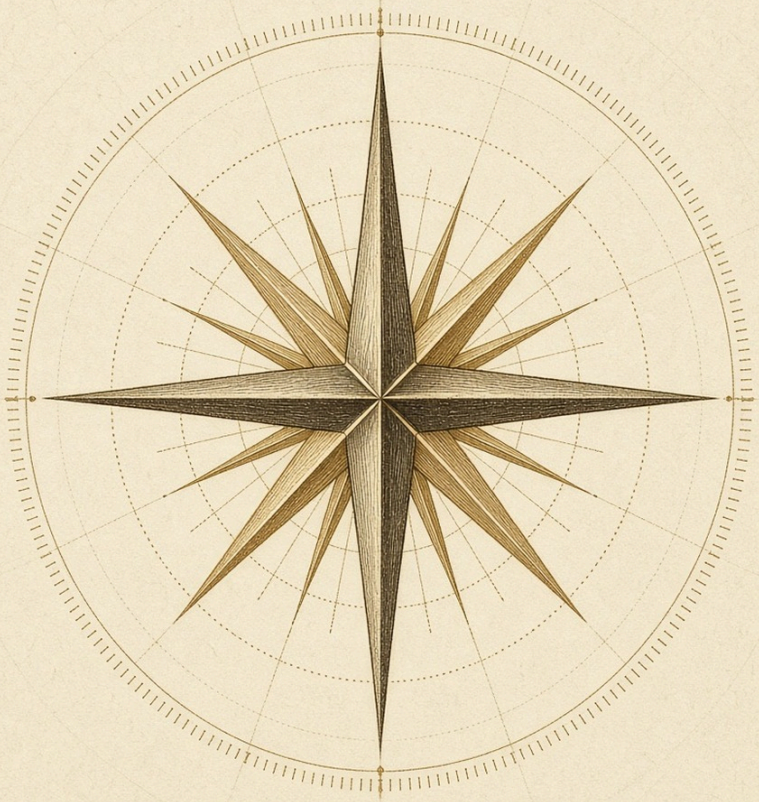


Maritime Consciousnesses

Amadeu Lacerda Pessanha

Consciousness is a shore.

Oficina do Maralto · 2003



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Maritime Consciousnesses

AMADEU LACERDA PESSANHA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Line of the Horizon
1974

Moral Atlantic
1986

The Ear of the Tides
1998

Oficina do Maralto · Lisbon and Recife

AN ESSAY

Maritime Consciousnesses

on what the sea does to the soul that keeps it

Amadeu Lacerda Pessanha

Oficina do Maralto
Lisbon and Recife
2003

MARITIME CONSCIOUSNESSES

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Oficina do Maralto

To the memory of my father,
who sold fishhooks
and did not ask them for a metaphor.

I did not inherit the sea.
I inherited the stubbornness of looking at it
until it answered me with precision,
not with comfort.

Olinda notebooks, 1958

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Preliminary note

I began this book in a rented house in Paraty, on a morning when the tide filled the alley and forced the baker to cross it barefoot. There was nothing extraordinary in that. What was extraordinary was the way no one was startled. The water rose, the chairs went up onto the tables, the coffee went on being made, and the street, for an hour, ceased to be a street without ceasing to be a city. It was there, with cold ankles, that the title came to me in the plural.

I say consciousnesses, not consciousness, because the sea does not produce a single way of being lucid. It produces several, and they do not reconcile easily. There is the consciousness of the one who measures, of the one who waits, of the one who crosses, of the one who was crossed by force, of the one who has never seen salt water and still organizes hope according to it. To gather them into an elegant singular would be to lie in good prose.

In writing, I refused two facilities that were offered to me through life with the best of intentions. The first was the sea as a figure of the unconscious, so worn it no longer wets: a decorative abyss, good for any sentence that needs to seem deep without having gone down anywhere. The second was the sea as mere infrastructure, a page of logistics, tonnage and deadlines. Between the ornamental abyss and the container terminal there is a narrow strip where real people decide, eat, fear, name, and sometimes do not come back. It is in that strip that I want to stay.

For years I avoided the essay. I was afraid of lyricism, the professional illness of anyone who looks at the Atlantic for too long. The sea rewards the beautiful sentence and punishes the exact one. It offers mist, horizon, infinity, and charges little of anyone content with that. I no longer wanted a eulogy. I wanted an inventory of the attentions the water demands and of those it destroys.

The reader will find, then, less metaphor than the title seems to promise. When I say horizon, I will be speaking of a line that changes with the height of the eyes. When I say deck, I will speak of a floor that moves and of a hierarchy that this movement makes necessary, and at times criminal. When I say debt, I will not be decorating a moral argument. I will be naming the trade that made of

this ocean, at once, a road of worlds and a cemetery without a headstone.

I was born in Olinda, in 1931, on a street from which one could see the reef and, beyond it, a band my mother called, without poetry, “the open.” My father sold fishhooks and line at a counter that smelled of salt and cardboard. I do not come from a line of captains. I come from a line of people who stayed. That origin forbids me two gestures maritime literature adores: nostalgia for a ship that was not mine, and contempt for those who never went aboard. Coastal consciousness often begins on land, barefoot, waiting for a sail that is late.

I studied philosophy in Coimbra and the history of navigation in Lisbon. I taught for decades in Recife. I frequented archives, wharves, lighthouses, one jangada, and many conversations that do not fit in a footnote. None of this made me owner of the sea. It made me, I hope, suspicious of the haste with which we turn the sea into a symbol so as not to have to look at it.

The volume gathers twelve meditations. They may be read in order, because there is an order, or separately, because each one tries to close an account of its own. First the limit we see. Then the body that keeps its balance. Then language, and the history that language often keeps silent. Then the instruments, the watches, the knowledges without a chair, memory, shipwreck, the city, the interior, and at last the modest ethic of staying afloat.

I offer no salvation. I offer a slower way of saying the word sea.

I

The horizon as a category

There is an error the school repeats in innocence: to call horizon the line where sky and sea meet. Anyone who has spent a whole afternoon before the reef at Olinda knows that this line meets nothing. It is the moving limit of our reach, a provisional agreement between the curve of the water and the height of the eyes. I climb the hill, the agreement recedes. I go down to the sand, it comes nearer. The sea did not draw that border. We did, with the short measure of the body.

That is why the horizon is not an object. It is a category. It organizes the visible and, at the same time, accuses what is still unseen. Every nautical chart is an attempt to turn that accusation into calculation. Every coastal longing is the

same attempt, made with fewer numbers and more stubbornness. To confuse the two operations — the pilot's and the exile's — produces a great deal of literature and some shipwreck.

The distance of that limit, for someone standing on the sand, is not the infinity of posters. It grows, approximately, with the square root of the height of the eyes. A few kilometers, not an eternity. The refraction of light may stretch the account a little; desire stretches it without shame. I spent a whole youth explaining to seminary colleagues that infinity, seen from the beach at Olinda, ends at a coconut palm on one side and a fishing boat on the other. They did not give me a high mark. They gave me reason only much later, when they too had grown old and had begun to distrust words that do not fit inside a measure.

The ancients, who did not have our ease in photographing what we do not understand, treated the problem with a gravity that still serves. The line was not the end of the world. It was the end of a piece of information. Beyond it there might be land, storm, or simply more water. Nautical courage did not consist in denying the limit. It consisted in acting with rigor before the limit moved. There is an enormous difference between crossing the unknown and decreeing that it does not exist because the sentence grew wider.

I insist on this point because literate culture turned the horizon into a lazy synonym for hope. "To open horizons" came to mean almost nothing: an invitation to feel oneself ample. But the horizon of the one who sails does not widen the chest. It imposes a discipline. You do not arrive at it. You push it, and it reconstitutes itself farther on, intact, indifferent to your effort. There is no better image for knowledge, and few are so badly used. Knowledge that lets itself be reached all at once, and that poses for the portrait at the point where it was reached, was generally not a horizon. It was furniture.

I remember a class, in Coimbra, in which a professor drew on the board a circle and a point outside it. He said that philosophy began when the point perceived that the circle was its own, not the world's. The sentence was elegant and, applied to the sea, incomplete. The point, at sea, is sick. The point is hungry. The point may die if it misreads that circumference. The category of the horizon becomes serious only when error has a consequence. On firm land we confuse depth with the freedom not to pay for the mistake on the same day. On deck,

the mistake is collected in cash.

There is also a nocturnal horizon, and painting almost never gets that one right. Without the line, the world does not disappear: it changes regime. The ear takes the post the eye abandoned. The lighthouse does not draw the horizon; it pierces it at intervals. Between two flashes, the sailor keeps in memory the line he does not see. That keeping is a mental act of high dignity. I call it consciousness because it is neither pure instinct nor pure concept. It is an attention sustained in the absence of the figure. Anyone who has never had to keep an invisible line for a whole hour will speak of the dark as if it were merely a lack of subject.

When, already old, I returned to Olinda and looked for the line of my childhood, I found it displaced not by philosophy but by the landfill, by the building, by the electric light that dulls the contrast. The horizon was still there. What had changed was the foreground, and with it my capacity to distinguish the limit. The category, I concluded, does not live only in the water. It lives in the hygiene of looking. To see far one must consent that the near does not occupy the whole sentence. This is true of the beach and of the essay. It is true, I suspect, of any life that wants to be exact without becoming small.

II

The consciousness of the deck

The deck is a floor that does not promise stillness. That single trait is enough to alter the notion of a person. On land, the self leans on things that pretend to be quiet: the room, the table, the street that dawns in the same place. On deck, stillness is an exception that needs to be explained. The body learns first. The concept comes after, if it comes. Much philosophy is wrecked by beginning with the concept, like someone who wants to learn to walk by first discussing the idea of a floor.

Whoever goes aboard for the first time usually describes seasickness as a trouble of the stomach. It is a trouble of reference. The inner ear, used to a complicit floor, receives contradictory news and protests with the only eloquence it has. I do not ridicule that protest. In it is the beginning of maritime intelligence: the discovery that stability was an agreement, not a law. The agreement may be a good one. It does not cease to be an agreement. Whoever forgets this on firm

land treats his own chair as a natural right and takes offense when the world moves.

There is an ethic proper to that moving floor, and it does not coincide with the ethic of drawing rooms. On deck, competence is public. A badly made knot is not an opinion. An order shouted at the wrong moment is not a style. Hierarchy, which on land may be theater, at sea is an instrument of survival for as long as the weather does not grant a hearing. To say this is not to praise the brutality of historical commands, many of which were only brutality with a technical vocabulary. It is to recognize that there is a difference between the authority that hides incompetence and the authority that holds the collective when the collective has no time to deliberate. The first asks for process. The second asks for memory, so that it does not become eternal after the weather has begun to grant a hearing again.

I read, like all my generation, the novelists who made of the ship a moral laboratory. I owe them the ambition, not the setting. What interests me is not the hero who faces the storm in order to reveal character. It is the nameless sailor who, in the fourth hour of the watch, distinguishes a smell of rain from a smell of the hold. That distinction does not enter the epic. It does, however, enter the continuity of life. The consciousness of the deck is made of these minimal distinctions, repeated until they become character. Character, in this trade, is not what is declared in port. It is what is done when no one has yet made a speech and the wave has already come in.

The deck also teaches a harsh form of equality. Before a wave that sweeps the rail, a diploma does not float better than a calloused hand. The sentence is dangerous, I know. It has already served to romanticize misery and to absolve those who organized it. I use it in a strict sense. The water does not recognize a title. Men do. And it is in the difference between what the water does and what men do with the power to command that the justice of a ship is played. A ship may be a community of care or a machine of humiliation with a compass. The sea does not decide which of the two. The decision is human and, for that reason, chargeable.

There was a night, off Recife, when a master of a trawler said to me, without looking at me: “Here no one is whole. We lend the piece the other has lost.” He

was speaking of sleep. One sleeps because the other watches. It was not philosophy. It was a rota. The quarters of the watch are not a metaphor of solidarity. They are a calendar of the body, divided so that the collective body does not go out. Even today, when I hear someone define consciousness as the private property of the individual, I remember that sentence said to the dark, not to me. There are consciousnesses that exist only in relay.

It is well not to embellish the loan. It is not always just. There are ships on which some sleep too much because others cannot refuse the watch, and that refusal would have the name of insubordination. A true relay supposes that the piece lent will be returned. Without return, there is no ethic of the ship: there is extraction, with the sea serving as excuse. I note this so as not to turn a fisherman's fine sentence into a shipowner's alibi. The sea gives the fatigue. The payroll decides who carries it.

I came down from that trawler with my balance still uncertain and with a certainty the university had not given me. A person is not, at sea, an inwardness that the world comes to disturb. A person is a distributed attention, which fails when it concentrates entirely in a single chest. I went back to my room in Recife, closed the door, and felt, for the first time with distrust, the silence of a floor that asked nothing of anyone. Comfort seemed to me, for a few hours, a polite form of absence. Then it passed, as revelations pass that are not a trade. The criterion remained. Where no one takes a turn, someone is being spent.

III

Languages the water teaches

A language reveals what a people agreed to notice. Portuguese, in this matter, is rich in a way ordinary dictionaries waste. Sotavento and barlavento are not ornamental synonyms for one side and the other. They are sides relative to the wind, and therefore they change when the wind changes. Whoever learns these words learns that right and left are not enough to orient a life exposed. One must say from which force one is sheltered, and that force does not turn when we turn our head.

Cove, spit, shoal, channel, ebb, slack water, set: each term is a wrinkle of attention. The ebb is not "the tide going down" in the lazy sense. It is a time

with duration, danger, and opportunity. The slack, that interval in which the water seems to hesitate before reversing its movement, has a name because someone needed to act during the hesitation. Where there is no name, there is usually no trade. Where the trade dies, the name remains for a while, like a tool hung on the wall of a house where no one mends anything anymore. Then it falls.

I am not defending purism. I am defending precision. When we trade "leeward" for "over there," we are not simplifying: we are erasing the relation to the wind. True simplification would keep the phenomenon and lighten the word. What we do, almost always, is the opposite. We keep a pretty word and lighten the phenomenon. That is why so many texts about the sea can be transferred to the mountain by the change of three nouns. They did not pay attention. They paid style. Style without attention is a good coat on a body that never got into the water.

In the same language there are boats of different centuries that go on living together without apologizing to one another. Galleon, nau, caravel, packet, saveiro, jangada, trawler, skiff. Whoever lines them up in a paragraph, as I have just done, runs the risk of the museum. In the mouth of those who work, however, they are not chronology. They are instruments. The jangada is not a humble caravel, nor the saveiro a picturesque chapter waiting for the serious ship. Each one answers to a sea, a bottom, a pocket, a kind of hunger. The language that keeps these names also keeps a plurality of techniques. To lose them is not to lose the picturesque. It is to lose options.

There is still the language that did not reach the dictionary because it reached the hand. In small ports I heard verbs I would not know how to spell without betraying them. I do not collect them here as exoticism. I cite the fact to remember that maritime knowledge does not wait for the academy's recognition in order to be complete in its own order. It waits, rather, not to be destroyed. A vocabulary disappears when the practice that made it necessary disappears. You do not save a fisherman's verb in a glossary if the jangada no longer goes out. The glossary is a decent headstone. It is not a resurrection.

The letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha, which I read as the first great document of our prose before a world the sentence did not yet possess, is an exercise of language stretched to the limit of what the author knew how to name. He describes

bodies, birds, waters, gestures. The sentence wavers, repeats, corrects itself. That wavering is more honest than much later certainty. Caminha does not yet possess the vocabulary of dominion. He possesses the vocabulary of applied astonishment, which is a rudimentary and noble form of attention. What history later did with that scene does not annul the quality of the page. Nor does it absolve the page of what was to come. A letter may be exact and, even so, the door of a violence. The two things fit in the same sheaf of paper, and it is the reader's duty not to tear either half.

In Lisbon, years after Olinda, I discovered that the same word did not always point to the same water. The Atlantic of the quays of my childhood was warm, short of horizon because of the reef, full of talk. The Atlantic at the mouth of the Tagus had another color, another wind, another administration of fear. The language was one and was not. "A heavy sea" meant, in both places, a difficulty; but the body that heard the phrase had already been educated by different tides. I understood then that the dictionary unifies too quickly. Maritime consciousness is dialectal even when grammar pretends it is not.

To learn the language of the water is, in the end, to accept that the world has sides that do not coincide with our body. Windward does not turn when I turn. It turns when the wind changes. There is a grammatical humility in that. The sentence ceases to be the center and becomes the instrument. I, who live by sentences, needed a long time to find that humility desirable. It does not diminish the writer. It diminishes the fantasy that the writer is the wind.

IV

The Atlantic and the debt

I come to the chapter that justifies the others. Without it, this book would be a collection of delicacies, and delicacies, alone, are a form of omission.

The same ocean that the epic treated as a road was, for more than three centuries, the greatest corridor of deportation in modern history. Brazil was the principal destination of the Atlantic trade. Millions of men, women, and children crossed this water not as travelers but as cargo. Salvador, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and other ports are not merely landscapes of fortress, tile, and sun. They are the entrances of a continued crime, counted in cargo books, in forced baptisms, in

changed names, in deaths that did not always deserve a line. I do not reproduce a single figure here. The criteria of counting vary, and the order of magnitude is already the moral fact: millions of lives, not a tragedy of exception.

I do not write this to balance lyricism with a portion of guilt, like someone adding salt to correct a sweet. I write it because any maritime consciousness that speaks Portuguese and keeps silent about the hold is a falsified consciousness. The hold is also maritime. The shackle is also a technique of navigation, in the terrible sense of a technique applied to transport. Whoever studies sails and does not study chains has studied a museum, not an ocean. The museum may be beautiful. Beauty, in that case, is part of the problem, if it serves to close the visit before the hold.

I do not write from the hold. I write from a street in Olinda, from a chair, from a language I learned in schools. My father sold fishhooks; he did not run a plantation. That origin does not make me innocent, nor does it forbid me the chapter. It forbids me the tone of one who explains to others a pain that did not sit at his table. What falls to me is not to look away, not to embellish the turning aside, and not to confuse my emotion with reparation. Emotion is cheap when it does not alter what is said in the next paragraph.

The essayist's temptation, here, is the grandiose sentence. I will resist it. Grandiosity is usually flight. I prefer the detail that does not let me leave clean. The sugar of Pernambuco, the gold that came down to the coast, the tobacco, the dried meat, the cheerful city on the slope, depended on a system that used the Atlantic as a road of cruelly organized direction: people this way, on the voyage without voluntary return; wealth, the other way, under another name. The sea was not scenery. It was a piece of the engineering. The trade wind, which the manuals celebrate as an ally of the discoveries, was also an ally of the trade. Nature did not choose. Men chose the use.

In Rio, the Cais do Valongo received, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, an immense part of those people, before it was filled in and covered by a city that preferred to walk on top. I do not need today's vocabulary to say what yesterday's documents already said, when someone took the trouble to read them. There was a market. There was a price. There was a child counted. The later covering of the quay is an image almost too didactic, and still true: a collec-

tive consciousness can pave what it does not want to step on with the right name.

There is a second temptation, symmetrical with the first: to declare that, before this crime, nothing more can be said about the shore, about the fisherman's trade, about the line of the horizon. I disagree. Total silence is also an abstraction. The descendants of those who were landed built, on this same coast, languages, kitchens, prayers, boats, musics, ways of reading the weather and of treating the dead. The maritime consciousness of the Black Atlantic is not an appendix to this chapter. It is one of its centers. The sea, for that tradition, is not only a wound of origin. It is divinity, a saint's road, sustenance, daily danger, home. To reduce it to the historical tragedy would be to commit, again, the simplification of someone who looks from outside and can bear the other only as a wound.

What I ask, of myself and of the reader, is that the two truths remain on the same page without one serving as alibi to the other. Beauty does not compensate the crime. The crime does not confiscate the beauty produced in spite of it and against it. Adult consciousness is that uncomfortable remaining. Whoever needs to resolve the contradiction too quickly is looking for rest, not understanding. I myself, on certain late afternoons on the quay, feel the impulse to resolve. The light collaborates. The water turns gold, a boy runs, someone laughs. The impulse is human. I yielded to it many times in life. In this book I do not want to yield. I can say that the afternoon is beautiful and, in the next sentence, remember what that port shipped and landed. If the two sentences cannot bear each other, the problem is not aesthetic. It is moral.

When I pass by boat before a fort and hear someone say "what a view," I think of what the view cost those who are not in the photograph. The thought does not make me better. It only prevents a cheap enthusiasm. And cheap enthusiasm, in the matter of the sea, is the most common form of unconsciousness. Not the ignorance of one who did not study. The unconsciousness of one who studied enough to choose the postcard and call the choice sensitivity.

V

Charts, courses, and the drawn self

A nautical chart is a portrait of what an age agreed to ignore. The monsters drawn in the old margins, so often cited to amuse children, were captions of uncertainty. Where the line was missing, the drawing confessed. I prefer that honesty to the mute maps that cover the globe with a uniform certainty, as if seeing from above were the same as understanding. The view from above is a magnificent instrument. It becomes a superstition when it dispenses with the man who is still at the level of the water, where the chart does not get wet and the hull does.

To navigate by dead reckoning — to deduce the point from the last reliable position, the course, and the time — is a theory of identity that does not dare say its name. You know where you left from. You know, approximately, where you pointed. You know how much time has passed. From this you infer where you are. Error accumulates in silence. A current you did not measure displaces you without asking leave. At the end of the account, land appears where it should not, or does not appear. The correction, when there is luck and craft, is called a sighting. Until then, one lives on an honest hypothesis.

It is not different from what we do with our own life, except in one decisive point: at sea, the account can be confronted with a lighthouse, a shoal, a coast that does not yield to our narrative. In the inward life, we manufacture complacent lighthouses. That is why I distrust autobiographies that close with perfection. They found land exactly where the route promised. This happens, sometimes, to navigators. To narrators, it happens with a statistically suspect frequency. A life told without drift is, in general, a life corrected too much at the editing table.

The instruments deserve respect because they limit fantasy. The cross-staff, the quadrant, the mariner's astrolabe, later the sextant, the needle, the chronometer: each one is a machine for putting opinion on a diet. They do not eliminate judgment. Without judgment, the number does not govern a helm. But they place judgment under a discipline. A master who despises the instrument is a dangerous mystic. A master who despises the eye because the instrument has

spoken is a dangerous bureaucrat. Good technical consciousness oscillates between the two contempts without settling in either. That oscillation is not indecision. It is craft.

I remember a cold room in Lisbon, I still young, before a chart on which someone had corrected, in darker ink, the outline of a cape. The correction was minimal. It changed a bay by a stroke of a few millimeters, which on the ground would have been many lives if a pilot trusted the old stroke. I stood looking at that graphic repentance as one looks at an examination of conscience well made. Whoever drew again did not make a speech about humility. He made a better line and left the worse line visible underneath. He did not erase the error. He made it useful. To this day I find that gesture a model of prose. To correct without pretending that the first version did not exist.

I like the old compass roses not for the ornament, though the ornament moves me, but because they oblige one to name intermediate directions. North-northeast is not a decoration. It is the admission that pure north almost never coincides with our course. Practical life happens on the compound courses. Ideology prefers the cardinals, because a cardinal fits in a shout. No one steers a boat by shouting "north" when the wind asks for thirty degrees of nuance. Societies, unfortunately, try. And they call firmness the refusal of nuance.

There is, in the charts, a drawn self: the self that imagines itself at the center of the rose, capable of choosing. That self is in part a necessary fiction. Without it, one does not hold a helm. But it is well to remember what the chart does not draw. The ship's boy's fear. The owner's account. The absence of those who stayed. The insurance. The price of biscuit. The law waiting in port. The name of the one who did not sign the log because he could not write and, even so, held the course. The course is a line. The voyage is a crowd of interests around the line. To confuse the two things is the naivety of someone who loves maps and fears archives.

I myself, in drawing in this book a self that thinks the sea, am making a chart. I leave monsters in the margins where information fails me. I ask the reader to read them as confession, not as decorative fantasy. Where I am too smooth, distrust. A coast too smooth, on the old chart, was often the coast no one had seen up close.

VI

The lighthouse watch

The keeper does not possess the horizon. He maintains a luminous sentence so that others may read it in passing. That definition, which I noted many years ago in the margin of a notebook, still seems to me the most just. It does not speak of solitude, a word worn through to transparency. It speaks of an addressee. The light has a reader whom the author of the light may never know, and that asymmetry is the moral core of the trade.

I visited lighthouses out of a duty of study and out of a curiosity I do not want to disguise as method. What impressed me was not the isolation, which the novel had already prepared to the point of nausea. It was the quality of attention required by a work in which, for most of the hours, nothing happens. The keeper's danger is not only the storm. It is familiarity. The light keeps its period, the mechanism repeats itself, the ear grows used to it, and consciousness can sleep with its eyes open. To watch is to fight against one's own habit of watching. There are few sentences I would repeat with more conviction to a student, and almost none I have fulfilled every day.

There is a discreet moral in this profession. The lighthouse does not exist for the one who inhabits it. It exists for a third person, unknown, who may pass that night or may not. To work for an unknown person who will not come to give thanks is a rare school. Our cities are full of the contrary: gestures made to be seen by those who already know us, and preferably by those who can repay. I do not condemn repayment. I condemn the belief that, without it in sight, the gesture loses its sense. The lighthouse is a practical objection to that belief. It is lit also on the nights when the bar is empty.

I do not turn the keeper into a saint. There were drunks, abandonments, fights, badly kept towers, administrations that treated men as pieces of the lantern. Idealization is a way of not looking. I knew a man, whose name I will not say because I did not ask him to enter a book, who showed me the service book with a frankness without pose. There were failures. There were nights when the notes became the handwriting of someone fighting sleep. There was also a stubborn regularity, almost without heroism, which had saved, according to him,

"he did not know how many, and did not want to know, because knowing brought bad luck." I accepted the superstition. It protected the trade from statistical vanity.

Even so, the function contains a lesson that survives its bad servants. There are lights that serve only if they are regular. Intermittent heroism orients no one. A kindness that lights when there is an audience and goes out when the night is ordinary is not a lighthouse. It is a bonfire. The bonfire warms those nearby and confuses those far off, who do not know whether that is a port, a feast, or a fire. Regularity seems poor to temperaments that respect only the exceptional. At sea, the exceptional without a code is often the wreck.

The technical intermittence of the light, that one, has a function. The period, the eclipse, the color, the number of flashes distinguish one tower from another. The sailor does not want just any brightness. He wants that brightness, identifiable, so as to know where the land waits for him and on which side the danger is. Even the darkness between two flashes is part of the code. Not every silence is a fault. Some silences are a signal. I was slow to understand this, educated as I was in a culture in which to be silent always seems an omission. There are omissions that are a crime. There are intervals that are language. The difference lies in knowing whether someone, on the other side, has agreed the meaning of the interval. Without that agreement, the dark goes back to being only dark.

I think, sometimes, that certain books ought to be written with this ethic. Not to illuminate the author. To be recognizable in the dark, regular, and useful to whoever passes offshore without the obligation to land. If this essay has any right to exist, it will be that. Not the crashing originality, which ages like a bonfire. The regularity of an attention the reader can use on a night of his own, before a water I may never have seen. I do not need to have been in every lighthouse. I need not to lie about the nature of the light.

In the last tower I visited, already with legs little disposed to the stair, the guard showed me the sea by day, which is when the lighthouse seems useless. "By day we exist for the tourist," he said, without bitterness. "By night, for whoever needs us." The sentence divided the world better than many treatises. I kept it. There is a daytime existence of our ideas, made to be photographed, and a nocturnal existence, in which they have to work without an audience. I would like

mine to belong to the second. I know how many times they stayed in the first.

VII

Fishermen: a knowledge without a chair

In the middle of September 1941, four men left Praia de Iracema, in Fortaleza, on a jangada called São Pedro, rigged with logs of piúba. They were Manuel Olímpio Meira, known as Jacaré; Jerônimo André de Souza; Raimundo Correia Lima, Tatá; and Manuel Pereira da Silva, Manuel Preto. They were going to meet the president. They were not going as a symbol, though the country decided, with its usual speed, to make them one. They were going because thousands of fishermen in Ceará were outside the pension that supported other workers of the sea, and because misery, when it is very concrete, produces itineraries that theory finds improbable.

The jangada covered more than two thousand kilometers of coast. On 15 November 1941 it entered Guanabara Bay. There was a siren, a crowd, the audience with Getúlio Vargas. Three days later, Decree-Law no. 3,832, of 18 November 1941, provided for the situation of fishing owners and fishermen before the Institute of Retirement and Pensions of Maritime Workers. The sentence, put that way, sounds like the end of a chapbook. It was not. Inclusion came with the usual small print. For those who fished on their own account, the benefit could be reduced to a third of the normal, unless they contributed double. A partial victory, wrested by people the legislation treated as nearly invisible, followed by real life, which does not let itself be closed in a decree.

The following year, Orson Welles, in Brazil to film, wanted to reconstruct the arrival. During the filming at sea off Rio, in 1942, Jacaré fell into the water. The body was not recovered. The film, which Welles called *It's All True*, was not completed then. I tell the fact without exploiting its symmetry, though the symmetry is there, cruel, waiting for the men of letters. The man who crossed that distance on a jangada in order to be seen by power died in a representation of the crossing. There are too many lessons in that sentence. I distrust them all. I stay with the essential: there was a trade, there was a claim, there was a risk that was not a metaphor. The risk fulfilled itself off the plan, which is where serious risks usually fulfill themselves.

The knowledge of these men did not pass through the chair, and the chair, for a long time, repaid the indifference with late praise. They knew the moon, the color of the water, the creature that announced fish, the log that would hold, the wind that was talk and the wind that was a sentence. This knowledge is not an earlier stage of science, waiting to be promoted. It is another regime of proof. The proof, there, is called coming back alive and with something to eat. Whoever fails that examination does not repeat the year.

I, who have spent my life in rooms where error is an inconvenience correctable in the revision of proofs, need to repeat this sentence until it takes my arrogance from me: there are knowledges whose verification is the body. They are not superior to mine for being old, nor inferior for not fitting in a journal. They are knowledges with another cost. To treat them as folklore is the last gesture of the literate man who wants the color of the scene without the debt to those who sustain it. Folklore is the polite name we give a knowledge when we have already decided not to be governed by it.

There are those who remember Jacaré as a man of a notebook, capable of verses, illiterate of school and not of attention. I will not invent a quatrain I did not read. The fact is enough for me, if it is a fact and not a memorialist's affection: the leadership of that voyage did not coincide with the diploma. This ought to be banal. It is not. We go on organizing public respect as if the printed letter were the only sign that someone had thought. The jangada São Pedro is an objection to that organization chart. Not the only one. One of the clearest, because it crossed the country slowly, in sight of anyone who wished to see, and it arrived.

Decades later I spoke with sons and nephews of fishermen, in Fortaleza and on the coast of Pernambuco. I will not fabricate here a speech I did not note word for word. I will say only what was repeated, from different houses, with a calm that shamed me. They knew what theirs had done. They knew the price. They did not ask me to turn them into a legend. They asked, when they asked for anything, that the fish might still be sold by the one who caught it, and that old age not be a beach without a stair. The rest was with me. The rest was literature. I took care not to confuse the two accounts, though literature, by its natural vanity, always wants to pay both with the same coin.

A knowledge without a chair is not a knowledge without a criterion. It is a knowledge whose criterion does not ask our leave. I may describe it. I may defend it when the law crushes it. I cannot name myself its official interpreter without repeating, in small print, the gesture the decree sometimes makes: to include by half and call that complete justice. The half, in 1941, was written. A third, to be exact. The numbers of the law are also a form of consciousness. It is well to read them down to the article no one cites in the speech at the edge of the quay.

VIII

Tide, memory, forgetting

The tide is the most honest model of memory I know. What returns is not the same water. What returns occupies, however, the place of the previous water, and for a moment convinces us of identity. The beach believes. We believe. Then the line recedes and leaves on the dry a small proof that the return was a loan: a seaweed, a sole, a shard, a different silence. Whoever loves perfect repetitions does not love the tide. He loves a clock.

I grew up seeing women go, early in the morning, to see what the night had done to the sand. They were not looking for a metaphor. They were going to see whether the canoe was whole, whether the net had not been taken, whether the boy who insisted on sleeping in the bow was still a boy and not news. That daily inspection is a form of practical memory. It does not remember in order to move. It remembers in order to decide the day. I think I have spent my whole life trying to write with a similar method, and approaching it only now and then. The beautiful sentence is the opposite of inspection. The beautiful sentence has already decided what it wants to find.

There is an abundant literature on the sea as forgetting. The image is strong and, for that reason, suspect. Water does cover. It also returns. And it returns badly, by half, out of time, like a disorganized archive that releases the piece only when we no longer know to which case it belonged. Whoever expects from the sea a symmetrical consolation — to carry away forever what hurts — has not observed a coast after the surge. The sea is not that convenient river of the myths, made for the soul to drink and forget. The sea is a capricious archivist.

Sometimes cruel in being so partial. It returns the shoe and keeps the name.

I once saw a plank returned to the beach with three letters still legible and the rest sanded by the sand. There were people around discussing whether it belonged to a known boat. No one reached an agreement. The plank dried, was leaned against a wall, and, days later, had served to wedge a table. I do not tell this as a parable, though the parable offers itself with an almost indecent insistence. I tell it because that is how it was. Collective memory, on the coast, does not always become a monument. Sometimes it becomes a wedge. The use continues. The meaning is completed in another trade. Whoever demands that every loss remain solemn does not know the economy of houses in which wood is lacking.

The names given to the tides, in the communities that still depend on them, follow the moon with an exactness urban calendars have lost. The full moon is not romance. It is the height of water at the quay, it is ease or disaster for leaving the bar, it is fish that comes in or does not. When a city stops naming the tide, it has not become more rational. It has become less informed about its own edge. Rationality is not the abandonment of the phenomenon. It is its correct description. A coastal city that knows only the hour of the clock and ignores the hour of the water is a city illiterate at its own address.

I, who live by remembering in writing, distrust memory when it presents itself too clean. The tide serves me as a correction. If a childhood memory returns whole, with complete speeches and studio light, it was probably rewritten by vanity. The true memories I keep of Olinda arrive like the ebb: incomplete, with sand, with an object I do not know why it stayed. The rusted hook in my father's drawer. The sound, not the words, of an argument in the kitchen when a neighbor's boat did not come in. The color of the water on the day they told me, without lowering the voice, that my cousin had stayed. Not the speech. The color. For years I tried to recover my mother's exact sentence on that day. I could not. The sentence I put in its place was always more dignified than her voice, and for that reason it was false. I gave up. I stayed with the color, which would not let itself be improved.

Forgetting, sometimes, is hygiene. No one sails if he keeps on deck all the previous storms in equal volume. Total memory would be a form of immobility, a boat so loaded with yesterday that it does not leave the bar. But there are forget-

tings that are only the victory of the stronger over the archive. That one I do not call peace. I call it a human tide, and those are the worst, because they rise by decision, not by the moon. One can argue with the moon. One cannot dissuade it. With a human decision one still can, if there is someone to inspect the beach in the morning and say, without metaphor, what was taken.

IX

Shipwreck as method

On the first of November 1755, All Saints' Day, the earth in Lisbon failed, and the Tagus too. The river drew back. The bed appeared in parts. The wave came. The fire did the rest. I will not narrate again what has already been narrated by better witnesses and by a European debate that has not yet finished learning the lesson. I want only an observation useful to my theme. The disaster of that day was not only of ships. It was of a confidence. The confidence that the city, the quay, the hour of mass, and the order of the world coincided. When they coincide for a long time, we begin to call that coincidence nature. Nature, in Lisbon, presented a dissent.

Voltaire answered with a poem, and European philosophy gained a shock we like to remember because it seems intelligent to us. I do not deny the shock. I deny that it replaces the scene. The poem is one possible consciousness. The widow on the quay is another. The pilot who saw the bed of the river where there ought to have been water is yet another. My trade, which is the essay's, is closer to the poem than to the widow. I know this. That is why I forbid myself to think that the intellectual shock has already done the work of mourning. It has not. It has done the work of thought, which is necessary and is not sufficient.

A shipwreck is a violent correction of the human measure. While the hull holds, technique seems a second nature. When the hull yields, the first nature presents the bill, without discussing the project. That is why shipwreck fascinates philosophers and terrifies practitioners. The philosopher sees a method. The practitioner sees the death of people whose names he can list. I write from this side of the table, in safety, and for that reason I oblige myself not to find the method too beautiful. The beauty of the method, in this subject, is almost

always a symptom that we were not on board.

Even so, there is a sober use of the idea, and I do not want to waste it for fear of rhetoric. Small wrecks happen without epic. The canoe that turns in the bar. The engine that goes silent. The anchor that does not bite. The calculation of the ebb that erred by half an hour. Whoever survives these lesser episodes, and accepts learning them, acquires a quality I would call instrumental modesty. He begins to treat his own knowledge as provisional. Not as useless: as provisional. The distinction matters. The skeptic who no longer studies the bar is not humble. He is only a wreck in advance, of those who drown on land for fear of repeating the gesture. Instrumental modesty still goes out. It goes out with another attention.

There was, in my family, an episode that never became news. A great-uncle went out for a short job, at dawn, and came back swimming, in the morning, without the boat and without two nails. He did not become wise. He became quieter and, for a year, more exact. Then the exactness wore out, like everything that is not exercised, and he went back to risking what he should not. I tell this against the legend that trauma improves us forever. Sometimes it improves us for a season. Consciousness is not a medal. It is a maintenance. Whoever tells his disaster as a diploma is, at bottom, asking to be excused from remaining attentive.

Lisbon, after 1755, rebuilt itself, and the rebuilding is also a lesson, not only the ruin. There is a vanity of ruins that displeases the understanding as much as the vanity of palaces. The city that rises must decide what it repeats and what it alters. It does not always decide well. Often it remakes the quay with the same excessive confidence, only with newer stone. The method of shipwreck, if it is to serve for anything outside the sea, is the question asked in time, not the cult of rubble. Where are you too thin? What bolt did you stop reviewing because yesterday it held? What word of yours works only in fair weather?

I wish no one the complete lesson. I wish the question, asked with the water still outside. There are questions that occur only when the water has already come in, and those arrive late, though they are sincere. The essayist, who has the indecent privilege of thinking dry, ought to use that privilege to advance the question, not to describe it with talent after someone else's disaster. If I fail at

this, let the reader at least keep the question, which is in the public domain and does not need me.

X

Coastal consciousness

There are cities that can forget the sea for days. Some manage it, and even so they interest me, because their forgetting is full of sea: in the port that feeds them without their seeing it, in the surname, in the fish that arrives early at the market, in the price of freight hidden in the goods. But coastal consciousness properly speaking is another thing. It is that of the city that cannot turn its back completely, because the water enters the drawing of the streets.

Lisbon, Salvador, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Belém, my Olinda: each one negotiates in a distinct way with that impossibility. In all of them, however, I find the same moral division disguised as geography. Those who live facing the view and those who live facing the danger are often not the same people. The veranda and the flood are not distributed by lot. The beautiful postcard has an address. The trash the tide piles up has another. To call this landscape, and nothing more, is a political decision dressed as an adjective.

Recife taught me this with an almost didactic clarity, which does not make it easy to live. The water is not an ornament of the city. It is its syntax. Bridges, mangroves, quays, the tide that changes the smell of the center at the end of the afternoon, the reef that gave the place its name and that breaks the wave before it arrives with all its force. Whoever speaks of Recife without speaking of water speaks of a model. And whoever speaks of the water without speaking of those who lose the house when it rises speaks of a card. Coastal consciousness, if it is consciousness and not scenery, includes the price of the edge.

Olinda, seen from Recife, looks like a crèche on the hill: convents, palms, a sweetness the card did not invent, only chose. I lived in that sweetness long enough to know what it omits. The high city looks at the sea with a security the low city cannot copy. History put churches on the height and wharves below, and then pretended that the distribution was the natural charm of the relief. The relief is real. The use of the relief is history. One does not understand a shore until one asks who was left with the breeze and who was left with the flood.

I write in 2003, and it is already visible, to whoever wants to see, that the edge is changing place. It is not for me to prophesy meters I have not measured. It is for me to register what generations in Olinda already discuss without waiting for a theorem: the retreat of the coast, the walls, the stones set against the sea like someone arguing with an interlocutor who does not sign an agreement. Erosion is not an intellectual fashion. It is an old fight between the house and the water, now harder to deny. A maritime consciousness of our time will be incomplete if it treats the coast as a stable frame for eternal feelings. The frame has entered history. The line of the beach, which seemed a given, is a sentence under revision.

This alters even nostalgia, which is the vice of my class and, I confess, my own. Longing for a shore supposes that the shore remain there, waiting for our moved return. And if the shore does not wait? Memory will have to learn a new trade: to remember not only what was, but what was in transit while we pretended it was eternal. Lighthouses also retire. Some fall. Some remain in the middle of the beach, or in the middle of the water, like a sentence whose context the tide carried off. Light is not an acquired right over geology.

I love these cities. I say it without shame, because the love that refuses examination is not love. It is propaganda. To love a coast is to want it to remain habitable for those who work on it, not merely photographable for those who pass. The criterion is simple. The fulfillment is not. I have seen plans for the shore in which the word revitalization meant the polite expulsion of whoever smelled of fish. The beach became beautiful. Coastal consciousness died exactly on the day of the inauguration, making a speech. There is no sadder contrast than a ribbon cut in front of a quay from which the people who knew the tide by name have already left.

The healthy coastal city, if I had to describe it without naivety, would be the one in which the boy of the view and the boy of the flood attend the same school and the same water, and in which the second does not pay alone for the first's postcard. It is not a description. It is a criterion of reading. I apply it to Lisbon as I apply it to Recife, so that no one will suppose that my tenderness as one born in Olinda makes me blind only abroad and lucid only at home. Pet blindness is the contrary of consciousness. It chooses the place where it does not want to see.

XI

The interior that imitates the sea

I never accepted the lazy division between a Brazil of the coast, supposedly open, and a Brazil of the sertão, supposedly closed to the sea. The sea entered the backlands by names, by promises, by ex-votos, by the stories of those who went and did not return, by the stories of those who never went and even so measured hope in leagues of water. The interior does not ignore the ocean. Often it imitates it, because it needs a greatness equal to the thirst.

I heard, in the fairs of the Agreste, the word sea said with a reverence that on the coast, from being so daily, has already worn out. For that speaker, the sea was not an available horizon. It was a mythical limit, almost theological, the place where the world declared its scale. There is a risk in romanticizing that reverence, and I avoid it. It was also fed by absence, by inequality of travel, by a school that taught the discoverer and not the price of the passage. Even so, the image operated. It organized accounts. It gave a figure to the very large. To despise it as geographical ignorance is not to understand what a figure is for when the body cannot make the voyage.

The inverse is also true, and less sung. I have known men of the sea who longed for a street without damp, for a floor that did not ask for calculation, for a night in which the body could lay down the watch. Maritime consciousness is not always an enamorment. Sometimes it is a fatigue of someone who has no license to be distracted. The interior, for these, is not backwardness. It is the concrete fantasy of rest. I heard a master say, without lyricism, that his dream of old age was a house in which the window gave no information. "A window that warns of nothing." I understood. He had spent his life at a window that was an instrument of work. He wanted, at the end, a window that was only a window.

The great droughts produced, in the sertão, an experience of waiting that converses, in its own way, with the fisherman's waiting. They are not the same waiting. To fuse them would be the coarseness of a hurried essayist, of those who discover an analogy and then move into it. One waiting depends on the rain that does not come. The other, on the water that is always there and even so does not give fish. But the two teach an anthropology of contingency. The next day is

not a right. It is a hypothesis. Whoever grew up with the next day guaranteed will call this pessimism. Whoever grew up otherwise will call this a calendar.

I like the ex-votos in the shape of a boat, hung in rooms where many devotees never went aboard. The object is a minimal theology. Life also takes on water, and someone asks to arrive. It is not necessary to have seen Recife in order to understand the rough wooden jangada glued to the wall. The symbol, in this case, does not replace the real. It points to a crossing that the devotee's body recognizes by other floods: illness, debt, the child who went to the big city as one goes to the open sea. To ridicule the ex-voto is easy for someone who never needed a request so concrete. I, who was educated to prefer the concept to wax and wood, had to relearn respect. The concept does not sail. The wood, even in miniature, is already an attempt at a hull.

There is also the chapbook, the saint of the boat, the promise, the story told at the fair with the precision of someone who cannot get the hero's name wrong because the listener knows the family. I will not folklorize that corpus in a list. I want only to mark its place in the geography of consciousness. The sea, there, is an imported measure made domestic. It serves to say excess. It serves to say the crossing. It serves to say what has no size in the language of the fields and therefore borrows the language of the water. That borrowing is not fraud. It is figurative intelligence. The fraud would be me, from the coast, explaining to the man of the sertão what the sea is "for real," as if the truth were exhausted in what I saw with my eyes.

That is why the title of this book is not only coastal. Maritime consciousnesses include those who measure the world from the absence of the sea. They include the boy of the sertão for whom the word Atlantic is a door, and the old man of the port for whom the same word is a workaday expedient, dirty with scale. To force them to speak the same sentence would be a didactic violence. It is for the essay to keep them on the same horizon without pretending they are in the same boat. The horizon, I have already said, is a category, not a meeting place. It can be common without being identical. This, in fact, would be a good definition of culture: what allows us to look at the same line without having made the same voyage.

XII

Staying afloat

Whoever stays afloat does not confuse flotation with victory. The body floats, in ordinary conditions, because physics allows it, not because character deserves it. I begin with that reminder to avoid the tone of advice that the ends of books contract like a fever. I am not going to tell the reader how to live. I am going to say what, after these meditations, still seems to me true, and true in a modest sense: I have not yet been able to give it the lie.

The sea does not make us deep. It makes more expensive the error of being superficial. That is the only moral superiority I dare attribute to it, and even that is indirect. Depth continues to be our task. There are vile people in every port in the world, and just people in cities without a drop of salt water. Geography baptizes no one. Whoever uses the quay as a certificate of sensitivity is only changing pulpits.

What the frequency of the sea can do, if we do not turn it into an ornament, is educate a few habits. I say habits, not virtues. Virtue announces itself. Habit sustains. A lighthouse, I have already said, is not an intention.

The first is the habit of the moving limit. To know that the horizon recedes does not prevent us from tracing routes. It prevents us from taking the route for an absolute. Every conviction ought to carry, in the margin, the hour at which it was calculated and the position from which one was looking. Without those data, conviction is a map without a scale, and a map without a scale is an opinion disguised as territory. I myself wrote pages, in earlier books, which today I want to reread with the position noted. I do not renounce them entirely. I want to know from what height of the eyes they were said. Some, I suspect, were said from the hill, where the limit looks nobler than it is.

The second is the habit of the relay. Someone sleeps because someone watches. Consciousness is not an individual trophy. In coastal families this is learned early, sometimes unjustly, with the women carrying the watch on land while public speech celebrates only those who left. To name the relay is also to correct its distribution. It is no use praising the watch if the praise always falls on the same kind of body, the one that goes, and forgets the body that holds the house

so that the going is possible. The voyage begins in the kitchen as much as on the quay. The epic hates that sentence. So much the worse for the epic.

The third is the habit of historical debt. To say Atlantic, in Portuguese, without remembering the hold, is to speak a language by half. The missing half does not ask for our weeping, which is a quick way of feeling absolved. It asks for precision, memory, and the refusal to use beauty as a solvent. I do not have the power to repair what the trade did. I have the power, small and nontransferable, not to write a page that depends on forgetting it in order to stay harmonious. Harmony that depends on forgetting is decoration. It may adorn a room. It should not adorn a consciousness.

The fourth is the habit of maintenance. To know is not a sudden illumination. It is the revision of the bolt, the listening to the weather, the correction of the reckoning, the apology when the reckoning erred and the error reached someone. Consciousness, if it is maritime in any useful sense, looks more like a trade than like an ecstasy. Ecstasies sell better. They last less and do not hold the helm at the hour when the hand is wet. I distrust my own pages of ecstasy, including those the reader may have found beautiful in this volume. Beauty is not forbidden. It is forbidden to be the last criterion. The last criterion is to know whether the sentence is still true when the tide changes.

I do not want this book to end at altitude. I want it to end at the height of the water, which is where things happen. The tide fills the alley in Paraty, the baker crosses barefoot, the coffee goes on being made. None of this is a symbol while it is still wet. It becomes a symbol when someone, from the window, decides not to come down. I came down. The water was cold. That, and not a theory, is what I have to offer at the end: the disposition to enter the measure of the phenomenon, even when the phenomenon is only a flooded street on an ordinary morning. The reader has the right to find it little. I find it sufficient, and rare.

The plural of the title stands. There is not one maritime consciousness. There are several, and they argue inside whoever is disposed to hear them without forcing them into minutes. The cartographer's and the enslaved person's do not fuse. The keeper's and the woman's who inspects the beach in the morning do not fuse. The boy of the sertão and the master of the trawler do not fuse. The adult work is not to fuse them into a concept more elegant than they are. It is to

prevent one from speaking in the name of all. Including mine, which is that of the literate man, born in sight of the reef, and which for that very reason is always tempted to be the voice of the whole chapter.

If I ever knew how to stay afloat, it was on the days when I managed this: not to resolve. To keep. To look at the line, to say its height, and not to call infinite what was only the temporary end of my view.

A note on the sources

I avoided, in the body of the essay, the footnote. Not out of contempt for the archive, but because the footnote, in this genre, often serves as a safe-conduct: the sentence risks little, and the note pretends the risk was taken. I prefer that the responsibility stay in the line. Even so, the reader has the right to know what is document and what is meditation.

The letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha, written in 1500 and dated, in the editorial tradition, the first of May, is a document. I read it for the wavering of the sentence before what did not yet have a stable name, not as a certificate of innocence for what followed. The Lusiads exist, and the line everyone quotes exists in them. I do not repeat it. The problem was never the line. It was the use of it as a license to treat navigation, above all, as the glory of the language.

The Lisbon earthquake, on the first of November 1755, All Saints' Day, with the retreat of the Tagus, the sea wave, and the fire, is a historical fact of enormous consequence. The estimates of the dead vary so much that I preferred not to elect a number. Voltaire wrote, the following year, a poem on the disaster. I cite the existence of that response, not its lines. The essay should not dress itself in someone else's clothes in order to seem older.

The voyage of the jangada São Pedro is fact. They left Fortaleza, from Praia de Iracema, in the middle of September 1941: Manuel Olímpio Meira, known as Jacaré; Jerônimo André de Souza; Raimundo Correia Lima, Tatá; and Manuel Pereira da Silva, Manuel Preto. The entry into Guanabara Bay took place on 15 November 1941. Decree-Law no. 3,832, of 18 November 1941, provides for the situation of fishing owners, fishermen, and employees in connected trades before the Institute of Retirement and Pensions of Maritime Workers. Article 4

reduces to a third the benefits of the fishermen on their own account defined there, allowing them a double contribution in order to obtain the full benefit. I used that small print on purpose. The history told only up to the president's embrace is an incomplete history.

In 1942, during Orson Welles's filming of *It's All True*, at sea off Rio de Janeiro, Manuel Olímpio Meira fell into the water and the body was not recovered. The film was not finished at that moment. I attributed no speeches to Jacaré, to Welles, or to the other three crewmen. Where someone else's oral memory reached me only as rumor — the notebook of verses, for example — I treated it as rumor, not as quotation.

On the Atlantic trade, the fact that suffices me in the body of the text is this, consolidated by the historiography: Brazil was the principal destination of the people embarked by force in Africa, and the number of those lives is measured in millions. I did not choose a single figure because the totals vary according to whether one counts embarkation, landing, period, and route. The order of magnitude is not in serious dispute. The Cais do Valongo, in Rio de Janeiro, built at the beginning of the nineteenth century and later filled in, is a historical place of that landing, not an allegory I invented to close a paragraph.

The relation between the distance of the horizon and the square root of the observer's height is elementary geometry, corrected in practice by refraction. I used it as an antidote to the rhetoric of infinity, not as a scientific novelty. Any pilot recognizes it in use, even when he does not write it down.

The rest is mine. The house in Paraty, the counter of fishhooks, the great-uncle who swam back, the master of the trawler, the nameless keeper, the mornings in Olinda: these are matter of memory and of composition, not a document the reader should cite as archive. If any of these scenes seems truer than the date of a decree, so much the better for literature and so much the worse for the illusion that only the decree is real. The two orders of truth exist. I asked only that they not replace each other.

The author

Amadeu Lacerda Pessanha was born in Olinda on 12 March 1931 and died in Paraty on 4 August 2016. He studied philosophy at the University of Coimbra and the history of navigation in Lisbon. He taught for more than thirty years at the Federal University of Pernambuco. He refused, with unvarying courtesy, to be called a philosopher of the sea. He said the sea already had too many interpreters and too few witnesses.

He published, with Oficina do Maralto, The Line of the Horizon (1974), Moral Atlantic (1986), and The Ear of the Tides (1998). Maritime Consciousnesses, finished in a rented house by the quay at Paraty, appeared in 2003. He left unfinished a text he called The Sand Returns.

The persona, the house, and this bibliography are invention. The essay the reader has just read was written to exist as a book, not as the disguise of a historical author. The dates, the names, and the decrees indicated in the note on the sources can be verified. The voice that meditates on them cannot.

Collection note

This work belongs to Margem 37, a literary project of human–AI collaboration conceived by Lis & Lev.

Amadeu Lacerda Pessanha is a fictional literary persona created with Grok, and *Maritime Consciousnesses* is a work produced from that persona. Biographical and narrative elements relating to the author belong to the literary universe of the work. Factual, scientific or historical references, when identified as such, refer to the real world.