António Lobo Antunes, *The Cus of Judas*

Note: *The Cus de Judas*is the semi-autobiographical account of a Portuguese soldier (the narrator) who fights in the colonial war in Angola. Throughout the novel, the narrator addresses an anonymous lover, with whom he shares his traumatic experiences.

**V**

Do you know Malanje? I was waiting in the morning to tell you about Malanje, the unreality of polar twilight that surrounds the objects and faces of this kind of transparent halo landed in the pine forests of Beira, in the morning, of the silence of the suspended sea, listening, breathing lightly, in the morning, to tell you of Malanje. Malanje, you know, is today the pile of rubble and ruins in which the civil war has made it, a land unrecognizable by the stupid useless violence of bombs, a shallow field of corpses, steaming ribs of houses, and death. Perhaps in that time, when I passed her back to my country, I could guess the wreckage and ruins under the intact profile of the buildings, the trees of the garden, the café filled with pretentious mulattos, whose huge luxury cars supported on the sidewalk the squalo noses of the headlights. Perhaps he could predict, under the apparent health of the sun, his near death, as certain sick people reveal to us, behind the cheerful smile or eyes full of false hope, the squeathing, not of fear or disgust, but of shame, of agony. The shame of lying down, the shame of not having strength, the shame of disappearing soon, the agony, the shame before others, those who of the feet of the bed look at us in the relieved horror of the survivors, invent words of a painful optimism, talk in a low voice with the nurse in the corners of the room, which the window illuminates diagonally of an illusory day. Malanje, you see, is today the pile of wreckage and ruins in which the civil war made it, a devastated, missing city, a temple of Diana with dark walls and walls torn down, but in '73, it was the land of diamonds, of those who enriched and gained weight at the expense of smuggling diamonds, at the expense of the camanga, the stealth trade of the stones: all the people brought frasquinhos of reagents in the pocket, the blacks, the white population, the police, the PIDE, the administrative, the teachers, the troop, and at night, in the dirty waist of the sanzalas, the ore was bought to those who arrived from the river or the border with a flicker of glass wrapped in pieces of cloth, protected by the knives attentive to the accomplices. Sanzalas and whore houses under the eucalyptus trees, cheetah bedspreads, dolls, aged women with silver teeth, record players singing the heart meringues of the Congo, and happiness for two hundred shields in a sudden laugh of young black, welcoming us within a joy of mockery.

Malanje was the small, bald, wrinkled officer, stood at the door of the high school to watch the girls leave the classes, wetting the role of cigarettes of an old pig desire, or installed after dinner on the sidewalk to the balcony of the messe, watching the impúbere neighbor, who lifted the dishes from the table, with bulging orbits, stuffed animal. I saw him in the Chiúme open the fly in front of a prisoner, force her to lift one of her legs by placing it on the bidet, and penetrate it, in a beret on her head, blowing through her nose a goat-repellent asthma. I entered the sergeants' bathroom, in the eternally flooded and nauseating pigsty that was called the sergeants' bathroom, I saw the officer hugging, in a kind of epileptic despair, to the prisoner, mute and shy creature leaning against the tiles, of hollow pupils, and above their head, through the window, the chana opened up in a majestic fan of tinted greens, in which one guessed the slow, ziquezagueante, almost metallic brightness of the river, and the great peace of Angola in the cacimbo, at five in the afternoon, refracted by successive contradictory layers of the fog. The man's buttocks formed a plunger movement that rushed, the shirt was caught on the back on inaccurate islands of sweat, the chin trembled like those of the pensioners in the cafeterias of the nursing homes, the plight's hollow pupils aimed at me in an unbearable fixity, and I felt like, you see, also taking my dick out and urinating on them, urinate long on them, as in small pee to the frogs of the yard, sheltered in the middle of two trunks in a affliction of breathing stones.

But we could not urinate on the war, on the vileness and corruption of war: it was the war that urinated on us its shrapnel and its shots, confined us to the narrowness of anguish and made us into sad spiteful animals, raping women against the white cold and light of the tiles, or made us masturbate at night, in bed, waiting for the attack, heavy of resignation and whiskey, shrunk on the sheets, to the iae of terrified fetuses, listening to the gaseous fingers of the wind in the eucalyptus trees, identical to very light phalanges brushing by a piano of thin leaves. We have no trees here: just the dust of the buildings that rise, around this, according to the same depressingly equal model for melancholy bankers, the lights of the Areeiro up there, bluish and vague as orbits of blind dogs, Avenida Almirante Reis and its shops closed on themselves in the manner of the fists of a sleeping child: people wake up, pull away the curtains from the window, peek out, observe the grey streets, the gray cars, the gray silhouettes that greyly move, feel a gray despair grow within them and lie down again, conformed, muttering gray words in their thick sleep.

Have you noticed that I live in a Pompeii of buildings under construction, walls, beams, growing debris, abandoned cranes, mounds of sand, and round cement machines like rusty stomachs? In a few hours, helmet workers will begin to hammer these ruins perched on sketches of frames, the torches will pierce the concrete in a web rage, the plumbers will open bushes of arteries in the flesh of the houses. I live in a dead world, without smells, dust and stone, where the nurse of the polyclinic of the first floor walks, in a coat, the surprised beard of faun, searching around him, in vain, fluffy grasses of margin. I live in a world of dust, stone and garbage, mainly garbage, garbage from the works, garbage from the clandestine tents, garbage from papers that turn and chase each other, along the sidings, gutters outside, blown by a breath that there is no, garbage of gypsies dressed in black, installed in the uneven of the earth, in an immemorial waiting of known apostles.

I wanted to tell you about Malanje, now that I behaved more or less, isn't it? old dentures loose, panting, tongue-out, by the white circle of the host. I, a choirboy, accompanied the priest and contemplated, fascinated, the unbelievable length of the tongues of the old women who pushed and cotosed, armed with umbrellas of bone cord and large thirds similar to necklaces of actresses, in front of the prior, cup in hand, muttering mystical burping snares by the tip of the beiços. I wanted to talk to you about Malanje, the city surrounded by houses of whores and eucalyptus trees, homeland of the camanga full of profanity or elusive adventurers, types of cautious pupils, oblique, installed lightly on the terraces of cafes. I wanted to tell you about malanje's miraculous clarity, the light that would be said to be born from the ground in a fiery, violent jubilation of the PIDE bunker and the pretentious barracks below, provincial barracks, you see, smelling disinterest and sergeant.

From Malanje to Luanda, four hundred kilometers of road crossed the fantastic hills of Salazar, villages on the edge of the tar like warts on the contour of a beiço, the majestic flow of the Dondo in which one guesses the presence of the sea, in the delay of its slow hips of woman of Pavia, and in the white and learebirds of the bay of Luanda, to skim the water with the bodies of fusiform spherine. But the important thing, in Malanje, were the minutes that precede the dawn, the unreal, poignant, absurd minutes that precede the dawn, colorless and distorted like the faces of insomnia or fear, the deserted perspective of the streets, the transid silence of the trees and their arms that seem to retract, hesitantly, hurt by a panic without reason. Before dawn, you know, all cities worry, wrinkle in discomfort like the eyelids of a man who has not slept, spy on clarity, the undecided birth of light, shiin like sick pigeons on a roof, wincing at night feathers in fragile and hollow fear of bones. The first sun, pale, orange, as if painted in pencil in the faded silver sky, finds, as it slowly emerges from the geometric confusion of the houses, nailed squares, shrunken avenues, no-space sleepers, shadows devoid of mystery refugees inside the rooms, between the brightness of the glasses and the smiles of the dead in the frames, of curly moustaches like the sarcastic eyebrows of the teachers of Mathematics, after the utterance of a difficult faucet problem. All the cities are restless, but Malanje, you realize, bent over to shudder at herself as I lean, in bed, to themselves, fearful of the day that awaits me, with its unbearable weight of stone in my chest, and the ash that accumulates in my hands and I leave in the restaurants when washing them, before the eternal steak tasteless of lunch. I wanted to ask you not to leave here, to accompany me, to lie with me waiting not only for the morning but the next night, and the other night, and the next night, because isolation and loneliness are wrapped in my guts, in my arms, in my arms, in my throat, prevent me from moving and talking, make me an agony vegetable incapable of a cry or a gesture, waiting for sleep that is not enough. Stay with me until I finally fall asleep, walk away from you in one of those inexplicable loose reptations with which the drowned sway in the leakers, extend me face down, mouth on the pillow, drooling on the belly of the pillowcase indistinct words, sink me into the swampy pit of a kind of death, snoring my thick coma of gum and alcohol. Stay with me now that Malanje's morning swells inside me, vibrates inside me, inverted, deformed reflex agitations, and I am alone on the asphalt of the city, near the cafes and garden, possessed of an unusual desire without object, indefinite and vehement, thinking of Lisbon, Gija or the sea, thinking of the houses of whores under the eucalyptus trees and their beds full of dolls and naperons. The fear of returning to my country compresses my esophagus, because, you see, I no longer have a place anywhere, I've been too far away, too long to belong here again, to these autumns of rains and masses, these time-consuming winters depolished like fused lamps, these faces that I recognize badly under the drawn wrinkles, that an ironic characterizer invented. I float between two continents that repel me, naked with roots, in search of a white space where to anchor, and that can be, for example, the extended mountain range of his body, a recôncavo, a grave of his body, to lie down, you know, my hope ashamed.