Gonçalo M. Tavares’s *Uma Viagem à Índia* and Bloom’s ‘definitive boredom’

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In this paper, we will be looking at the issue of boredom in the contemporary world and its presence in Uma Viagem à Índia (A Voyage to India), by Portuguese writer Gonçalo M. Tavares, through an analysis of the protagonist’s journey from Lisbon to India, wherein he looks to learn and forget in the same movement (that is to say, always moving forward and not allowing himself time to ever look back). The unique and complex goal for this unusual voyage is made explicit right at the beginning of stanza ten from Canto I:

Let us look closely at this passage and discuss the hostility towards the past mentioned by the narrator. If we look at the narrative offered by Tavares, we will see that Bloom’s hostility is the result of an important event in his life, which is in turn directly responsible for his decision to escape Lisbon in such an abrupt manner: Bloom killed his father, John Bloom, immediately after he had commended the death of Bloom’s beloved, Mary. For those familiar with Camões’ The Lusiads, this episode is intimately related and directly inspired by the Inês de Castro episode that recounts a tragic legend of forbidden love, which was made popular by Camões and which has been the object of inspiration for countless Portuguese artists over the centuries. In a wider sense, we can say that Bloom’s hostility has to do with the conflicting relationship between

2 All translations from Gonçalo M. Tavares’s Uma Viagem à Índia into English are my own.
contemporary man and history. Indeed, Lars Svendsen, in *A Philosophy of Boredom*, states that there ‘is no longer any great history that can offer us a monumental meaning into which our lives can be integrated’. What Svendsen is saying here is that the past, nowadays, lacks the meaning it carried for our ancestors, who believed in the designs of fate and in the power of tradition. On the contrary, that sense of tradition, respect and responsibility before the past has long been losing ground in contemporary societies, resulting in a true identity crisis that leaves the man of the twenty-first century utterly and inevitably displaced, detached and profoundly immersed in numbing boredom. According to Svendsen, the sense of belonging and safety that tradition used to offer has been on the decline since the beginning of modern times: ‘Tradition brings continuity to one’s existence, but this sort of continuity is precisely what has been increasingly lost throughout modernity’. This loss of touch with tradition that has become a salient characteristic of the modern contemporary age, and is precisely what Tavares tries to counter with this book, which is a clear and conscious dialogue with tradition, with the classics (including not only the epic by Camões—following the poem as a kind of map or chart—but also James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, visible in the choice of the main character’s name and, more importantly, in the subversive and parodic nature of the text).

In fact, modernity is characterised by a break with older ways of comprehending, especially with regard to the relationship between man and God. With the advent of an Enlightenment-inspired modernity, Reason became the primary principle in guiding human actions, and as a result religious acts and rituals lost the strength and significance that they enjoyed in earlier periods. More recently, postmodern thought challenged this primacy of Reason which, as Stuart Hall states, has, since the Enlightenment, ‘been taken to define the very core or essence of our being, and to ground our existence as human subjects’. In fact, Hall further states that ‘the Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action […]. The essential center of the self was a person’s identity’. In this postmodern configuration of life there is no longer a place for what Jean-François Lyotard came to define as ‘metanarratives’ in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing, its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal.

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7 ibid.
As we can see, this last sentence fits perfectly well with Bloom’s ‘provocatively epic and anti-epic’, a voyage at the beginning of the 21st century in which the issues of heroism and the absence of great causes are treated with a good dose of irony and humour, two essential elements of the author’s writing. As a consequence of this postmodern ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’, contemporary man can no longer find solid and safe anchorage, neither in God nor in himself. He can no longer build his identity upon the grand legitimising narratives of the past and is instead ‘composed, not of a single but of several, sometimes contradictorily or unresolved identities’.

Contemporary man is thus at a loss, between past promises of safety and the disconcerting uncertainty of reality. In the absence of a clear and safe course for the future, the postmodern individual experiences unprecedented feelings of indifference, apathy and boredom, ‘a void without tragic or apocalypse’, as the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky writes in his 1983 work *L’ère du Vide* (The Age of Emptiness), this being an echo of the point made by Svendsen concerning absence of ‘meaning into which our lives can be integrated’, i.e., that:

‘[…] no longer is any ideology capable of enflaming the crowds, postmodern society no longer has idols or taboos, no glorious image of itself, no motivating historical project, from now on it is the void which governs us, but it is a void without tragic or apocalypse’.

This absence of anchorage leads to the existence of a profound feeling of boredom (or tedium), identified by Fernando Pessoa’s semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares in *The Book of Disquiet* as a lack of religious commitment or faith:

Tedium… Perhaps, deep down, it is the soul’s dissatisfaction because we didn’t give it a belief, the disappointment of the sad child (who we are on the inside) because we didn’t buy it the divine toy. Perhaps it is the insecurity of one who needs a guiding hand and who doesn’t feel, on the black path of profound sensation, anything more than the soundless night of not being able to think, the empty road of not being able to feel… Tedium… Those who have Gods don’t have tedium. Tedium is the lack of a mythology. For people without beliefs, even doubt is impossible, even their scepticism will lack the strength to question. Yes, tedium is the loss of the soul’s capacity for self-delusion; it is the mind’s lack of the non-existent ladder by which it might firmly ascend to truth.

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12 Svendsen, p. 236.

13 Lipovetsky, p. 11.

In the contemporary world, this lack of faith does not exclusively concern religion, but is deeply related to an absence of an emotional and spiritual connection (including with political projects), which was an integral part of traditional societies and which attempted to give life a meaning that is now difficult to find amidst the chaos of postmodern life. For many contemporary authors, this emotional and spiritual connection with oneself and the world is being replaced with an increasing and almost obsessive desire for ephemeral and distracting activities, an urgency for instant and transient relief from the tedious caused by a fast-paced, globalised world, drowning in over-stimulation from the excessive presence of digital, luminous multi-touch screens of every colour, shape and size. In this respect, Lipovetsky tells us that, especially in the Western world, ‘moments of boredom in front of the television, at the cinema or the theatre are very frequent.’ Furthermore, ‘television frequently disappoints us, but at the same time we cannot stop watching it: we systematically turn it on as soon as we get home, no matter what programme is on’. For Tavares, the book and the act of reading serves to disengage and disconnect people from the excessive speed which characterizes our postmodern world and the subsequent boredom it creates. As he says, the book is a ‘máquina da lentidão’, a machine of slowness, in the sense that it opposes the uncontrollable speed of the contemporary world and favours what the author also calls the exercise of lucidity, a skill which is too often lacking in these hectic, frantic and technologically chaotic times. For Tavares, the book, and the act of reading, imposes a slower rhythm which is absolutely necessary to preserve the ability to remain lucid in a world that spins at a speed which he calls ‘oppressive’ and ‘violent’, mostly due to impressive technological advances.

Intimately related with this need to practice lucidity by adjusting ourselves to the slowness demanded by the act of reading, there is the idea of the importance of learning how to deal with boredom, a thought expressed by the author in several interviews after the publication of Uma Viagem à Índia. Once more we return to the idea of the excessive speed of the contemporary world and the ‘diverting activities’ which ultimately seem to be unable to counteract the sense of hopelessness and discouragement, the empty and indefinite longing characteristic of contemporary Western societies. In Uma Viagem à Índia, Bloom tells us: ‘Não sou indiferente às repetições, suporto melhor o tédio/ que certas aventuras desnecessárias./ Não estou, pois, obcecado por novidades./ Porém não suporto que, em mim, a não surpresa já não me surpreenda’ [‘I am not indifferent to repetition, I can stand boredom better than

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17 Gonçalo M. Tavares, ‘Gonçalo M. Tavares—entrevista a Carlos Vaz Marques’, Revista Ler, December 2010, pp. 30-38, 84, p. 84. [All translations from this interview are my own].
certain unnecessary adventures. I am not, therefore, obsessed by novelty. Nevertheless, I cannot bear the fact, in me, non-surprise is unsurprising’] (VI, 104).

Therefore, according to Tavares, the key is in learning how to deal with boredom from an early age, and that this should be something taught in school, an idea which had already been expressed by the philosopher Bertrand Russell in his 1930’s work *The Conquest of Happiness:* ‘The capacity to endure a more or less monotonous life is one which should be acquired in childhood. Modern parents are greatly to blame in this respect, they provide their children with far too many passive amusements’.\(^{19}\) Still, according to Tavares, the moments offered by boredom, that is those ‘moments of waiting in which apparently nothing seems to be happening’,\(^{20}\) constitute a ‘fundamental matter’ that we should know how to use to our advantage.\(^{21}\) Finally, it follows that, according to this thesis, the capacity to remain lucid in the contemporary world is intimately connected to the contemporary man’s ability to understand and deal with the boredom of everyday life.

This is, however, as we have seen, a boredom that bears no sense of tragedy; it is unlike Pessoa’s disquieting tedium, ‘a tedium that includes the expectation of nothing but more tedium; a regret, right now, for the regret I’ll have tomorrow for having felt regret today— huge confusions with no point and no truth, huge confusions…’\(^{22}\) Bloom’s boredom in *Uma Viagem à Índia* may resemble Bernardo Soares’ tedium, but as Eduardo Lourenço states in the preface to Tavares’s book, ‘it bears a resemblance to Pessoa (…) but without the repressed tears’.\(^{23}\) However, despite the absence of tears, the issue of contemporary boredom is something that greatly worries Tavares (a preoccupation which is stated in the book’s subtitle: *Contemporary Melancholy: an itinerary*) and is, as we have seen, something that we should ideally learn how to bear and take to our advantage. Here lies what philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche understand as the creative power of boredom.\(^{24}\) According to Svendsen, ‘for Nietzsche, boredom is the unpleasant “calm” of the soul’ that precedes creative acts’.\(^{25}\) Thus, Nietzsche considers boredom to be a


\(^{21}\) ibid.

\(^{22}\) Pessoa, p. 27.

\(^{23}\) Lourenço, p. 17.

\(^{24}\) This notion is intimately related to Heidegger’s consideration of ‘profound boredom’, as explained by Slaby: ‘Heidegger then goes on to claim that the experience of profound boredom, understood in its full existential depth, makes manifest that a human being is the free and responsible creator of whatever meaning there is in one’s life. Not only that, profound boredom moreover amounts to a *call* to actively take charge of one’s existence so as to *endow* it with meaning, and thereby effect a fundamental change in existential temporality’ (Slaby, ‘The other side of existence’, p. 102). According to Heidegger, then, there is a difference between this type of boredom and other more ordinary types. Patrick Gamsby explains: ‘Heidegger mentions what could initially be referred to as superficial boredom, a more profound boredom, and then profound boredom. These are the three levels of escalating intensity in the experience of boredom’. See Patrick Gamsby, *The Black Son of Boredom: Henri Lefebvre and the Critique of Everyday Life* (Ontario: School of Graduate Studies Laurentian University, 2012), p. 86.

\(^{25}\) Svendsen, p. 58.
necessary evil to the creative spirit, much in the same way that, for Tavares, it is ‘a central, basic thing’.26

In that same interview, Tavares adds that ‘those people who are most desperate are precisely the ones who are always running away from boredom’.27 This idea is somewhat related to an idea put forward by Russell in the chapter on ‘Boredom and Excitement’ from The Conquest of Happiness,28 which addresses the modern man’s ‘fear of boredom’,29 which he must avoid at all cost:

Among those who are rich enough to choose their way of life, the particular brand of unendurable boredom from which they suffer is due, paradoxical as this may seem, to their fear of boredom. In flying from the fructifying kind of boredom, they fall prey to the other far worse kind. A happy life must be to a great extent a quiet life, for it is only in an atmosphere of quiet that true joy can live.30

This notion of a happy life being essentially a quiet life is in some way related to Tavares’s idea of a need for a certain praise of slowness in contemporary society, namely through the act of reading. Hence the idea of reading as a kind of voyage in itself, of which his book Uma Viagem à Índia, modelled after a renaissance epic, is a fine representative. These notions relating slowness and quietude with happiness are very much in keeping with the Hellenistic philosophers’ ideas of ataraxia (tranquillity, peace of mind) and apatheia (“impassiveness”, or release from worry or disturbance).

Bloom, the fictional character (and, as Tavares explains, the ‘name of a modern literary heritage’)31 is thus the man chosen to remake Vasco da Gama’s voyage in the twenty-first century, and to retrace Camões’ literary steps by following the map given by the sixteenth-century Portuguese epic, except for some detours related to Uma Viagem à Índia’s narrative unity and the character’s own trajectory within this parodic and ‘provocatively epic and anti-epic’ adventure from the beginning of the twenty-first century.32 Bloom is, according to the author’s own words, a man who ‘is not afraid and doesn’t reveal desperation, he does not think retrospectively about his own life’, something which makes his escape from Lisbon very different from the typical seasonal escapist trips from daily life’s ever-present boredom, a life so paradoxically full of

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27 ibid.
30 ibid.
32 Lourenço, p. 17. [All translations from Lourenço’s texto are my own]
speed, excess and over-stimulation. According to Tavares, *Uma Viagem à Índia* attempts

[…] to recover the idea of travelling as a journey and not merely a destination, because Bloom leaves Lisbon on Canto I and only reaches India in Canto VII […]. The route chosen is of utmost importance. Only in this respect does it [Bloom’s travel] resemble the voyages of a distant past, because contemporary travels are those which are simply focused on arriving to their destination as quickly [and I would add “as safely”] as possible.

Also, by allowing Bloom to take his time at each stop before reaching India (closely emulating—and parodying—Gama’s route as described in Camões’ epic), Tavares further distances his book from the typically touristic idea of ready-made and pre-packaged trips, thereby making an implicit statement with regard to the frenetic speed of Western postmodern societies and the attendant search for immediate relief from boredom. Talking about his itinerary, Bloom tells us: ‘Obriguei-me/ a percorrer o caminho mais lento./ Deve chegar-se cansado ao sítio/ onde se quer envelhecer,/ pois se chegarmos fortes ainda, e impacientes,/ arrancaremos de novo. E falharemos o destino’ (VI, 194). ['I have forced myself/to undertake the longest path./ One must be tired when one reaches the place where one wishes to grow old,/for if we still arrive strong, and impatient,/ we will take off again. And miss our destination’]. In another passage, it is the narrator who addresses this issue:

Bloom fora coerente.
Não se apressara demasiado a chegar à Índia; a técnica e as máquinas são um engano:
tudo parece fácil, rápido, e os homens
apressam-se, esquecendo a biologia
que trazem e o modo orgânico como a própria sensatez cresce.
Bloom fora sensato. Em 2003 poderia demorar
menos de um dia a chegar à Índia, e demorou meses (VI, 282).

[Bloom had been coherent. He did not hurry too much in arriving in/ India; technique and machines are deceiving;/ everything seems easy, fast, and men/ hurry, forgetting about the biology/ they carry and the organic manner in which wisdom grows. Bloom had been wise. In 2003 he could have taken/ less than a day to arrive in India, and he took months.]

These two passages are critical to the understanding of Tavares’s view of travelling in the age of technology, machinery and progress: commercial travels in the twenty-first century make it all too accessible for the common man, creating the illusion that all is, after all, ‘easy’ and ‘fast’. However, according to Tavares, this is not the right way to

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achieve wisdom. In fact, as we have seen, these ‘unnecessary adventures’ in search for excitement only serve to increase contemporary man’s sense of loss, a feeling of not-belonging, of out-of-placeness, and a desperate unnamed longing for longing itself (VI, 104).\(^{35}\) As the Roman philosopher Seneca said, ‘[he] who is everywhere is nowhere. When a person spends all his time in foreign travel, he ends up by having many acquaintances, but no friends’.\(^{36}\) In the same Epistle (II), Seneca also adds: ‘a plant which is often moved can never grow strong’, which is analogous to the postmodern man’s experience of desperately trying to find new a distraction that can relieve the unbearable boredom which assails him instead of deciding to face it head on, and even possibly embrace it.\(^{37}\)

In fact, in *Uma Viagem à Índia*, in spite of this moving away from the frantic rhythm of Western life, in the end, Bloom only encounters the same boredom he had when he left Lisbon; boredom as a result of not having found what he was looking for, a boredom as a result of having discovered that life outside the Western world is exactly the same—evil and deceptive, faulty and incomplete. According to Tavares, Bloom’s initial scepticism and pessimism in fact double and his overall disappointment towards existence increases,\(^{38}\) making him utter these last pessimistic and discouraging words in the final canto of the poem: ‘Nada que aconteça poderá impedir o definitivo tédio de/ Bloom, o nosso heói’ ['Nothing that ever happens can stop the definite boredom of our hero, Bloom'] (VI, 456). Seneca, in his Epistle XXVIII (*On travel as a cure for discontent*), states:

> Are you surprised, as if it were a novelty, that after such long travel and so many changes of scene you have not been able to shake off the gloom and heaviness of your mind? You need a change of soul rather than a change of climate. Though you may cross vast spaces of sea […] your faults will follow you whithersoever you travel.\(^{39}\)

This is exactly what Bloom experiences, for his gloominess never truly leaves him, his discontentment and his disquietude are ever-present (and grow stronger), along with the profound boredom he carries with himself from the first days of his leaving, such as when, in Canto I, he describes the daily boredom surrounding his existence: ‘the days go on motionless,/ and thus predictable’, and the skies ‘romantic, blue and boring’ (VI, 44). It is from this tedious environment of day-to-day life that Bloom sets off to India, in search of what he calls ‘a new joy/ or if possible, several’, a kind of balance between comfort and risk, between novelty and habit—what he interestingly calls ‘tédio surpreendente’, a ‘surprising boredom’, something that could resemble a joy which

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\(^{35}\) Similarly, in *The Book of Disquiet*, Bernardo Soares says: ‘I’m losing my taste for everything, including even my taste for finding everything tasteless’. See Pessoa, p. 211.


\(^{37}\) ibid.

\(^{38}\) In the interview with Pedro Mexia, Tavares says: ‘In spite of everything, he [Bloom] didn’t come back the same, he has multiplied his initial disappointment by two’ (Tavares, ‘Gonçalo M. Tavares—O romance ensina a cair—entrevista a Pedro Mexia’).

\(^{39}\) Seneca, *Moral Epistles*
would combine the ‘pleasures/ of a house pet fed in a plate/ with those of a wild and savage animal’ (VI, 52). To this ‘surprising boredom’ he adds the ‘unusual which/ not being a mute or noisy event, being a place, forces one to walk’—this unusual place is what Bloom looks for in order to shake off the boredom of everydayness (VI, 54). As the narrator advises, ‘do not let your comfortable chair hinder/ your curiosity’ (VI, 54).

However, the question is where to go and what to do in a century full of ephemeral distractions; as Bloom says in Canto X, ‘there is no more secret land, the travel catalogues,/ with detailed maps, cover/ 90% of the secrets. Heroes have come directly/from legends into parliaments:/ they get together to invade a sheet of paper/ with harshful words’ (VI, 442).

As we can see, the contemporary world has no place left for heroes and, as Tavares affirms, ‘if we think about heroes in the 21st century, one of the possibilities is that they are bored. For a hero, this century has become uninteresting’. By the end of his voyage, he realises the inevitability of tedium as a result of contemporary life, hopelessly and resignedly concluding that ‘Um homem perde o essencial quando não tem/ uma única vontade forte; para/ ou avança, que importa?’ [‘A man loses the essential when he does not have a single strong will; does he stop or move forward, does it matter?’] (VI, 443).

In fact, looking back on his adventures, all Bloom can see is the nothingness resulting from all his excesses. He says:

[…] e o que restava agora desses excessos?
Três prostitutas, dois amigos e ele, Bloom: seis humanos,
no reino das folhas e das ervas daninhas; e ainda o tédio e um livro trazido da Índia:
“Mahabarata”.
E o rádio, sim, sempre no bolso: mas não funciona (VI, 445).

[‘(…) and what is left now of all those execesses?/Three prostitutes, two friends and him, Bloom: six humans/ in the kingdom of leaves and weeds; and, still, boredom and a book brought from India: the “Mahabarata”./ And the radio, yes, always in his pocket: but it does not work.’].

Disappointment is all there is for Bloom; he paraphrases Peter Sloterdijk when he admits ‘ingenuity is irrecoverable’, especially after having tried in vain to look for ‘the Spirit on the voyage to India’, only to ‘find the matter he once knew’ (VI, 455, 453).

This is, indeed, the state of affairs, the itinerary of contemporary melancholy as traced by Tavares’s Uma Viagem à Índia, the last canto of which ends on a surprisingly impressive note of profound but ultimately resigned disappointment and discouragement, as we can see in the following verse: ‘O mundo/está nas imediações do nada,/ a desordem/ um prenúncio,/ o inferno/ torna-se indispensável/ em certas semanas/ monótonas’ [‘The world/ is on the brink of nothingness,/ chaos/ is a presage,/ and hell/ becomes indispensable/ in certain monotonous/ weeks’] (VI, 444). As we can see, chaos

is necessary for one to agitate the tedious nature of life. However, excessive agitation only serves to increase the initial boredom, because every passing distraction, every travel has a return ticket, so that repetition and routine is all we have. Therefore, as Seneca notes, in Epistle XXVIII:

What pleasure is there in seeing new lands? Or in surveying cities and spots of interest? All your bustle is useless. Do you ask why such flight does not help you? It is because you flee along with yourself. You must lay aside the burdens of the mind; until you do this, no place will satisfy you.41

Seneca’s thoughts seem to strike a fundamental chord and are completely in tune with what happens in twenty-first century postmodern societies: people live their lives anxious for a Friday night, always dreaming of the next holiday, the next escapade—that this will help them flee from the dreaded moments of boredom that are always inevitably lurking around. However, as Bloom finds out, this boredom is impossible to escape from because it always ends up reaching its arms out to smother us, just like Pessoa’s fog which prevents ‘us from thinking, from acting, from clearly and simply being. As if we hadn’t slept […]’.42 We return once more to Seneca’s words of wisdom in that same epistle:

You wander hither and yon, to rid yourself of the burden that rests upon you, though it becomes more troublesome by reason of your very restlessness, just as in a ship the cargo when stationary makes no trouble, but when it shifts to this side or that, it causes the vessel to heel more quickly in the direction where it has settled. Anything you do tells against you, and you hurt yourself by your very unrest; for you are shaking up a sick man.43

This way, Bloom, tormented and bored, sets off to India, in search of ‘new events [which] exist in new spaces, and not in old ones’, searching for something he cannot define, something different from the sameness of everyday life while looking for ‘the impossible:/ to find wisdom while he escapes; to escape while he learns’ (VI, 54, 42). Yet we know this escape from old places is not the solution for boredom, because tedium will always follow Bloom wherever he goes. Svendsen addresses this search for novelty as a means of fighting and contradicting the monotony of routine and repetition, relating it to the consumeristic eagerness which characterises the world we live in: ‘We become major consumers of new things and new people in order to break the monotony of things being the same’.44 Concerning this contemporary consumerism, Svendsen says: ‘In a world with fashion as a principle we get more stimuli but also more boredom, more emancipation and corresponding slavery, more individuality and more abstract impersonality’.45 Precisely due to the overwhelming presence of stimuli which appear at an ever-increasing rate, we feel more and more lost and adrift, paradoxically ending up with even more of the boredom that we were trying to get rid

41 Seneca, Moral Epistles.
42 Pessoa, p. 59.
43 Seneca, Moral Epistles.
44 Svendsen, p. 47.
45 ibid., p. 46.
of in the first place. In *The Book of Disquiet*, we find a passage which in some way reflects this idea of boredom as a result of abundance and excess: ‘Great melancholies and sorrows full of tedium can exist only in an atmosphere of comfort and solemn luxury’.\(^{46}\) For Tavares, this environment of safety and comfort that exists in contemporary societies transforms the world in ‘a kind of global hospital in which the main source of preoccupation is to eliminate pain and danger’, and ‘where there is almost a map of place where one can be a hero’.\(^{47}\) Tavares thinks that there is almost no place for risk and unpredictability in contemporary Western societies, leading him to consider that ‘boredom is a natural consequence’ of this situation.\(^{48}\)

Bloom also gives himself to fleeting joy and excitement in order to escape the boredom that dominates in several moments throughout his journey, particularly in his return from India, after the disappointment of having found, or rather, having confirmed, that everything he had believed about that magical and mystical country was nothing but an illusion. This is especially evident in Canto IX, which parodically re-enacts a famous scene from *The Lusiads*, the episode of the *Ilha dos Amores*, or the *Island of Love*, which was raised by Venus in the sea to afford sailors a resting-place and give them a much deserved reward for their efforts. However, Bloom’s Island of Love is not an island, but Paris, where, in the company of friends, the Parisian Jean M. and the Indian Anish, he gets involved with prostitutes, thus satisfying his immediate sexual desire. But this satisfaction is fleeting and the whole episode ends up in tragedy:

O que se faz quando nada se sente é brutal
E as circunstâncias arrancam-nos dos bons conselhos.
E assim foi mesmo: o contacto físico, de repente, enojou definitivamente Bloom.
A mulher quis abraçá-lo; ele pegou numa parte mineral da natureza
e num único acto vingou-se dos longos dias sem vontade de agir.
A cabeça da mulher tornou-se disforme, e o sangue provou ser um elemento
que nos outros é quase imperceptível (VI, 448).

[What one does when nothing is felt is brutal/ And the circumstances drag us away from good advice/ And this was exactly it: the physical contact, suddenly/ Definitely disgusted Bloom./ The woman wanted to hold him; he grabbed/ A mineral part of nature/ And in a single act he took vengeance on the long days/ With no desire to act/ The woman’s head became shapeless/ And blood proved to be an element/ that in other people is almost imperceptible.]

As we can see, in the end, Bloom finally ‘took vengeance on the long days with no desire to act’, that is to say that he took vengeance on boredom. I say finally precisely because that is the expression Tavares associates with this particular passage in the itinerary shown at the end of the book: ‘action (finally)’, he writes—finally there is action, finally Bloom decides something that seems to shake off the everyday tediousness of life: he acts in cold blood, unexpectedly, impetuously, with ferociousness and violence and suddenly releases all the anguish and frustration that was silently

\(^{46}\) Pessoa, p. 240.


\(^{48}\) ibid.
growing within, a consequence of the profound tedium he experienced during his voyage. Svendsen discusses this connection between the impulsive violent action and the feeling of boredom by looking at the example of the novel *American Psycho* (Bret Easton Ellis, 1991), which tells the story of wealthy New York investment banker Patrick Bateman who kills more or less indiscriminately out of sheer boredom. Drawing from the relationship between violence and boredom present in the novel (and the movie), Svendsen writes that

> the chaos and violence is what moves one from boredom to life, awakening oneself. Providing life with some sort of meaning. We have an aesthetic attitude towards violence, and this aesthetic was clearly apparent in the anti-aesthetic of modernism, with its focus on the shocking and the hideous'.

In Bloom’s case, this act of violence, this ‘action (finally)’ only apparently shakes off the protagonist’s boredom and Bloom’s trajectory as it goes right back to where it had started in the first place: an assassination followed by yet another escape, this time back to Lisbon where it all had begun some months earlier. This simply means in effect that nothing really works out for Bloom since he ends up being practically back where he started, only this time his boredom and disappointment are doubled. In this melancholic ending, Bloom ‘arrives in Lisbon’ where ‘No hatred welcomes him, and no love’ (*VI*, 452). However, this is not the end of the narrative: there is also the promise of love (or happiness) which appears just as Bloom attempts to commit suicide from the top of a bridge. But even here, the discouraged and pessimistic tone of this final canto never disappears because, as we have seen before, ingenuity cannot be regained: ‘He walks up to the woman and the world proceeds, but nothing that happens can ever stop the definitive boredom of/ Bloom, our hero’ (*VI*, 456).

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