bom grado o "do Heroísmo"), mais uma longa crónica tauromáquica bastante perita" (766).

⁸ See *Mau Tempo* 111.

⁹ *Mau Tempo no Canal* shows the influence of Camilo Castelo Branco in the novel's evo-

cation of “terror grosso” through ghosts, premonitions, kidnapped nuns, confined women, etc., along with its narrative rhythm, which establishes itself from chapter 22, and particularly from chapter 29, in a quick succession of events and unexpected happenings, and in contrast to the slow, bucolic atmosphere of chapters 31 and 35, which owe more to Júlio Dinis than to Camilo.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the theme of the lost waltz is taken up again in the epilogue, where Margarida sees a waltzing couple on the *San Miguel*.

¹¹ I believe that *juncal* [the term that is translated in the text] is spelled incorrectly, and should read *juncal*.

¹² Marcel Proust makes regular use of this narrative strategy in his *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

¹³ Vitorino Nemésio prepared the volume, which was published after his death.

Translator's note

I referred to Francisco Cota Fagundes's translation of the novel, *Stormy Isles: An Azorean Tale* (Providence, RI: Gávea-Brown, 1994). This affected word choices like “mallow-green dress” for “vestido cor de malva” and “serpent-shaped ring” or Margarida's ring.

Guest editor's notes

i *Arco da Velha* or “Old Lady's Arc” is a popular expression for “rainbow.”

ii *Garça*, the term used by both Nemésio and Seixo, literally means “heron.” In most of the islands of the Azores, however—and in *Mau Tempo no Canal*—the term refers to gulls.

iii The terms *pombo* and *pomba* appear in Nemésio's novel and were here translated, quite correctly, as “pigeon.” In the context of the Azores, however, *pomba* demands the translation “dove” due especially to this bird's association with the Holy Ghost Celebrations: Dove of the Holy Ghost or Spirit. I have corrected the cases in the translation in which “pigeon” for *pomba* would be inappropriate.

iv The “sun” being referred to here is the sunny area of the ring—the bleachers.

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