

***The New York Times* – 4th August 2011**

# The New York Times

## Mysteries of Lisbon (2010)



Music Box Films

Ricardo Pereira and Clotilde Hesme in "Mysteries of Lisbon," directed by Raúl Ruiz.

## A Portuguese Tale of Time, the Revealer

By MANOHLA DARGIS

Published: August 4, 2011

A masterly tale about lives and stories and the art of their telling, "Mysteries of Lisbon" is also an elegiac meditation on love lost and rediscovered through misted memory. Directed by the Chilean filmmaker Raúl Ruiz and set mainly in Portugal, with detours to other European corners, it is a period picture based on a work by the prolific Camilo Castelo Branco (1825-90), who was born in Lisbon, illegitimate and orphaned, and flirted with the priesthood before finding his calling in writing, running off with a married woman, landing in prison and finally committing suicide. Mr. Ruiz's "Mysteries" are just as outlandish, gloriously so.

Made for European television and originally divided into six one-hour episodes, the movie now runs an absorbing, astonishingly fast four and a quarter hours. It's being presented with a brief, charitable intermission, which should give you time to (among other things) wrap your head around Mr. Ruiz's elegant twists. The story opens and closes with a voice-over belonging to a man you come to know as Pedro da Silva, but initially know as a 14-year-old called "just João" (played as a teenager by João Luis Arrais and as an adult by Afonso Pimentel). Believing himself an orphan, he lives in a boarding school run by the kind, bluntly

spoken Father Dinis (Adriano Luz), whose cassock and tender manner obscure an adventurous, thorny past.

That history comes to light over the course of the movie and through a great many melodramatic incidents involving desperate women, dastardly men and overheated emotions that at times run perilously, if self-consciously, close to soap operatic parody. Mr. Ruiz certainly solicits laughter with moments of weird comedy, some of which almost take you out of the movie. But even at his most playfully Brechtian, including when he's making you aware of the artifice of the material — as in the introductory images of illustrated glazed tiles that directly allude to later scenes — Mr. Ruiz keeps you hooked, pulled in by the sympathetic and comically off-putting performances and by his delightful, supple, fully cinematic storytelling.

It would be foolish to try to condense all the characters, time frames and marvelous details in "Mysteries of Lisbon," which stretches across at least three generations. Soon after he first appears, João discovers that he's the son of a countess, Ângela de Lima (Maria João Bastos), who visits him one night after he's injured. She brings him a theater diorama as a gift, a miniature that he carries with him and that emerges as a crucial storytelling device. Mostly, though, she almost magically grants his wish, becoming the mother he longed for and filling in the first blank in a puzzle that eventually will also be solved with the help of Father Dinis; João's father, Don Pedro (João Baptista); a scar-faced pirate, Alberto (the excellent Ricardo Pereira); and others.

Shooting in digital, Mr. Ruiz makes his way fluidly through this unusual bildungsroman, which in less able hands could easily have transformed into a confusing narrative thicket. But there's a lightness of touch here, despite the sometimes heavier moments, that extends from the prowling camera to the way Mr. Ruiz nestles one character's memory inside other memories. In one such sequence, and at the urging of a distraught Ângela, Father Dinis shares the story of João's paternity with the boy, and the scene shifts to the past, when a wounded Don Pedro stumbled into the school. Then, as if picking up a baton in a relay race, Don Pedro begins to recount his and Ângela's tragic romance, and the scene and time shift once again, taking the tale deeper into the past.

As its title suggests, "Mysteries of Lisbon" is a mystery involving João, but one that opens and keeps opening, life after life, to embrace the near-entirety of his world. Drawing on narrative traditions, from popular melodramas to avant-garde theater, Mr. Ruiz, best known in America for his 1999 adaptation of Proust's "Time Regained," turns "Mysteries of Lisbon" into yet another search for lost time. In the new movie Pedro's voice-over serves as a narrative through line that, again and again, gives way to other voices that take possession of the story, even as it also finally, touchingly circles back to the beginning. Along the way Pedro retraces his life, summoning up memories that address the ambiguities of his origins.

Nabokov likened "Remembrance of Things Past" to a treasure hunt, one in which time is the treasure and the past its hiding place. "The transmutation of sensation into sentiment," he wrote, "the ebb and tide of memory, waves of emotions such as desire, jealousy and artistic euphoria — this is the material of the enormous and yet singularly light and translucent work."

Much the same can be said of Mr. Ruiz's movie, though its ebb and tide of memory eddies into Hitchcockian whirlpools. As in "Vertigo," the past in "Mysteries of Lisbon" doesn't remain past but spirals into the present, overwhelming it to the point that Pedro — as his story is repeatedly overtaken — becomes a near-footnote in his own life, as is true of us all.

## **MYSTERIES OF LISBON**

*Opens on Friday in Manhattan.*

Directed by Raúl Ruiz; written by Carlos Saboga, based on the novel by Camilo Castelo Branco; director of photography, André Szankowski; edited by Valéria Sarmiento and Carlos Madaleno; music by Jorge Arriagada and Luis Freitas Branco; art direction by Isabel Branco; produced by Paulo Branco; released by Music Box Films. In Portuguese, French and English, with English subtitles. Running time: 4 hours 17 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Adriano Luz (Father Dinis), Maria João Bastos (Ângela de Lima), Ricardo Pereira (Alberto de Magalhães), Afonso Pimentel (Pedro da Silva), João Luis Arrais (the young Pedro da Silva), Clotilde Hesme (Elisa de Montfort), João Baptista (D. Pedro da Silva), Léa Seydoux (Blanche de Montfort), Melvil Poupaud (Col. Ernest Lacroze), Malik Zidi (Viscount of Armagnac) and São José Correia (Anacleto dos Remédios).

**A version of this review appeared in print on August 5, 2011, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: A Portuguese Tale Of Time, the Revealer.**

***New York Times* – 31st July 2011**

# The New York Times Magazine

## **A Mild-Mannered Maniac**



Raoul Ruiz in his home in Paris.

**By A.O. SCOTT**

**Published: July 29, 2011**

In the small bookstore of the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, a wall of shelves is devoted to works by and about the great auteurs — monographs, coffee-table tomes, DVDs. The pantheon of world cinema is too large for the available space, so the masters are arrayed in double rows, one behind the other. In order to browse, you must dig and rearrange, and on a recent visit, I felt a bit like a cinephile-archaeologist or a monomaniacal archivist as I burrowed past Ozu and Pasolini and displaced a row of Scorsese, making my determined way to Raoul Ruiz. I unearthed a small cache of movies directed by this Chilean-born filmmaker, who has made his home in Paris since the mid-1970s. I also found a book of interviews from the 1980s and another, “Poétique du Cinéma,” based on lectures he gave, mostly at American universities, over the years. The title of one lecture is “Cinema as

Clandestine Voyage,” which might describe a curious viewer’s sometimes baffling but frequently enchanting journey through Ruiz’s films.

Ruiz on the set of “Mysteries of Lisbon,” a four-and-a-half-hour, two-part adaptation of the sprawling novel by Camilo Castelo Branco.

Discovering Raoul Ruiz is like stumbling into a secret room in an old, echoey mansion. You lean against a wall, your shoulder innocently trips a hidden mechanism and you find yourself whirled into a hidden chamber. Curios litter every surface, and the walls are lined with old volumes — uniform editions of the collected works of prolific authors whose names ring vague, perhaps imaginary bells. You may recall a name from a college syllabus or a paperback you once saw on someone else’s nightstand, but you had no idea there was such a diverse and enormous body of work.

Ruiz, who just turned 70, is the director, so far, of more than 100 films in several languages and also, in his spare time, a theater director and film theorist of some renown in Europe and beyond. He has taught at Harvard, adapted the last volume of Proust into a feature film, transformed several of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tales into a dark, surrealist comedy starring Marcello Mastroianni and made the life of the Viennese painter Gustav Klimt into a fractured biopic starring John Malkovich. His forays into North America have included the twisty psychological thriller “Shattered Image,” starring William Baldwin and Anne Parillaud, and “The Golden Boat,” a New York mock-*policier* with appearances by Jim Jarmusch, Kathy Acker and Annie Sprinkle.

“I have a mania for citation,” Ruiz said to me on a recent morning, the day after my trip to the *cinémathèque*. We were drinking coffee in the unpretentious apartment, not far from the Père Lachaise cemetery, where he lives with his wife, Valéria Sarmiento, an editor and a filmmaker with whom Ruiz collaborates frequently. It was not the only time he described himself as a person who is subject to pathological obsessions. “Mania” was the answer he supplied to the obvious but irresistible question “How did you manage to make so many movies?” and also the explanation for the ancient leatherbound books crowding the shelves behind him. “These are my antidote to the Internet,” he said, taking down a 17th-century French edition of memoirs attributed, in an elaborate and once-notorious hoax, to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius.

There is something old-fashioned about Ruiz — his literary enthusiasms, his compulsive collecting, the calm, amused tone in which he expresses these benign manias. And he seems to make films the way a 19th-century polymath might write, without the strain and anxiety that so often mark the modern creative temperament. His movies, though, are anything but antiquarian, even (or perhaps especially) when they are populated by costumed specters drawn from classic books. “Time Regained” is the perfect adaptation of Proust, because it feels less like a respectful homage to a venerable author than like a movie Proust himself might have made: Ruiz captures the essential Proustian experience of being simultaneously at odds with and at home in the present, aware of the perpetual slippage of past into future. And that may be a version of the essential Ruizian sensation. The world of his movies — as experienced by the characters and the audience alike — is at once soothingly, elegantly familiar and booby-trapped with surprises. There are sudden disappearances, long-buried

secrets coming to light, supernatural happenings and bizarre coincidences. In his universe, improbability is the rule.

So it is no surprise that, in his conversation, surprises pop up frequently. He is soft-spoken — his impeccable French inflected with dry Spanish sonorities — and courteous, with a round, placid face that registers flashes of mirth and melancholy. Our conversation — dilating through the middle of the day, across a meal of roast pork, salad, fruit and cheese — was marked by a dizzying array of verbal annotations to postmodern philosophers and renegade biologists, to Filipino patriots and French publishing executives, all part of a flow of observation, speculation and anecdote. He recalled encountering legendary gangsters on the Brooklyn waterfront as a teenager traveling on a merchant ship captained by his father and, with the same amusement and wonder, a scene from an obscure old movie in which an aspiring composer played by Ricardo Montalban plays along with his own song on the radio.

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THE NEW YORKER

## **Mysteries of Lisbon**

**by Richard Brody**

The director Raul Ruiz's elegant intellectual gamesmanship and elaborate historical fantasy starts small and simple, with the story of a boy whose obscure background gradually comes to light through the efforts of his teacher and protector, a priest at his boarding school—whose own background proves equally surprising. Ruiz weaves a shaggy-dog story of shifting identities and intertwined destinies, from the mid-nineteenth century to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; his characters spill their tales in flowing monologues, and he stages the events with an air of intrigue that's amplified by his sly, insistently roving camera and his sinuous, theatrical long takes. In its more than four hours, the movie offers only a handful of emblematic images and memorable lines of dialogue; the director is after neither the inner nor the outer life, but, rather, the peculiarity of the storytelling life. He relies heavily on the blandishments of fine furnishings, gorgeous settings, and stiff manners (the proceedings aren't far from a cerebral and Continental "Masterpiece Theatre"), but, along the way, he offers a sharp and subtle debunking of a key myth of modernity: its vaunted social mobility. For Ruiz, the aristocratic age, before identity cards and international files, was when no one really knew what was in a name. In Portuguese, French, and English.

The Los Angeles Times logo, featuring the words "Los Angeles Times" in a white, serif font, centered on a dark gray rectangular background.

## **Movie review: 'Mysteries of Lisbon'**

**Secrets and longing are at the center of this darkly elegant melodrama. With Raúl Ruiz directing, the film moves with its own logic, dreamlike and unshakable.**

By Sheri Linden, Special to the Los Angeles Times

August 12, 2011

Based on a 19th-century novel that's usually characterized as sprawling, "Mysteries of Lisbon" is a hothouse melodrama seen through a cool, discerning eye.

Director Raúl Ruiz has called it one of his most theoretical films, but this multicourse (41/2 - hour) feast is no self-conscious demonstration of molecular gastronomy. The storytelling is straightforward, with a classical sheen, even as mischief and hallucination puncture the serene surface.

The running time should not be cause for dismay; with 100-plus films to his credit, Ruiz is nothing if not a master of tone and pacing as he moves his players through the drawing rooms, hotels, convents and monasteries of Western Europe and, briefly, Brazil, unwrapping stories within stories within stories.

At the center of the ever-expanding lacework — until the center shifts, as it will several times, and back again — is an orphaned teen who introduces the saga as a "diary of suffering." Like many of the characters, João is not what he at first appears. He learns he's really Pedro, the product of a star-crossed love between two members of the nobility, both second-born and, therefore, destined for misfortune rather than inheritance.

Pedro's inheritance is a particularly intense strain of *saudade*, that Portuguese mode of longing; when his countess mother (Maria João Bastos) suffers, she does it exquisitely.

Her ally, and Pedro's, is the priest who has housed and schooled him: Father Dinis, who might be called the mystery of "Mysteries." A keeper of secrets he claims he'd rather not know, he's a protector with the manipulative focus of Iago.



Adriano Luz brings delectable inscrutability to the role, conveying the quiet authority of a man of God and the plain-talking roughness of a thief. Then again, in one of his past incarnations, the good father might very well have been a thief, among other things.

But multiple selves are elemental to the world Ruiz has brought to life. On that front, Father Dinis is matched by the dashing nouveau riche Alberto, who plays by no one's rules. Ricardo Pereira is magnetic as the accomplished but overcompensating ladies' man, filling his Xanadu with imports, including an exotic bird, like a Lusitanian Charles Foster Kane.

Among the shadow-draped story's gypsies, tramps and aristocrats, destiny is least oppressive for those who shape-shift and name-change, who refuse to settle for the identity dictated by their birth. And that's no surprise from a protean artist like Ruiz.

Spinning out from Pedro (played, as a pining adult, by Afonso Pimentel), the degrees of separation expand and contract as the story crisscrosses the Continent and the decades. Whether among officers of the French Revolution or exiled lovers in Venice, whether zeroing in on murderous fathers, belching bandits or behind-the-scenes benefactors, the film moves with its own logic, dreamlike and unshakable.

Those who appear irredeemable — some of them, anyway — turn sympathetic as the perspective changes.

Through every twist of the kaleidoscope, the delight in storytelling is primary. The boy Pedro peers into a diorama of his life at its most confusing and finds beauty, if no answers. Ruiz is as uninterested in solutions as he is in hitting Hollywood-style beats.

He constructs a memory palace from an endlessly unfolding paper fortuneteller, choreographing his troupe of note-carrying go-betweens, eavesdropping servants, lovers bent on revenge (Clotilde Hesme, commanding) and those locked in unhappiness (Léa Seydoux).

Screenwriter Carlos Saboga's adaptation of the 1854 novel by Camilo Castelo Branco, alive with language that's sharp and poetic, occupies a place somewhere between heaving bosoms and clinical detachment. But "Mysteries" never undercuts its soap opera essence with irony; it celebrates every jealous impulse and weird duel. (The source material was serialized, and the film began as a series for Portuguese television.)

Essential to the film's dark elegance is the plaintive score, a mix of compositions old and new, and the assured camera of first-timer André Szankowski — circling, prowling, standing back in judgment, so unlike the blindfolded boys who, in one of Ruiz's many sly touches, stumble through the background of a scene.



## Music Box plays 'Lisbon'

By **JOHN HOPEWELL**  
and **ELSA KESLASSY**

**I**n its second pickup at Berlin, Music Box Films has taken all U.S. rights to Chilean Raul Ruiz's period drama "Mysteries of Lisbon," co-produced and sold by Paulo Branco's Alfama Films.

Music Box bought Liz Garbus' Sundance documentary "Bobby Fisher Against the World" earlier in the festival.

The "Lisbon" deal closed at

Berlin about an hour after a market screening, said Music Box prexy William Schopf. The U.S. pickup also includes "Lisbon's" six-hour miniseries spinoff.

An opulent 19th century epic melodrama tracing suffering through various generations, "Lisbon" runs 4½ hours with an intermission. It adapts Camilo Castelo Branco's novel of the same title.

"How many films do you

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### 'LISBON'

*Continued from page 1*

see that are so appealing but have no nudity or violence but whose storytelling carries you through 4½ hours?" Schopf asked.

Bowing at the Toronto festival and winning the director the Silver Shell at San Sebastian, "Mysteries" won the Louis Delluc French critics' award for film of the year. It has already turned a profit, Branco told Variety.

Modestly budgeted at €2.5 million (\$3.4 million) for the feature and TV series, Branco said, "Lisbon" has sold to Gallic paybox Canal Plus. Distributed by Alfama, "Lisbon" has enjoyed a spirited sustained run in France, grossing about \$740,000 in 17 weeks.



**"Mysteries of Lisbon," a period drama from Chilean Raul Ruiz, became the second film picked up by Music Box Films at the Berlin festival.**

Music Box will release "Lisbon" in the top-10 U.S. markets in September or October, Schopf said.

"Lisbon" has sold to the U.K.

(New Wave), Spain (Wanda Vision) and Taiwan (Swallow Wings). Japan is close to closing. Alfama distributes in Belgium and Switzerland.

## The Hollywood Reporter – 17th December 2010



by Rebecca Leffler

PARIS – **Raoul Ruiz'** *Mysteries of Lisbon* shocked the French film biz by taking the prestigious Louis Delluc prize for Gallic title of the year at a ceremony in Paris on Friday. Based on a famous 19th century Portuguese novel, the four-hour, 26-minute Portuguese-language romantic tale of interwoven stories and premiered at September's Toronto International Film Festival.

Festival de Cannes President **Gilles Jacob** presided over a jury of French industry heavyweights and journalists.

"It's exceptional that a film of this length would be given such an award," producer Paulo Branco said, accepting the prize on behalf of Ruiz who is currently in Chili. He added: "It proves that when one believes in one's projects, even as atypical as this one, one can succeed. This prize is a recognition: risk and audacity still pay off in cinema."

Other films vying for the title this year included **Olivier Assayas'** *Carlos* biopic, **Roman Polanski's** thriller *The Ghost Writer*, Xavier Beauvois' *Of Gods and Men*, Bertrand Tavernier's *The Princess of Montpensier*, **Claire Denis'** *White Material*, Jean-Paul Civeyrac's *Young Girls in Black* and Mathieu Amalric's *On Tour*.

The Louis Delluc prize, often nicknamed the "Goncourt of cinema" and compared to that famed literary award, kicks off Gallic awards season and typically is a good indicator of upcoming winners for the more major awards in the territory. This year, however, it remains to be seen if the four hour-plus title will be able to sway Cesar academy voters come February. Plus, many members of the film biz questioned the jury's choice of a film in Portuguese that takes place in Portugal, stars Portuguese actors and was co-produced by a Portuguese film company as worthy of the title of best French film of the year.

Last year's prize winner *A Prophet* proved to be an awards season oracle when the film went on to win the coveted Cesar award for best film among nine awards at the ceremony in addition to an Oscar nod for France.

*Lisbon* stars Adriano Luz, Maria Joao Bastos, Ricardo Pereira and French actresses Clotilde Hesme and Lea Seydoux. Seydoux also stars in Rebecca Zlotowski's *Belle Epoque* which won the Louis Delluc prize for best first film of the year. The 68th annual Louis Delluc prize ceremony was held at the swank Fouquet's restaurant on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on Friday.



## **On the Long and Winding Road of Raul Ruiz's Epic *Mysteries of Lisbon***

By J. Hoberman Wednesday, Aug 3 2011

Say what you will about 19th-century literature—they had stories in those days (and stories within stories). None of the 260 books authored by Camilo Castelo Branco (1825–1890) is available in English, but this madly prolific Portuguese novelist provided the material for two imposing movie epics: Manoel de Oliveira's 1979 breakthrough *Doomed Love* and now Raul Ruiz's scarcely less remarkable and equally long *Mysteries of Lisbon*, shown at last year's New York Film Festival and opening this week at Lincoln Center's new Munroe Film Center.



Music Box Films

'I'll explain later!' Alfonso Pimentel as Pedro in *Mysteries of Lisbon*

## **Details**

### ***Mysteries of Lisbon***

Directed by Raul Ruiz

Music Box Films

Opens August 5, Elinor Bunin Munroe Film Center, IFC

Convolutéd does not begin to describe this four-and-a-half-hour movie that, given the filmmaker's straightforward if subtly distanced embrace of Branco's sprawling three-volume novel, might be called *Mysteries of Mysteries of Lisbon*. A sort of ethnographic time-traveler, Ruiz dramatizes every outrageous plot twist with serene equanimity—treating the hopelessly old-fashioned as the new avant-garde. The tale of the illegitimate "orphan" Pedro's search for his origins is embedded in a thicket of concealed identities, unexpected confessions, and madly proliferating nested narratives. Boasting of "coincidences so great no

novelist would invent them," the story advances as it retreats; the movie's most often repeated line is "I'll explain later!"

Adapted from a six-part miniseries (or soap opera) produced by longtime Oliveira associate Paulo Branco for Portuguese TV, *Mysteries of Lisbon* is a fitting companion to Ruiz's triumphant 1999 adaptation of the thought-unfilmable *Time Regained*, a movie that, rather than approximate Proust's prose, addressed his modernist use of simultaneous multiple perspectives. As *Time Regained* was a 20th-century movie about a 20th-century novel, *Mysteries of Lisbon* is a 21st-century adaptation of a 19th-century chronicle. Placing the very notion of narrative between quotation marks, it's at once matter-of-fact and outlandish, anachronistic and contemporary, a movie of fluid long takes and static compositions in which all of the action might be set within the paper theater given to the young hero by the aristocratic woman who, 20 minutes into the movie, turns out to be his mother and then ...

Leisurely and digressive, this generally exhilarating saga ("a storm of misadventures" per Ruiz) variously suggests Victor Hugo, Stendhal, and (thanks in part to the unnatural, emphatic yet uninflected, acting) Mexican *telenovelas*. The score is richly romantic; the period locations are impeccable. Secondary characters come unexpectedly to the fore as the past perpetually introduces itself into the present. War breaks out—20 years before the story opens. (Like just about everything in early 19th-century European intellectual history, every event can be traced back to the historical rupture of the French Revolution.)

*Mysteries of Lisbon* has no shortage of incidental absurdism, although the suggestion that human existence is an enigmatic divine plan carried out by priests and penitents is a reminder that literary surrealism was largely the invention of lapsed Catholics. Slightly less self-effacing than God, Ruiz signals his own presence (if not necessarily his intentions) with some intermittently eccentric camera placement and strategic mirror reflections, repeated scenes of servants spying or eavesdropping on the affairs of the oblivious aristos who employ them, and occasional bouts of hysterical, unmotivated laughter. The ability of characters to recognize each other after lifetime-long separations is a source of humor as well as mystery: "The winding roads we had to travel, my son, to meet again!"

The more Pedro learns of his past, the more confused and morbidly alienated he becomes. Ultimately, *Mysteries* cuts its own Gordian knot to wrap with a magnificent, looping closer—a blaze of white light that metaphorically conflates the end of literature, theater, and cinema. The nothingness is Olympian. A child is born, a man dies (still living in that child's imagination), and the movie feels majestically disinterested—once set in motion, it hardly cares if you watch.



# VOGUE

## Love Nests: *Mysteries of Lisbon*

by John Powers

You won't see a more brilliant piece of filmmaking this year than *Mysteries of Lisbon*. Adapted from a Dickens-on-LSD 1854 novel by Portuguese writer Camilo Castelo Branco, **Raúl Ruiz's** ravishing film takes the costume drama to a whole new level of refinement. The clothing, the locations, and the photography are all gorgeous, as are most of the actors. But the movie also offers the tempestuous delights of a potboiler. With settings ranging from Lisbon to Paris to Italy and Brazil, this is a tale bursting with romance and prostitution, volcanic passion and bloody murder, shifting identities and stories nested like Matryoshka dolls. Heck, there's even a pirate.

Trying to summarize this kaleidoscopic yarn—it runs over four hours—would be futile. Suffice it to say that *Mysteries of Lisbon* begins with fourteen-year-old João (**João Luis Arrayas**) who lives in a church orphanage led by Father Dinis (**Adriano Luz**). Born of aristocratic adultery, João dreams of one day meeting his mother, Ângela, the Countess of Santa Barbara (**Maria João Bastas**), locked up by her domineering count (**Albano Jerónimo**). Eventually he does meet her, and she tells her story, beginning a cycle in which, over the course of the film, each of the characters I've mentioned—plus a slew of others—tell their own stories in a widening circle of love and betrayal. Now a couple of the yarns are, to my mind, less exciting than the others, and at moments you may wonder if all these proliferating tales add up to anything. They do. By the time João learns the full truth, the individual stories come together like a string of pearls, offering a vision of an entire society, beautiful and corrupt, where nobility and baseness dance hand in hand.

If you're like most people, you may not have heard of Ruiz, a Chilean surrealist forced to flee his home country after the 1973 military coup. Working out of Paris, he's made scores of films, some of them arresting but baffling, some laughable but fun (check out *Klimt* with John Malkovich), some literally unwatchable. I may have walked out of more of Ruiz's movies than any other director's. But when he's good, he's staggeringly good. His 1999 film, *Marcel Proust's Time Regained*, a poetic distillation of an entire fictional universe, is one of the greatest literary adaptations of all time. So is *Mysteries of Lisbon*, which moment after moment, shot after shot, shows a level of attention to detail that is never less than magisterial. Every location is perfect. Every camera placement is perfect. Every performance is perfect. Okay, okay, I admit that I'm not wild about the opening shot. But that would be quibbling.