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In the style of a colonial film from the 1960s shot in 16mm, the prologue of *Tabu* ^[1] _[1] (in the Official Selection of the LUX Prize 2012 ^[2] _[2]) by Portuguese director Miguel Gomes tells of how a crocodile became inconsolable after having gobbled up an explorer tragically in love, and already in this beginning we see all the ingredients of this delicious film: its grain, its choice of black and white, its themes, its intelligence, its love of film, and finally its slap-stick humour that always wants to suddenly impose grotesque elements in situations initially approached as tragedies.

The first part of the film, named “Lost Paradis”, is set today and revolves around three elderly neighbours whose names suit them: there is the pious and charitable Pilar (Teresa Madruga), whom can be counted on to pay attention and to come running when she is needed, the devoted Santa (Isabel Cardoso), a woman of colour probably originally from a Portuguese colony who lets herself be treated as a housemaid when she is not being accused of witchcraft or tyranny, and the widow and abandoned mother Aurora (Laura Soveral), towards the end of her life. It is especially Aurora that the two others always have to come to the rescue of, as she ruins herself in casinos, drawn there by strange dreams populated by hairy monkeys - an irresistible call even if she is aware that dreams and reality are two different things, for if she weren't it would be different. When she is urgently taken to hospital, not before having asked Santa to look after the crocodile, she utters her wish to see a certain Gian Luca before she dies. (When Santa asks which crocodile, she says the question is absurd because there aren't fifteen of them!)

In the second half of the film, we set off on an adventure 50 years before with Mr Ventura, him also very well named, in the farm that the departed Aurora used to own in Africa at the foot of a certain Mount Tabu. In this paradise, Aurora (who, young, has the delightful features of Ana

Moreira) lives a very dreamy reality. This is shown through silent images, with the exception of the jolly musical passages that retrace her incredible biography, to the voice of our narrator (played in his youth by the devastating Carloto Cotta, with his Gérard Philippe moustache). However, as this very colourful black-and-white story carries on, we discover why the young woman who exported ostrich feathers, briefly became an actress, and was a dedicated hunter of large game, had to give up this idyllic life to forever keep with her the secret of a tragic love story, like a large crocodile at the bottom of her heart.

Whereas the endearing *The Artist* continues to conquer Mount Hollywood, *Tabu* deploys its roots in a whole new type of earth to give silent cinema the most authentic of tributes, because the film does not parody silent cinema but rather captures its spirit. In short, *Tabu*'s infinite originality strikes you from the very beginning. Gomes' film does not resemble anything recent in cinema, nor anything else for that matter.

Interview with director Miguel Gomes:

How influential were German silent films to you, Murnau's in particular?

I am not intending to reference films very often. It just turns out that they are somewhere in my subconscious. I have seen a cycle of Murnau films on the Portuguese State television back when I was younger – which would be inconceivable nowadays. But the aim, in this film, was not to have references to specific Murnau films. I want to tell a story for itself. I don't want to be closed off or to exclude the people who do not get the references. I think Murnau was a great film-maker. If you have a heart you cannot fail to be moved by his films.

In *Tabu*, you play with exotic elements from the 1930s. There seems to be an idealization of exoticism, but you also criticize colonialism. Why did you make this contrast?

Colonialism and exoticism can coexist. I don't think you have to try to set an example or try to demonstrate that colonialism is bad. You don't have to set out with that kind of thesis. When I was working on this film, I got to know some people who had a band in Mozambique. They told me that they had a very close link to their land. They made comments that I did not in any way agree on political terms, but they also describe what they have been through there. That provoked a very strong emotional reaction in me. And that emotional reaction is one you can have wherever you are from and whatever political system you have been through.

I also believe that there are certain things which are typically related to youth. And that is one of the reasons for the structure of the film. The film is about old age, but it is also about youth. It is about loneliness in opposition to the possibility of love... As in many silent films - in Murnau's too - what is established is very often a strong contrast, a dichotomy: "Paradise" and "Paradise Lost", in my film. I did want to establish that opposition.

In the second part, there is a love story and there is also a story of its time. You can implicitly criticize the society of that time and also colonial regime. Pregnancy is a symbol of the demographic bomb that is going to explode. There are events that are on the way, that are going through various stages to their until they reach their natural conclusion. You can say that about colonialism. And you can say that about the love story between two people, which is doomed to failure...

There are many stories within one film: colonialism, love story, colonialism, religion...if there is a main topic in the film, what is it?

I don't like central ideas... The outset was the story was something I was told by a relative of mine: that an old lady was getting mad with her maid as she thought she was interfering too much in her life. This doesn't sound like the plot of a novel, not the kind of story you make a film about. It's a rather everyday story and I wanted that tone to be present in the film too. When people get over rational and start focusing on ideas, then they say "we need a scene to demonstrate this idea". It is a rational construction. I don't think that's interesting. I believe films are far more organic in their structure.

Source: [Cineuropa](#) ^[3]

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[1] <http://www.luxprize.eu/v1/tabu.html>

[2] <http://www.luxprize.eu/v1/official-selection.html>

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