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

Horácio Costa
Translated by
Kimberly DaCosta Holton

At a particular moment in *Terra do Pecado* (*Land of Sin*, 1947) Maria Leonor, the widow-protagonist in José Saramago's first novel, says to Dr. Viegas, her doctor and confidant,

> I wish I did not feel ashamed at this moment, but I do… I need something that would give me certainty of my wretchedness. Look, doctor, I am asking you, go to the office and bring... bring *First Principles* by Spencer… I want to feel that, fundamentally, this means nothing, as long as I maintain the calm necessary to continue thinking about the overwhelming greatness of the Universe. I want to feel small, identical to the irrational female who betrays her mate for the first time just after his death. (207-08)

Besides the melodramatic tone that imbues Maria Leonor's speech with the stale flavor of a nineteenth-century novel, the mention of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who together with Charles Darwin was one of the Victorian masters of evolutionary theory, aligns the belief systems in *Terra do Pecado* with an earlier historical period than the one in which the book was composed. In fact, upon reading this book, a strange sense of anachronism assaults us: written fifty years ago, the novel recalls a culture that is over a hundred years old, one dominated by sexual taboos of various types, and by an agrarian or urban bourgeoisie characteristic of the work of Camilo Castelo Branco or Eça de Queirós, not of the universe of modern urban and rural life. *Terra do Pecado* features, in sum, a society less marked by the habits of the twentieth century than by the mores of a world whose time still obeyed the rhythms of village bells.

This point applies not only to the novel's plot, but also to its prose and structure. If *Terra do Pecado*'s plot typifies a late nineteenth-century story—a widow suffers from sexual incontinence, becomes involved with her brother-in-law and, driven by her guilty conscience, seeks out the family doctor, all of this giving rise to a foreseeable conclusion of calculated pathos—the novel's language and structure also clearly demonstrate the distance between Saramago and other novelists writing in Portugal and the rest of the world at the time of the book's publication. Considering this asynchronism, few of Saramago's 1947 readers could have anticipated that, fifty years later, the author of *Terra do Pecado* would receive international acclaim as one of the most powerful and original writers of the late twentieth century, becoming the first Nobel Laureate in Portuguese, a language that had waited a considerable time for this recognition.

So as not to focus solely on *Terra do Pecado*'s plot, let us also consider the nature and design of the novel's characters. If in critical terms little is gained by asserting that Maria Leonor, Benedita and Dr. Viegas would be better off in a Portuguese novel of the nineteenth century rather than of the mid-twentieth, even less is gained by a reader's comparing these characters to those of Alves Redol or Carlos de Oliveira in *Gaibéus* and *Casa na Duna*—books that influenced the development of Portuguese prose fiction immediately following their publication, seven and four years before *Terra do Pecado*, respectively. To mark the distance between Saramago's formal vocabulary and that of his contemporaries, let us recall also that much of the innovative fiction produced in Northeastern Brazil by novelists such as Jorge Amado and Graciliano Ramos, who exerted a tremendous influence on young Portuguese writers of the time, was written in the 1930s.

It was, therefore, not from his foreign and domestic contemporaries that the young Saramago drew inspiration for his first characters. We would have to look back to Abel Botelho's "Social Pathology" series and its typology of human stereotypes, not to mention Júlio Ribeiro's heroine in *A Carne*, to find figures that were similarly shaped by an aesthetic, ethical and even ideological model artificially tailored to the preconceived trends of a literary current. If exhibited in a gallery of characters, the hysterical Maria Leonor, the paternal Dr. Viegas, and Benedita, an example of servile generosity and dedication, would not be out of place beside the Barão de Lavos and Próspero Fortuna, or the protagonists of Júlio Ribeiro's novel, the young Lenita and her similarly paternal and respectable Dr. Lopes Matoso.

Terra do Pecado's lineage resides much more in the Portuguese version of Zola's naturalism—which, today, is clearly identifiable as the book's antecedent—rather than in the twentieth-century novel, be it the developing prose of early Neo-Realism or the fiction indebted to the literary experiments of international modernism. If all of this turns young Saramago's anachronism transparent, it also demonstrates in and of itself the independence of the writer within the Portuguese literary context. We will later return to the consideration of this distance between Saramago and the trends and dominant literary discourses at the time his first book was published. In fact, we can see how—through the employment of an evolutionary perspective in order to compare the construction of fictional characters from *Terra do Pecado* to *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (1976), to the short stories of *Objecto Quase* (*Almost an Object*, 1978), to *Levantado do Chão* (*Raised from the Ground*, 1980) and to *Baltasar and Blimunda* (1982), as is the purpose of this essay—dating from his original asynchronism, Saramago gradually charted his own course, arriving eventually at the center of the most advanced literary production in the world of Lusophone writing today.

Following *Terra do Pecado*, nineteen years would pass before Saramago published a new book. Twenty-nine years would pass before he conceived of a significant cast of characters driven by an extensive fictional plot. Saramago's return to prose fiction was slow and steady. It is surely not in the two books of poetry (*Os Poemas Possíveis* [*Possible Poems*] of 1966, and *Provavelmente Alegria* [*Probably Joy*] of 1970), with which Saramago reinaugurated his literary activity, nor in the two books of *crónicas*[1] (*Deste Mundo e do Outro* [*From This World and From the Other*] of 1971 and *A Bagagem do Viajante* [*The Traveler's Baggage*] of 1973), that we may be able to discern the first drafts of a return to the construction of fictional characters. Nevertheless, it is also important to note, particularly in some *crónicas*, traces of a revival of the creative impulse. I would underscore, to cite one of many possible examples, "Travessa de André Valente," a *crónica* published in *Deste Mundo e do Outro*, in which the narrator encounters and maintains a dialogue with the ghost of Bocage; this constitutes a certain anticipation of the situation that, a decade and a half later, would be developed in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis.*

For obvious reasons, it is not useful to search the compilations of political writing published at the time (*As Opiniões que o DL Teve* of 1974 and *Os*

Apontamentos of 1976) for prefigurations of Saramago's fictional characters. Nor is it useful to search the two texts, *O Ano de 1993* (*The Year 1993*, 1975) and "O Ouvido" ("Hearing"), the latter published in the volume *Poética dos Cinco Sentidos* [*Poetics of the Five Senses*, 1979]), which I have called "experimental" in my study, *José Saramago: O Período Formativo*, for reasons elaborated in that work. We will not encounter in *O Ano de 1993* and "O Ouvido," neither *in nuce* nor in full bloom, so to speak, characters whose fictional status is comparable to those in *Terra do Pecado*. Meanwhile, however, in order to underscore an important point, let us dwell a bit on these two texts.

O Ano de 1993, a fragmentary account written in short verses that narrates the emancipation of an occupied city, is a text composed in a futuristic-dystopic convention that since the time of its publication has come to play a very important role in Saramago's writing. In both *O Ano de 1993* and "Ouvido," a text inspired by a suggestive medieval tapestry belonging to the series *La Dame à la Licorne* in the Parisian Cluny Museum, Saramago creates narration without constructing fictional characters. In both texts, the writer privileges collective processes: in the first, it is the insurrection of a terrorized population and the consequent expulsion of the invaders from the liberated city. In the second text, even though the principal female figure in the tapestry (who also possesses a historical name and identity: Claude Le Viste, a young maiden of petty nobility in medieval France, whose betrothals the "Licorne" cycle commemorates) might suggest a narrative development in which she is "encapsulated," Saramago's discourse concentrates on the manufacture of the tapestry itself, from the combing of the wool to the designing of the image by an unknown artist; only then is mention made of the maiden there represented. The process of narration in both texts privileges the hero or the anonymous laborer who is not marked by identifying signs, or better yet, "subjectifying" marks, through which, as we know, fictional characters are construed.

In *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (1976), Saramago constructs complete fictional characters, if not for the first time, given the antecedence of *Terra do Pecado*, then at least in the sense that their conception reveals an identifiable margin of authorial conscience, this time attuned to contemporary fiction writing. Accordingly, *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* can be viewed as the first demonstration of a dialogue on an equal footing between the not-so-young José Saramago and his political and

particularly literary environment. Unlike *Terra do Pecado*, this second novel remains open to the Portuguese and European literary horizons. On the one hand, *Manual* recuperates a narrative tone and digressiveness in the tradition of Almeida Garrett; on the other, Saramago's debt to the contemporary European novel, and the French novel in particular, becomes evident.[2]

Let us emphasize that due to the abovementioned factors, *Manual* can be considered the first demonstration, in reach and scope, of a mature work of fiction by Saramago. In addition, the hero of *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* inaugurates a series of middle-aged male characters that will multiply throughout the fictional human universe of the "adult" Saramago. The painter, a "portraitist," designated by the initial "H," characterizes himself as a mediocre artist. Certain of his limitations and of his somewhat pathetic role as the painter of portraits in the gallery of Portuguese society, lethargic and stratified before the revolution of 25 de Abril, H decides to conduct a profound self-examination, throwing himself into an enterprise with which, until then, he has had little familiarity: writing. Calligraphy is for him like Ariadne's string: it reproduces itself incessantly, unlike the world of images in which H feels more comfortable. This man in crisis reflects upon his life and his interest in art, while executing a self-cleansing operation (or really an eugenic operation, as the process brings about the perfecting of life-conditions). Gripped by doubt, a prisoner of his labyrinth, H seems to suffer from an affliction to which the medieval world gave a precise designation: *acedia*, the "midday demon" that especially affected monks and men of letters insecure about the efficacy of their intellectual contribution to a world of concrete labor.[3] Be that as it may, this sometimes cruel scrutiny sparks the execution of a singular "Manual of Self-Surpassing," perhaps the source of the suggestive and original title of the novel. In this writing, stylistically marked by digression—the importance of which, we might say in passing, is fundamental to the structure of Saramago's prose—H gradually reveals himself as the first complete and complex character written by Saramago: an anonymous hero, but about to become identified with himself and with history. After having felt himself evaporate in the ease of a life without horizons, as if he had become his own analysand—although, to be sure, his self-examination is far removed from psychoanalytic technique—the portrait painter witnesses a change in his relationship to art and turns into an artist, into a painter *lato sensu*, defined as such in view of himself and of the world.

In this process of change and individual reaffirmation before reality and art, the decisive intervention in H's life by a new romantic companion, also designated by an initial (M), and who provides a substitute within the life of the protagonist for a previous relationship characterized by mutual indifference, is fundamental; M makes H more sensitive and motivates a new interest in his country's situation, driving him to become involved in the emergent political and social forces of the days before the fall of the Salazarist regime. M functions as a catalyzing agent in H's change: her overwhelmingly positive intervention in the recuperation of the frustrated artist-narrator's self-esteem helps H reach the highest point on the psychological ground prepared by his calligraphic, millimetric self-exam. Without M, H's analytic efforts would never have been crowned; the fact that he arrives at this propitious point in synchrony with the emergence of 25 de Abril merely underscores the positive nature of the entire journey.

Moving from apathy to participation, from insensitivity to love, and from lethargy to activity, the character of H inaugurates a lineage of heroes who are distributed in a regular fashion throughout Saramago's novels: H is echoed—to cite only two examples from the writer's more recent work—in the figure of Raimundo Benvindo Silva, the proofreader in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, and in the obscure Sr. José, the clerk in *All the Names.* In terms of feminine characters, *mutatis mutandis*, we see M reflected in the publisher Maria Sara in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* and in the lost woman who takes her own life in *All the Names.* If the appearance of Maria Sara in the life of Raimundo Benvindo da Silva precipitates his authorial capacity—it is then that the proofreader, who rebels against the official version of history, becomes capable of writing his own "History of the Siege of Lisbon," in a first effort at producing an authorized fiction—the female figure in *All the Names*, even though she is merely a name undisclosed to the reader, becomes a leading light in a quest that obsesses the timid clerk, sparking a true revolution in his life. This elusive figure becomes the Ariadne who, *in absentia*, guides Sr. José when he resolves to confront as an individual and an equal his hierarchical superiors and the authority that emanates from the massive archives at the General Conservatory.

We can thus observe the importance of the conception and configuration of the characters in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* in the development of Saramago's novels. Concerning this topic, I'll offer some concluding observations. In the case of H, his anonymity is contrasted with the described

process of individuation, the novel becoming in fact a peculiar kind of Bildungsroman, in which the "Bildung" relates more to the uncommon transformations of the middle-aged than to the more typically occurring changes in youth, as opposed to what happened in Goethe's exemplary narrative. On the other hand, perhaps it would not be excessive to establish a link between the portrait-painter turned artist, who purifies himself through the act of writing, and José Saramago himself, who at fifty-four years of age, after having experimented with various literary genres and having performed various activities connected to creative writing such as journalism, translation and literary criticism, finally decides to establish himself as a novelist. There is no other character in Saramago's work, either before or after this second novel, who—bearing in mind differences that arise from the fact that H is not a mask for a veiled exercise of autobiography, and is indeed a fictional character *tout court*—approximates his creator so precisely and from so many different vantage points.

On the other hand, the configuration of Saramago's characters in a tension between the pole of anonymity and greater individual density versus that of nomination and lesser subjective density seems to constitute a vector in a good part of Saramago's recent novels. It is sufficient to recall, with regard to *Blindness*, that the doctor's wife, whose vision, let us say in passing, is like an impalpable Ariadne's string that orients and liberates the prisoners from the city turned into a deconstructed urban labyrinth and a backdrop for the epidemic of "white blindness." She is a character who is not only progressively individualized throughout the narrative, but who in fact facilitates the subjective development of those she leads.

This "individualizing anonymity" becomes one of the qualities that distinguish Saramago's characters. Nevertheless, there are texts in which anonymous characters are described according to their exteriority, excluding any other process of individuation. Both *O Ano de 1993* and the short stories in *Objecto Quase* privilege collective processes. In the majority of these works, the author employs an omniscient point of view, less concerned with accompanying a character in a determined time period—whether at the level of the narrated events or in his or her subjective life—as he is with articulating an external state of things through events related to the character. This point of view also favors an aesthetic and ideological affinity with the literary subgenre of dystopic futuristics established by Wells, Huxley, and Bradbury (and also manifested in some of Saramago's *crónicas* that I have studied elsewhere).[4]

Let us consider, for example, the anonymous character in the short story "Coisas" ("Things"). A clerk without any importance in a society subjected to total bureaucratic control, he is as thinly individualized as Raimundo Benvindo da Silva or Sr. José. However, as opposed to these characters, the "hero" of the story "Coisas" does not "grow," does not transform, we might say, from a larva into a dragonfly; rather, he ends up becoming one of the victims of the rebellion of the objects that, suddenly anthropomorphized, rise and subvert the dominant order. In this "rebellion of the things," the character is not given space to attempt a transformation that would afford him subjectivity; in this soulless world it is easier for objects to gain consciousness and animation than it is for members of the degraded human society. A dynamic similarly lacking in dimension, although equal in metaphoric wisdom, shapes the character in "Embargo," another of the stories in *Objecto Quase* that are couched in an aesthetic and ethical framework of dystopic futurism. Imprisoned in a car seat, in a position that demeans him and reminds the reader of the servitude to which the mechanisms of consumer capitalism reduce the citizen, a man dies, literally, before knowing how to evaluate what has happened to him. Nor do we encounter characters in "Centauro" or "Refluxo" that are comparable to those in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy.* In each story, the characters—the last centaur on earth in the former, and a capricious King who is fascinated with the construction of cemeteries and mausoleums in the latter—are undoubtedly related to the lineage of protagonists in mythological fables and narratives. However, two of the stories in *Objecto Quase* present characters that are differentiated, as much from one another as with regard to other stories included in the collection.

In the story "The Chair," which from a literary point of view may perhaps be considered the boldest in *Objecto Quase*, Saramago masterfully engages recent history in order to tell, through the prism of cinematographic language and popular culture, the tale of Salazar's fall from a common, everyday summer chair in 1968 in the Forte de Santo António in São João do Estoril, an accident that resulted in the dictator's death. Displaying with notable results the *parti pris* of irony, the writer transforms the *anobideo* insect—which had eaten away at the leg of the chair, an object-turned-instrument used to terminate a dictatorship—into a generic pop-culture protagonist (typical of those in comic book stories): Anobium, a termite species of Tom Mix who, without firing a single shot, yet certain of the

efficacy of his *démarche*, is elevated by the author into one of the most deserving heroes in Portuguese history. Under the guise of parody, Anobium's *sui generis* conception is a crucible of information and aesthetics, not to mention the deconstruction of the grandiloquence of redemptive political discourse that such a conception makes possible. Saramago undoubtedly creates one of the narratives in contemporary Portuguese literatures that most directly inculcate the satirical spirit of the *Farpas* of Eça de Queirós and Ramalho Ortigão.

Written in frank language stripped of any extra-literary references, "Desforra" ("Revenge"), the last short story in *Objecto Quase*, narrates the sexual initiation of an adolescent couple in a bucolic, summer setting. In a type of modern *fabliau*, composed not in verse but in clear prose that features a lyrical tone absent from the other stories in the collection (with the exception of "Centauro"), the frog that observes everything and the pig that chews his own testicles after being castrated hold as much importance in the development of the action as the adolescent who avenges the animal, advancing toward the water to enjoy his first sexual experience with a girl hiding in the grove across the brook. In tone, form and content, this story clashes unabashedly with the others in the same collection, taking up what in the context of Saramago's work at large is a recurring theme of probable autobiographical extraction related to life in the rural world, which can also be observed in various *crónicas*.

Curiously, it is the trajectory represented by "Desforra" that comes to bear fruit in Saramago's prose fiction immediately after the publication of *Objecto Quase*. But before we consider *Levantado do Chão*, a novel that takes up once again some key elements in "Desforra," it is convenient to remember the "shadow," or better yet, the progeny that this singular volume of short stories projects upon the subsequent work of Saramago.

While the aesthetics and ethics of dystopic futurism present in "Coisas" and "Embargo" were manifested for the first time in some of the *crónicas* in *Deste Mundo e do Outro* and in *A Bagagem do Viajante*, and encountered their earliest development in *O Ano de 1993*, the successive recuperations of this framework in Saramago's more recent work are notorious. The reading of *Blindness*, for example, is greatly enriched upon returning to the short stories; they deal with the same chaotic, deconstructed city that subjects its inhabitants to a kind of totalizing servitude, as I have had the opportunity to consider at greater length in another essay (Costa 1999). The short story "Refluxo," on the other hand,

reappears in *All the Names*: the cemetery in which Sr. José gets lost while searching for his anonymous beloved who has taken her own life reproduces in detail the one that the King in "Refluxo" orders to be built.

These individual examples of auto-intertextuality alert us to the internal cohesion of Saramago's work—at least at the level of the imaginary, to say nothing of the linguistic or stylistic formulation per se—and thus of the importance of the first works produced during his so-called "formative period." In light of these examples, it is possible to discern a means to understand the path followed by Saramago in his writing before and after 1980, the year in which *Levantado do Chão* was published. An important aspect of his narrative from 1980 on has to do with fictional situations that recreate, amplify, and develop preexisting constructs, as if his work consisted of fragments in constant internal evolution. The writer himself appears to refer to this dynamic in an indirect way during the 1980s in a reedition of his poetry collection *Os Poemas Possíveis*, when he comments in the prologue that the contemporary reader will encounter in them "connections, themes and obsessions" which reemerge in his later work.[5]

Correspondingly, the same can be said in relation to the creation of Saramago's characters. At the same time, in *Levantado do Chão*, this panorama—perhaps more ideal than real, given the intrinsic complexity of the writer's use of fictional discourse, employed in different ways in each of his novels—this panorama of successive auto-intertextualities, carefully and conscientiously reworked, is interrupted. In fact, *Levantado do Chão* can be viewed as a book of rupture, of self-rupture, if you will.

On the one hand, everything functions as if the author's concern in conceiving various generations of Mau-Tempos, the heroes of the story, owed more to a dialogue with the Portuguese Neo-Realist tradition of novel writing than to the assemblage of important characters generated in the first part of his work and reclaimed in Saramago's more recent novels, particularly in the cases discussed above. On the other hand, one cannot forget that *Levantado do Chão* emerged out of Saramago's direct contact with rural workers during his 1975 sojourn in Alentejo, as the writer has had occasion to confirm more than once.[6] This quality of "empiricism," so to speak, in the narrative's genesis differentiates this novel from the others. I will return to this point later in the essay.

Thus, in spite of the importance of the Mau-Tempos within the sum total of Saramago's work, these characters seem to remain, at the level of narrative

plotting, relatively isolated from the rest. This fact, debatable as it may be, corroborates the precarious assertion that this book seems to establish its most significant dialogue not with recent novelistic production but rather with key novels of Portuguese Neo-Realism, such as Alves Redol's *Barranco de Cegos* (1961), to name just one example, in spite of many notable differences between the two works.

I will pursue a parenthetical thought in order to clarify this problematic assertion. The relationship between *Levantado do Chão* and Portuguese Neo-Realism can be, *en passant*, compared to that of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* in the context of Brazilian literature. Both books are terminal apexes of vigorous literary currents that have predated them. The nineteenth-century regionalist fiction of Brazil, taken up and elaborated by the so-called "Northeastern cycle" of novels by Jorge Amado, Lins de Rego, and Graciliano Ramos, arrives at its (glorious) end and concomitant surpassing in Guimarães Rosa's work. So too the Neo-Realist currents that had predominated in the prose of Portuguese fiction for decades, with profound roots in Portuguese realism and naturalism, must recognize, in Saramago's *Levantado do Chão*, their ultimate and fundamental crystallization, as well as their subsequent literary overcoming.

Obviously, there are great differences at the level of writing between *Levantado do Chão* and *Barranco de Cegos*—that is, between the work in which Saramago breaks with his own narrative tradition and what is perhaps the most significant, if not paradigmatic, Portuguese Neo-Realist novel. As opposed to the still conventional literary discourse employed by Redol (with the exception of the novel's third part, "O Livro das Horas Absurdas"), José Saramago for the first time in his fiction seems to yearn to give his characters speech. In summary, the discourse—served by a much greater lexicalization, following the use of orality (or of "aurality," as the writer terms this very important seasoning in the chemistry of his texts)—is injected as it were into the characters, generating the definitive appearance of a distinct narrative voice, underscored by an original form of diacritical marking that from this novel forward will characterize the rhythm of Saramago's prose. Clearly, unlike H, who writes his diary/manual/deposition, the Mau Tempos speak through the narrator.

As in *O Ano de 1993*, the theme of authoritarianism and its overthrow flourishes with undeniable originality in *Levantado do Chão*. Thus, as we have already observed, if in that fragmentary text there are no characters in the

usual sense of the word, and if the few human figures that appear in it are distinguished by the anonymous "functionality" of "agents of historical transformation," in this novel, although the characters are defined by their historical placement since narration is marked by precise temporal delineation, they come imbued with personality of their own. In the story, which condenses the peasant saga of the Mau-Tempos—a clan that from a markedly sociological point of view could be considered as a multi-faceted, collective "macro-character"—Saramago scrutinizes the generational and temperamental differences between the characters. In addition to obvious distinctions—e.g., parents who differ from their children, wives from granddaughters, employers from employees, the young from the old—every opportunity of establishing an individualizing economy is explored by the writer in an effort to capture through literature the human plurality masked by the classist, homogenizing notion of the rural worker.

Perhaps the most complex character in the novel, who boldly illustrates the above point, is Domingos Mau-Tempo, "a sad, disgraced man" (59) as the narrator defines him, a peasant shoemaker driven to suicide by the double circumstance of his social condition and volatile temperament, and whom the narrative resuscitates sixty years later in order to make him participate in a final workers' march toward political affirmation as a defined social class during the revolutionary period. The narrator's game of unveiling these characters' internal dimension is described in the following way by Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva, with specific reference to Domingos Mau--Tempo:

> Following one of his unwise decisions, after he runs away to Ladeira with his entire family, the narrator analyzes his attitude as someone who sees inside the character, anxious for a freedom he did not possess. Because of this very dynamic, acting in a way that sets him apart from the others, the narrator gives him speech so that he may analyze himself. (233-34)

Silva continues with a revealing quotation from the novel:

> but Domingos Mau-Tempo could stand neither speech nor silence, and dragging himself too late to Ladeira, in the extreme west of the county, like a bird that throws itself against iron bars, what prison is this, my soul with thirty demons. (*Levantado do Chão* 29)

As opposed to H or M, and in perfect opposition to the characters in *Objecto Quase*, these peasants, who move toward redemption, toward a positive socio-historical transformation, and whose avatars are accompanied by a narrator profoundly identified with them in solidarity, reveal to the reader, in the spaces in which speech has been given to them through the use of free indirect discourse, a consistent capacity for fantasy mixed with an objective and often critical apprehension of the surrounding reality.

In this sense, the place of the Mau-Tempos in Saramago's fiction is similar to that of the protagonists of *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (principally H). Thus, assuming just for a moment that the clan of rural workers in *Levantado do Chão* constitutes a type of collective character, we encounter here the two arch-characters of the writer's later work.

After the experience of writing *Levantado do Chão*, Saramago was in a position to profit completely from the creation of his fictional characters. Within the magnificent textual mass of *Baltasar and Blimunda*, the clairvoyant Blimunda and the soldier Baltasar Sete-Sóis can be viewed as extensions of the characters in *Levantado do Chão*, yet even more fictionalized, if possible, and with the following proviso: between the lived experience at the basis of *Levantado do Chão*, owing to which narrative invention blends with what the writer presumably heard with his own ears, and the conception of fictional characters in *Baltasar and Blimunda*, there is a *plongée* in the literalizing imaginary. If the Mau-Tempos emerged from or were inspired by real sources, if at the origin of the oralization-auralization of *Levantado do Chão* there is a confrontation between the author-narrator and verifiable reality (in which, to draw a parallel, Saramago assumes an authorial stance privileged, for instance, by the "regionalist literature" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), in *Baltasar and Blimunda* the author relies on literary-historical information, as can be deduced from the relationship between the character of Blimunda and the data pertaining to the history of Portugal in the Baroque period.

As I have outlined in a previous essay, the conception of Blimunda draws on historical information, in the form of a travel account of Baroque Portugal by a Frenchman with the suggestive name of Chevalier Charles Frédéric de Merveilleux. The text was published in Amsterdam in 1732 and translated into Portuguese (after the publication of Saramago's novel) by Castelo Branco Neves in *O Portugal de D. Jõao V Visto por Três Forasteiros* (1983). Merveilleux refers to the wife of a Gascon resident in Portugal, a certain Madame

Pedegache, who "possessed the ability to see into the interior of the human body since her youth," adding that "she only enjoyed this marvelous gift when fasting" (160-62). It is not important to know for certain if this eighteenth-century medium was the exact source of Blimunda's character, or if Saramago had encountered related information in documents at the Torre do Tombo or other historical archives. What is important in any case, however, is to emphasize the distinct authorial attitude that informs the conception and development of the plot, and, particularly, of some of the novel's characters—an attitude absent from both *Levantado do Chão* and *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*, to say nothing of Saramago's *crónicas* and poems. In *Baltasar and Blimunda*, there exists a new authorial method and a new writerly horizon, clearly related to the articulation of history and fiction and the novel's imbrication within a certain lineage of contemporary narrative. In this sense, it would be particularly profitable to analyze the convergence of Saramago's new authorial attitude with a large number of twentieth-century Spanish-American novels, particularly those of Alejo Carpentier.

If we add to the above the "shadow" cast over the novel by the stylistics of the Portuguese literary Baroque—especially the model of Padre António Vieira's prose—we can confirm that in *Baltasar and Blimunda* José Saramago brings to full fruition a precise and well-founded literary trajectory.

From Maria Leonor to Blimunda, Saramago's unique trajectory demonstrates the obvious importance of binding the conception of the fictional character to the production of fully realized, and therefore literarized, novelistic language. The fact that the reiteration of this link (an interesting topic in and of itself) may be demonstrated with regard to the most important body of prose writing in Portuguese in the second half of the twentieth century calls our attention to yet another intrinsic asset of Saramago's work, which in its extraordinary quality allows and solicits the reader to establish multiple vectors of reading. I have attempted to explore one of these vectors throughout my essay; if the exploratory effort has invited and incited others to share in this endeavor, then my intention has been fully realized.

Notes

[1] [Translator's note] I have retained the term "crónica" in its original Portuguese throughout the text because I believe there to be no equivalent genre in the Anglophone tradition.

[2] In fact, it would be interesting to establish a correspondence between *Manual* and the French *nouveau roman*. Let us only recall the supplanting of the subjectively imagined character by the character objectively considered, whose status has been much discussed. This surpassing was extolled by Alain Robbe-Grillet in some of his most important and programmatic books vigorously debated at the time of Manual's publication. The essay "Pour un nouveau roman," published in 1963, for example, was at the time virtually required reading. But a study of the relationship between Saramago's novel and modern French literature would warrant development beyond the scope of the present essay.

[3] See, in this regard, Giorgio Agamben's *Stanze.*

[4] I refer the interested reader to my study *José Saramago: O Período Formativo*, in which I develop the points elaborated here, principally in chapter 3, "Da Poesia à Prosa: Saramago Cronista—*Deste Mundo e do Outro* e *A Bagagem do Viajante*" (85-116), and in chapters 6 and 7, "Produção Textual e Experimentação em O Ano de 1993 e 'O Ouvido'" and "A Reconquista da Prosa: *Manual de Pintura* e *Objecto Quase*" (211-349).

[5] "There was a poetic constant in the work... that legitimated the resuscitation of this book, because in it one can begin to define connections, themes, and obsessions that have become the structurally invariable backbone of a metamorphosing body of writing" ("Nota da 2a Edição," *Os Poemas Possíveis* 13).

[6] Saramago made this assertion during an interview I conducted with him at the Mexican Institute in Madrid in February 1998, later published in São Paulo ("José Saramago: o Despertar da Palavra"). In this interview, Saramago speaks explicitly of *Levantado do Chão*'s genesis, concomitant with the genesis of a particular form of narrating that from then on takes root in his writing: "I think that this happened because without knowing it, in the act of writing, I suddenly found myself in their place [the rural workers from the Alentejo who inspired the conception of Mau-Tempo], only now I narrate to them what they had narrated to me" (23).

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