

## ***Mistérios de Lisboa (Mysteries of Lisbon): Story and Structure***

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Michael Goddard (2013) describes the stories presented in *Mistérios de Lisboa (Mysteries of Lisbon)* (2010), the 266-minute film adapted by Carlos Saboga from Camilo Castelo Branco's novel and directed by Raúl Ruiz as constituting a "labyrinthine neo-baroque structure" (162). This essay aims to penetrate the apparent labyrinth by first unraveling these stories into a single linear chronology, then, by analyzing the underlying patterns of the film's two-part structure to reveal their surprisingly parallel narratives. What follows, then, is an exercise based in Formalist narrative theory which distinguishes between the stories' *fabula*, or implied chronology that viewers actively construe, and the stories' *syuzhet*, or order of events as presented, which is thought of as the story's structure.

### **The Chronology of *Mistérios de Lisboa (Mysteries of Lisbon)***

Split into two parts because of its length and related by multiple narrators whose stories are filled with shifting identities and curious coincidences, *Mistérios de Lisboa (Mysteries of Lisbon)*, more than most films, challenges viewers to reconstruct mentally its events into their correct chronological order. It offers a visual metaphor in its second part for the activity required for this mental reformulation of story events when Elisa de Montfort drops a note at the feet of Alberto de Magalhães, which he picks up and, without reading, tears into pieces and drops to the floor. The camera, shooting up from beneath the fallen pieces, captures two unnamed onlookers peering down at the scraps of paper as one of them re-arranges them so the note's message can be read. Like the two men rearranging the pieces of paper, but on a considerably larger scale because there are so many chronologically out of order flashbacks in the film, viewers watching *Mistérios de Lisboa (Mysteries of Lisbon)* mentally strive to reconfigure the events they see and hear into a single coherent chronology.

The following list chronologically reorders the film's forty-four significant sequences. The place of each segment as it appears in the film is indicated by a letter and number in parentheses at the end of each entry. Those appearing in the first part are marked "A: n;" while those appearing the second part are marked "B: n." Thus the a-

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chronological order of sequences as they appear in the film is A: 1-19 followed by B: 1-27. In their chronological order, the forty-four segments span more than fifty years.

1. Don Álvaro de Albuquerque and Silvina, Condessa de Viso, fall in love and flee to Venice where Silvina dies giving birth to the child who would become Padre Dinis. Don Álvaro eventually entrusts the child to the de Montfort family. [Related by Frei Baltasar da Encarnação to Padre Dinis] (part of B: 1)

2. As a boy, Padre Dinis grows up as a brother to Benoit de Montfort. They both fall in love with Blanche de Clermont. Together, as soldiers they rescue Coronel Ernest Lacroze whom they take to their home to recuperate. Benoit jealously watches Lacroze court and fall in love with Blanche. Benoit contrives to have Lacroze sent to a distant post and destroys the letter the Coronel asks him to give to Blanche. Benoit intercepts and destroys Lacroze's subsequent letters to Blanche and encourages her to believe that Lacroze was insincere in his declarations of love. Though she loves Lacroze, under pressure from her father, Blanche agrees to marry Benoit in a simple ceremony and without a honeymoon. After learning that Coronel Lacroze has committed suicide, Blanche lives by herself in the hunting lodge. She gives birth to twins, Arthur and Elisa. They are with her father when she dies in a fire. [Related by Padre Dinis to Elisa de Montfort] (B: 11-14)

3. Though her father refuses to allow their marriage, Pedro da Silva and Ângela de Lima become lovers. When her father discovers that Ângela is pregnant, he orders Knife-eater to kill Pedro and sends Ângela first to the convent Nazaré, then to a ranch. Though wounded by Knife-eater, Pedro manages to tell Padre Dinis what has happened. Ângela's father orders Knife-eater to kill the child when it is born. Padre Dinis, in the guise of the gypsy Sabino Cabra, rides to the ranch, befriends Knife-eater, and gives him forty pieces of silver in exchange for the child. Father Dinis takes in the child. [Initially related by Pedro da Silva to Padre Dinis who relates Pedro's tale as well as the latter events to João] (A: 6-7)

4. Ângela's father, the Marquês de Montezelos, encourages the Conde de Santa Bárbara to marry his daughter. Though Ângela repeatedly walks away from the Conde when he tries to court her, and Padre Dinis, in formal wear, also counsels him, anonymously, to leave her, The Marquês prevails and Ângela agrees to marry the Conde. Once more before the marriage, Padre Dinis in the guise of Sebastião de Melo, appears to the Conde and warns him that the marriage will cause the disgrace of both Ângela and himself. [Related by the Conde de Santa Bárbara to Father Dinis] (A: 10)

5. 14-year-old João living at Padre Dinis' boarding school wants to know his origins. Padre Dinis takes him to sit in front of the chateau of the Conde de Santa Bárbara. João's mother looks at him

briefly from a window. The Conde angrily asks Padre Dinis what he wants; Padre Dinis tells João the man is married to his mother, but is not his father. (A: 1)

6. The Conde de Santa Bárbara demands that Ângela tell him who the pair were he saw sitting in the garden. Eugenia pulls the Conde away from Ângela when he threatens her with a knife. [Related by Ângela in the letter Bernardo brings to Padre Dinis and read by João] (A: 3)

7. Bernardo brings a note from Ângela to Padre Dinis. Bernardo tells João that the Conde de Santa Bárbara had locked up Ângela for 8 years after he learned that she had had a child by another man. (A: 2)

8. Months later, Bernardo tells Padre Dinis that the Conde has joined the King in the north to fight invaders. Ângela wants Padre Dinis to visit her at the chateau. Once he arrives there he invites Ângela to live under his protection at the boarding school. (A: 4)

9. The Conde de Santa Bárbara returns to the chateau. (A: 5)

10. With Ângela's permission, Padre Dinis tells João, now called Pedro, the details of his parentage and adoption by Padre Dinis. (A: 6-7)

11. The Conde tells everyone that Ângela has run off with another man. He leaves Lisbon with Eugenia. Ângela becomes a topic of society gossip in Lisbon. Hearing this slanderous gossip at a party, Alberto de Magalhães speaks up to defend Ângela's honor and is challenged to a duel by Don Martinho de Almeida. (A: 8)

12. When Don Martinho's seconds try to arrange a duel with him, Alberto de Magalhães refuses despite their warning that he runs the risk of an unexpected encounter. (A: 9)

13. Padre Dinis responds to the Conde's slanderous claims by presenting a case against him. He takes a bailiff and a court registrar with him to visit the ailing Conde at an inn in Santarém. When Padre Dinis calls him a puppet of Ângela's father, the Conde recognizes how poorly he has treated Ângela. The Conde tells how Ângela's father arranged the marriage (A: 10)

14. The Conde agrees to sign a document acknowledging his slander of his wife. (A: 11)

15. Returning from visiting the Conde, Padre Dinis sees Don Martinho attack Alberto de Magalhães—whom he does not recognize—in the street. Alberto de Magalhães tosses him aside. Padre Dinis wonders why he defends Ângela's honor. (A: 12)

16. Back at the boarding school, Pedro overhears his mother tell Padre Dinis that she is willing to travel to Santarem to tell the Conde that she forgives him. (A: 13)

17. On the way to Santarem, Padre Dinis asks Ângela if she knows a man named Alberto de Magalhães. She says she once received a note about her son's birth from a man with that name, but that she thought the note was a trick by her husband. Dinis means to find out who the man is. (A: 14)

18. The Conde is dead when they arrive at the Inn. Ângela declines to hear the Conde's will. Frei Baltasar da Encarnação, the Conde's confessor, gives Ângela a note of apology from him. (A: 15)

19. Ângela and Padre Dinis return to the Boarding School. He tells Pedro that because she has refused the Conde's inheritance, she has no money and will enter a convent. (A: 16)

20. Ângela says her good-byes and leaves for the convent. (A: 17)

21. Padre Dinis visits Alberto de Magalhães who recognizes him and belches to reveal his identity. Alberto de Magalhães is pleased to learn that Ângela's son is alive and wishes to see him without being seen. He also wants to give Dinis 40 pieces of silver for the boy's future. (A: 18)

22. Padre Dinis visits Ângela at the convent. He tells her that Eugénia has also declined her inheritance. He tells her that Frei Baltasar da Encarnação wants to see him. (A: 19)

23. Frei Baltasar da Encarnação reveals that he is Padre Dinis' father and tells him about his birth and placement with the de Montfort family. He gives Padre Dinis his mother's skull. (part of B: 1)

24. Pedro enters Padre Dinis' sealed room and sees the elements of his past lives. (B: 2)

25. Padre Dinis decides to send Pedro to France to study. Pedro says good-bye to his mother. At the port office he notices Alberto de Magalhães watching him but doesn't know who he is. (B: 3)

26. Elisa de Montfort, the Duquesa de Cliton, signs a contract agreeing to spend one night with Alberto de Magalhães for the sum of 80,000 francs. She returns to his hotel every night for a week and tries to return his money. Alberto refuses the money and tries to avoid her. One night, Arthur tries to shoot him. They struggle and the gun goes off, killing Arthur. [Related by Alberto de Magalhães to Pedro] (B: 23)

27. Alberto de Magalhães and his wife, Eugénia, descend the main staircase of the Lisbon opera house. Elisa de Montfort, the Duquesa de Cliton, follows, pausing to speak to the Barão de Sá. Two men discuss Alberto de Magalhães and his past affair with Elisa de Montfort. The Barão de Sá tells the men that Elisa has invited him to visit her. Elisa drops a note before Alberto de Magalhães. He picks it and tears it up without reading it. (B: 4)

28. The Barão de Sá visits Elisa. She asks him to enable her to meet Alberto de Magalhães. (B: 5)

29. The Barão de Sá visits Alberto de Magalhães at his club and tells him that Elisa wants to meet him. (B: 6)

30. Elisa receives Alberto. She wants to repay what she owes him. He refuses and tells her that he doesn't want Eugénia to know about her. He advises her to return to France and forget him. After he leaves, Elisa picks up a pistol and a framed photograph. (B: 7)

31. Padre Dinis visits Eugénia, but when Elisa arrives he leaves after giving her a long glance. Elisa tries to give the money to Eugénia who refuses to accept it. Elisa hints darkly at Alberto's reputation and leaves without taking her money. (B: 8)

32. Elisa returns to her rooms and finds Padre Dinis waiting for her, on behalf of her mother, he says. Dizzy, Elisa leaves the room. Padre Dinis takes something from her purse, which he puts in his pocket. (B: 9)

33. Alberto returns home to find Eugénia cowering under a table. She has sensed Elisa's bitterness and hatred but doesn't know what to make of them. Alberto vows to kill Elisa if she does anything to Eugénia. (B: 10)

34. Alberto storms into Elisa's rooms, angry at her for seeing Eugénia. As Dinis watches, she tries to shoot Alberto, but fails because Dinis has taken the ball from the gun in her purse. Alberto begins to choke Elisa, but stops when Dinis calls out "Knife-eater." Alberto leaves and Dinis tells Elisa to renounce her vengeance and return to France. She agrees to return to France, but says she will neither renounce her vengeance nor forgive. Dinis gives the ball back to her. (B: 15)

35. Back in France, Elisa meets Pedro da Silva at the Visconde de Armagnac's home. She invites both men to tea. After she leaves, the Visconde calls her a widow who has become a melancholic recluse after her affair with a mysterious foreigner ended with his killing her brother in a duel. Pedro calls her a character from a Radcliffe novel. (B: 16)

36. The men have tea at Elisa's home. She whispers to the Visconde and leaves the room. He follows her, then returns. Then the men leave. (B: 17)

37. Back home, the Visconde assures Pedro that Elisa's apparent indifference was meant to excite his desire. (B: 18)

38. Pedro sends a poem he has written to Elisa. She returns it with a note telling him to send it to someone his own age. Then she suddenly arrives and invites him to her home that evening, saying she will explain everything. (B: 19)

39. That evening Elisa tells Pedro that she can't be his because of a stain on her heart caused by being robbed of her honor and by the death of her brother. She names Alberto as the cause of the stain. Pedro decides that since Alberto is the only impediment to their happiness, he will return to Lisbon and avenge her honor. Pedro receives word that his mother has died. (B: 20)

40. Pedro presents himself at Alberto de Magalhães' home as an emissary of Arthur de Montfort. He demands a duel. Amused, Alberto accepts. (B: 21)

41. The duel begins with epees. Alberto knocks Pedro's from his hand. Pedro demands they continue with pistols, but agrees to a postponement when Alberto wonders aloud what he should do with the money Padre Dinis left for Pedro's care should Alberto be killed. (B: 22)

42. Alberto tells Pedro about his affair with Elisa and the details of her brother's death. (B: 23)

43. Pedro visits his mother's unmarked mass grave. He meets the Marquês de Montezelos who is now a blind beggar searching for his daughter's imaginary mausoleum. He says he was a bad father. Pedro also encounters Elisa who dismisses him. (B: 24)

44. Pedro desires to disappear. He goes to Tangiers, then travels randomly. He eventually retires to a hotel when he seems to dictate his story. He becomes delirious, appears to return to his bed at the school and dies. (B: 25-27)

Not surprisingly considering the chronology's span of years, there are numerous temporal and narrative gaps, though, by convention, one must assume that whatever is missing is of no consequence.

### **The Structure of *Mistérios de Lisboa* (*Mysteries of Lisbon*)**

On the *Mistérios de Lisboa* (*Mysteries of Lisbon*) website, Raúl Ruiz discusses how the film lacks the basic elements that define what has come to be called the classical narrative Hollywood film, elements he terms collectively as "Bordwell's Paradigm," apparently after that critic's seminal elaboration of them in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*.

A Swiss journal dedicated one of its issues to me, to my films. And I read there that I had destroyed Bordwell's Paradigm. I say this because if we apply to 'Mysteries of Lisbon' this Bordwell's Paradigm idea, we will not know whether, in this case, the film should either be described as narrative or as experimental. Narrative it is not, since it does not respect either the three-acts [structure], or the central conflict, or the theory of the will so peculiar to the American film: 'someone wants something.' There's always an enigma to be solved. And that's not the case. The film is neither narrative nor experimental; rather it is both... (*Mistérios de Lisboa* website 2013)

If *Mistérios de Lisboa* (*Mysteries of Lisbon*) lacks the three-act structure of the classical Hollywood film, the striving of a single central character to achieve a desired goal, or a puzzle to be solved, as well as a narrative that proceeds by cause-and-effect, one might ask what organizing principle functions in their place to give the four and one-half hour theatrical version of the film an intelligible form.<sup>2</sup>

One suggestion of an organizing principle can be found in Ruiz's interview in *Positif* where he describes how he sought to create visual echoes in the film by reusing the same décor for different settings:

... some scenes were shot in the same decor without much change. This creates a kind of labyrinth effect, an echoing effect that reinforces the resonances of the text. Like when Padre Dinis addresses his ex-accomplice with a peasant accent as the latter is strangling the Duquesa de Cliton: 'Remember when you were a bandit, compadre!' I carefully sought this kind of echo in the backgrounds by reproducing in the palace of the Duquesa de Cliton, the chateau of Santa Bárbara. The space is the same, easy to recognize thanks to its doors that open in succession. (Gombeaud and Rouyer 2010, 23; my translation)

This pair of images from the film illustrates another instance of the echo effect that Ruiz describes. The two sequences are narratively comparable and similar in their *mise-en-scene*; each takes places in a side room during a formal ball. In the first (fig. 1), the Marquês de Montezelos is about to reassure the Conde de Santa Bárbara that his daughter, Ângela de Lima, is willing to apologize for her apparent indifference to him and join him for a dance; in the second (fig. 2), Don Álvaro de Albuquerque catches sight of Silvina, Condessa de Viso, with whom he will shortly begin a clandestine love affair. Both images of these initial moments of relationships—the first that leads to a bitter marriage and the second which leads to an illicit affair—share the same focal point of an open doorway at the right of the frame through which musicians and dancers can be seen. The echo effect is created by the fact that each occurs in a different half of the film; a narratively comparable scene filmed a second time in a visually comparable way stylistically echoes the earlier scene.

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<sup>2</sup> Ruiz also comments on Bordwell's supposed reduction of narrative strategies to matters of verisimilitude in a "Director's Statement" here:

<http://www.coveringmedia.com/movie/2011/08/mysteries-of-lisbon.html>. For Bordwell's puzzled response to Ruiz's claims about him, see <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/08/07/ruiz-realism-and-me/>



Figure 1 : From the film's first half. *Mysteries of Lisbon* (Raúl Ruiz, 2010) | © Clap Films



Figure 2 : From the film's second half. *Mysteries of Lisbon* (Raúl Ruiz, 2010) | © Clap Films

Though less apparent than the image of the torn note that suggests the work to be done in reconfiguring the film's *fabula*, one can read back from the stylistic echoes that Ruiz mentions, and this pair of illustrative images, to the underlying structural patterns of the *syuzhet*. For as David Bordwell explains in *Narration in the Fiction Film*: "patterns in the *syuzhet*'s presentation of story information will be matched by stylistic patterns...." (1985, 52)

The division of the film into two parts is the key to understanding the film's organizing principle; the division occurs not at the midpoint of the film, but at the point which assures that at an abstract level of analogies the pattern of action in each half of the film mirror each other. For beneath the scrambled chronologies of the events in the film's two parts there is, essentially, the same structure that begins with the revelation of illicit lovers, one of whom in each couple dies after the birth of their son; moves through the adoption of the new-born child by someone else; followed by reluctant, un-



happy marriages; which lead ultimately, though for different reasons, to slanderous accusations and duels that end inconclusively. Parallels between major events presented in the same order in the two parts echoing structure the viewers' experience of the film.

More specifically, the illicit romance in the film's first part between Pedro da Silva and Ângela de Lima which leads to the birth of their son, the teenager known as João when the film begins, is paralleled, mirrored, or echoed, at the beginning of the film's second part by Frei Baltasar da Encarnação's revelation that, as Don Álvaro de Albuquerque, he and Silvina, Condessa de Viso, were the parents of the child who grew up to be Padre Dinis.

Following Pedro's murder and the child's adoption by Padre Dinis, Ângela de Lima is forced by her father into a loveless marriage with the Conde de Santa Bárbara. The equivalent loveless, forced marriage in the film's second part skips a generation. Young Padre Dinis is raised with Benoit de Montfort who falls in love with Blanche de Clermont. However she and Coronel Ernesto Lacroze fall in love while he recuperates from battle at the de Montfort estate. Out of jealousy, Benoit conspires to have the Coronel assigned to a distant post, then arranges to have him depart without saying good-bye to Blanche. Benoit destroys the love letters the Coronel writes to Blanche after he leaves and convinces Blanche that the Coronel was untrue in his confessions of love to her. Not receiving any letters from Blanche, Lacroze commits suicide. Under pressure from her father, Blanche—like Ângela de Lima, in love with a dead man—reluctantly marries Benoit de Montfort, but lives apart from him after learning of the Coronel's suicide despite giving birth to twins, a son named Arthur, and daughter named Elisa.

After Ângela de Lima flees the home where she has been living with the Conde de Santa Bárbara and takes up residence with her son at Padre Dinis' boarding school, her husband leaves Lisbon, telling everyone that his wife ran off with another man. She becomes the talk of Lisbon society. When Alberto de Magalhães hears this slanderous talk at a ball and speaks up to defend her honor, Don Martinho de Almeida challenges him to duel, which Alberto declines. Padre Dinis initiates a legal proceeding against the Conde de Santa Bárbara whom he convinces to sign a deathbed confession that he had falsely slandered his wife's reputation.

In the echo of this in the second half of the film, it is not Blanche, but her daughter, Elisa de Montfort, the Duquesa de Cliton, who is the source of slander about her erstwhile lover, Alberto de Magalhães, dishonestly claiming that he robbed her of her honor and killed her brother in a duel. In a parallel of his appeal to the Conde de Santa Bárbara to retract his slanderous claims, Padre Dinis unsuccessfully tries to convince her to renounce her vengeance. She returns to France where, by chance, she encounters the young Pedro

da Silva and convinces him to challenge Alberto de Magalhães to a duel to avenge her brother.

Though Alberto de Magalhães refuses to duel with Don Martinho de Almeida, the latter eventually forces the issue with a surprise attack in the street. The confrontation ends ignominiously, however, for after Don Martinho shoots at Alberto and misses, Alberto picks him up and throws him to the side of the road. In the second part of the film, Alberto de Magalhães agrees to Pedro's challenge, though their exchange with epees ends with a postponement during which Alberto shows Pedro the contract Elisa signed agreeing to spend the night with him in exchange for 80,000 francs. (The bag of money Elisa repeatedly tries to renounce and return to Alberto is an echoing variation of the Conde de Santa Bárbara's inheritance, which both Ângela de Lima and Eugénia refuse, in the film's first part.) Alberto further explains to Pedro that her brother died, not in a duel defending his sister's honor, but while struggling with him after trying to shoot him in an ambush.

The following diagram lays out these parallel events and suggests how those that occur in the second part of the film might be considered as the major echoes, what Ruiz refers to as "resonances in the text," that he sought to replicate with his visual echoes. It is worth noting that the scenes involving Pedro at the beginning and end of the film that bracket the larger structural pattern also have echoing qualities.

#### The parallel structure of major events in *Mysteries of Lisbon*

The Film's First Part	The Film's Second Part
Young Pedro is alienated and ill.	
Illicit lovers Pedro da Silva and Ângela de Lima have Pedro. Pedro da Silva dies	Illicit lovers Don Álvaro de Albuquerque and Silvina, Condessa de Viso, have the enfant who becomes Padre Dinis. Silvina dies giving birth.
Padre Dinis saves the boy's life and takes him in.	The young Dinis eventually lives with the de Montfort family.
	Blanche de Clermont loves Col. Ernesto Lacroze. He commits suicide believing she does not love him.

Pressured by her father, Ângela reluctantly marries the Conde de Santa Bárbara.	Pressured by her father, Blanche reluctantly marries Benoit de Montfort.
The Conde de Santa Bárbara defames Ângela after she leaves him to live at Padre Dinis' boarding school.	Elisa, Blanche's daughter, defames Alberto de Magalhães after he breaks off his affair with her.
Alberto de Magalhães defends Ângela's reputation and provokes a duel.	Pedro demands Alberto duel to defend the honor of Elisa's brother.
	Adult Pedro is alienated and ill.

The parallel pattern of the second part is particularly impressive in the way it combines several new characters to construct the echoes of Ângela de Lima's woes. Because Silvina dies in childbirth, the narrative must piece together the second part's parallels for Ângela de Lima and her marriage from other characters who embody comparable situations. Additionally, because Silvina's death occurs more than fifty years before the film begins, the parallels to Ângela de Lima's travails must return the narrative to the film's present time. Thus the narrative skips a generation as Blanche de Clermont takes Silvina's place to function as a woman devoted to the memory of her lost, first love. Blanche's love for Coronel Lacroze functions as the echo for Ângela de Lima's devotion to her first love Pedro da Silva. The next step in this piecemeal duplication jumps more than two decades and obscures the underlying pattern somewhat by reversing the sexes. Though we might expect Benoit de Montfort to function as a parallel for the vengeful Conde de Santa Bárbara, it is Elisa, his daughter by Blanche, who fulfills this echoing function. The sexual reversal continues in her slander of Alberto de Magalhães, though not because he is unfaithful to her, but because he does not reciprocate her love. Elisa's slander of Alberto and incitement of young Pedro to challenge him to a duel, return the second part's narrative to the film's present time as it inversely echoes Alberto's defense of Ângela de Lima's honor and his refusal to duel Don Martinho de Almeida.

As the diagram of the film's underlying structure suggests, beneath the stories apparently nestled within one another, indifferent to shifting identities, and unaffected by what seem like digressions and asides, the two parts of Ruiz's film progress in tandem as parallel plots whose analogous situations readily function as an alternative to what Ruiz terms the "Bordwell Paradigm." The mirrored progression of analogous actions trumps chronology; the narrative order of what happens is more important than the historical moment at which it happens. And not even the use of several characters to construct the

parallel to Ângela de Lima's travails, or the reversal of sexes, can obscure how rigorously the two parts of the film echoed one another. Indeed, in contrast to the gap-filled story, the film's underlying parallel structure is considerably more unified than one might suspect while viewing the film. The structure that may have seemed to be "labyrinthine" and "neo-baroque" turns out to be remarkably simple.

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