

Saramago's Construction of Fictional Characters: From *Terra do Pecado* to *Baltasar and Blimunda*

Horácio Costa

This essay tracks the evolution of José Saramago's fictional characters. Beginning with Saramago's first novel, *Terra do Pecado* (1947), Costa outlines a dynamic of anachronism, where Saramago's characters and plot bear a stronger resemblance to nineteenth-century works of naturalism than to the twentieth-century modern novel. It is this initial asynchronism, Costa argues, that paves the way for Saramago's later originality. Following a nineteen-year hiatus from literary writing, Saramago published two books of poetry and two volumes of *crónicas*, wherein Costa identifies the revival of the creative impulse. In two subsequent texts, *O Ano de 1993* (1975) and "O Ouvido" (1979), Saramago creates narration without constructing fictional characters marked by "subjectifying" characteristics. In the novel *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (1976), Saramago returns to constructing complete fictional characters, inaugurating a series of middle-aged male heroes and female characters who come to populate his later novels. The tension between a character's anonymity and individuation, between sociological collectivity and psychological singularity constitutes an important vector in Saramago's work. In addition to the relapsing of Saramago's characters along the axes of these two poles, the multiplication of dystopic-futurist plots points to an important dynamic of auto-intertextuality. The internal cohesion of Saramago's work affirms the importance of comparing the texts of Saramago's formative period to his later works in an evolutionary trajectory.

José Saramago's Historical Fiction

Adriana Alves de Paula Martins

Starting from the assumption that one of the major trends in postmodern literature is the historical fiction that aims to reassess and revise the ambiguities and contradictions of historical discourse, the author focuses her attention on José Saramago's novels whose main subject is the historical and symbolic representation of Portuguese past events. Being particularly interested in the analysis of the ways Saramago's literary texts

examine the epistemological and the ideological heritage of the Portuguese nation from a historical, human, linguistic, literary, ethical and political viewpoint, the author proposes a typology comprising the main trends of postmodern historical fiction. The objective of this proposal is to study the meanings projected onto Saramago's novels by the explicit transformation of History into narrative subject matter, defining an important aspect of the writer's politics of symbolic representation of the empirical world.

On the Labyrinth of Text, or, Writing as the Site of Memory

Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Saramago's fictional discourse is that it functions as a site where cultural memory is activated through a complex web of intertextual references, as the author engages in a comprehensive re-reading of the Portuguese, Iberian, and generally Western cultural tradition. This essay considers the novels of Saramago's first major narrative cycle, from *Levantado do Chão* (1980) to *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), as labyrinthine agglomerations of discourses belonging to different times, places and genres, whose fragmentary irruptions break up the apparently smooth continuity of the text. Its main focus is on Saramago's engagement with the poetry of Luís de Camões, particularly *The Lusíads*, with the Bible, and with the historical intertext, the latter comprising both primary source materials and historiographic narratives.

Righting Wrongs, Re-Writing Meaning and Reclaiming the City in Saramago's *Blindness* and *All the Names*

David Frier

In both *Blindness* and *All the Names* Saramago exploits the archetypal narrative of the descent into the underworld in order to portray characters engaged in a search for renewed meaning in modern life, with a subsequent turn to creativity as the novels' protagonists emerge from what is either a nightmarish reality (in *Blindness*) or one devoid of all emotion

and individuality (in *All the Names*). In both works the focus of the narrative gradually moves away from the public sphere to the private, thus emphasising the developing relationships amongst individual characters and leading to a more appropriate balance between fulfilling personal needs and respecting those of others. This in turn leads to a recognition that a society worth living in must be based on the preservation of human values and on the active participation of all of its citizens in its affairs. The recognition that it is these values that turn human society into a civilisation is a necessary prerequisite for the construction of a better society.

Saramago, Cognitive Estrangement, and Original Sin?

Kenneth Krabbenhoft

The events portrayed in José Saramago's 1975 prose poem *O Ano de 1993* and his 1995 novel *Blindness* take place in a near future in which the normal protections of society and government have broken down. The purpose of this essay is to show how, by stressing the closeness of these dystopias to the readers' present-day experiences, Saramago creates the effect of cognitive estrangement first fully explored by Darko Suvin, and how this in turn provides him with a kind of fictional laboratory for exploring the positive and negative aspects of human nature. By allying Saramago with a number of science fiction writers, in particular Anthony Burgess in his 1962 novel *The Wanting Seed*, the essay expands our understanding of the Portuguese writer's inquiry into a range of concerns and how certain of his novels reflect the historical antagonism between the Augustinian and the Pelagian views of human morality.

"The One With the Beard Is God, the Other Is the Devil"

Harold Bloom

The essay analyzes, in turn, the three major personages of *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, God, Pastor or the devil, and Jesus Christ. God is seen by Saramago as a great humorist, but profoundly unloving towards everyone, including his son Jesus Christ. Saramago's God is interested only in extending

his domain, so that he will become the God of the Catholics as well as of the Jews. Pastor is portrayed by Saramago with a certain enigmatic reserve, yet essentially is seen as being more sympathetic than not, and certainly preferable to Saramago's God. Jesus Christ, as new-created by Saramago, is a superb and loving personality, but sadly perplexed by God's murderous scheme against him. Nevertheless, Saramago eloquently allows Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene an authentic and loving erotic fulfillment. The epilogue of my essay concerns Saramago's charming "The Tale of the Unknown Island," which I read as a lighthearted allegory that reverses the tragedy of *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*.

Journey to the Iberian God: Antonio Machado Revisited by Saramago

Orlando Grossegeese

Besides being a stubborn Communist and atheist, José Saramago maintains an Iberian vision that injures patriotic feelings and the traditional discourse of Portuguese identity set against Spain. The study shows how the author's interest in Spanish history, culture and literature throughout his entire work is closely related to poetics and ideology, even before the overt reclamation of Iberian identity in *The Stone Raft* (1986). The poetry and the philosophy of Antonio Machado, especially his theory of the apocryphal, play an important role in Saramago's writing, which enlivens the past as a paradoxical space of anachronic future. Machado also applied his theory to the destiny of Spain: the final verses of the poem "El Dios ibero" can be understood as a basis for *The Stone Raft*, read as a narrative complementary to *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. In both cases, the making of history as a collective project depends on the individual's change-of-mind, prefigured by the disinterred Antonio Machado and an undead, more subversive Fernando Pessoa. In the course of the journey depicted in *The Stone Raft*, Pedro Orce represents among the members of the touring group "el hombre ibero," the son of the Iberian God. At both levels, that of the narrated journey and that of poetic discourse, Pedro Orce has a "fertile death" that revivifies Antonio Machado as an *author* of an Iberian religion of salvation without a God from above, following the Machadian concept of Christian Communism, and announcing the Orphic and Marxist interpretation of Jesus in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*.

"Once But No Longer the Prow of Europe": National Identity and Portuguese Destiny in José Saramago's *The Stone Raft*

Mark J. Sabine

This article examines Saramago's construction of a "counter-factual" scenario in *The Stone Raft*, and assesses what destiny the novel proposes for Portugal as an alternative to integration into an EEC committed to market freedom at the expense of cultural diversity and of member nations' links with extra-European former colonies and neighbours. It argues that interpretations of the Peninsula's displacement as a utopian vision of a united Hispanophone and Lusophone community ignore both the narrative's dismantling of myths of national character—effected in part through Saramago's dialogue with Unamuno—and the novel's effacement of inter-regional tensions current in both Iberia and the post-colonial Hispanophone and Lusophone world. In place of an ideology of integrated Iberian separatism, the article identifies an appeal for greater interaction between European countries, as opposed to the integration of a subordinate "periphery" into what is perceived as a richer, stronger European "heartland." The article also investigates the novel's allusions to Portugal's partially abortive April revolution in the protagonists' tentative establishment of new economic, social and sexual values and customs. It argues that the inconclusive ending of the Peninsula's story represents a crisis of identity and destiny, challenging the novel's protagonists and readers to somehow move beyond a stereotypically Portuguese faith in messianism and miracles.

The Edge of Darkness, or Why Saramago Never Wrote about the Colonial War in Africa

Maria Alzira Seixo

One of Western culture's major literary works to be inspired by the colonial situation is undoubtedly Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). This essay is an attempt to sketch out a way in which some aspects of two of Saramago's novels, *The Stone Raft* (1986) and *Blindness* (1995), can best be understood in light of the cultural legacy bequeathed by Conrad's novella and how they can be interpreted from a contemporary postcolonial perspective.

In the final analysis, Saramago is shown to be writing neither from the center nor from the margin, but rather “from the edge” (of Africa). While being in the center implies the possibility of access to (and even exercise of) power, and peripheral situations suffer from exposure to its hegemonic irradiation, being on the edge may be considered as the privileged position for knowledge, both objective and impartial, uncontaminated by either centripetal or centrifugal concerns. It is the convenient place for a wise witness, making him able to ponder the issue of observation and of its exercise as a decisive contribution to a better way of seeing.

Cruising Gender in the Eighties (from *Levantado do Chão* to *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*)

Ana Paula Ferreira

In the ongoing process of revision to which Saramago’s fiction submits certain foundational myths of Western culture, the notion of woman as inferior and therefore subservient to Man is contested with particular emphasis, as female characters assume decisive roles in the development of Saramago’s fictional plots. In the five novels published in the 1980s, from *Levantado do Chão* (1980) to *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989), the writer’s textual journey posits an imaginative term of struggle against the oppressive effects of normative and structurally persistent patterns of gender domination in socio-economic and symbolic orders. Although some critics have attempted to define an abstract model of femininity in Saramago’s fiction, this essay insists on pulling the discussion of his women characters away from both an idealist/idealizing and a dangerously cooptative representational register, while pushing it closer to the experimental material(ism) of language in the open, multi-layered and movable space of Saramago’s subversive, inherently dialogic textuality.

Shit, Shrimps, and Shifting Sobriquets: *Iracema* and the Lesson in Lost Authority

Phillip Rothwell

This article considers the way in which the text of José de Alencar’s *Iracema* defies the semantic preclusions that the author seeks to impose

upon it. Crucial to this defiance is the resonance implicit in the names chosen by the author for the protagonists. These names escape closure by a variety of means. One is the Lusophonic echo inscribed in the warrior's name. Another is the recourse to an etymological survey legitimised by the author's own actions. In both cases, the text becomes partially liberated from Alencar's authority.

Violent Games: Towards a Historical Understanding of the Portuguese Bullfight

Rita Costa Gomes

The aim of this study is to provide a critical examination of the contemporary debate about the "affair of Barrancos," and in turn the history of bullfighting in Portugal. After establishing the role played today by the killing of the bull in the arena as a fetish for local and national identities, the essay proceeds with an analysis of some medieval examples of games using bulls in order to compare these with the modern "invention" of the bullfight as a traditional activity unchanged since the Middle Ages. I argue, on the contrary, that bullfights are a form of modern leisure, a game that indicates changing perceptions of violence, and that bullfights played a role in inculcating social discipline in the 19th century. In spite of its being contested in the name of "civilization" and of being the object of anti-cruelty legislation, the Portuguese bullfight, as a vehicle of collective excitement and the quest for profit, is perhaps facing its ultimate challenge—the extension of the moral debate about violence to a non-human actor of history, the bull itself.