

## Journey to the Iberian God: Antonio Machado Revisited by Saramago\*

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In 1998, when José Saramago became the first author of the Portuguese-speaking world to receive the long awaited Nobel Prize for Literature, the outburst of joy in his home country could not conceal a touch of bitterness. National pride was injured by the Spanish media talking about “nuestro Nobel” and by the Spanish public claiming the Portuguese writer for their own. This happened from the very first moment of the international press conference in Madrid, which took advantage of Saramago’s stopover as he returned home to Lanzarote from the Frankfurt book fair. Only a few days later, an aircraft of the Portuguese state with President Jorge Sampaio himself on board “reclaimed” the author from the Spanish island, transporting him back to Lisbon and conferring on him the highest national decoration, the *Grande Colar da Ordem de Santiago*, normally reserved for foreign heads of state.

This event reflects the many efforts to minimize the writer’s alienation from Portuguese society.<sup>1</sup> According to his essay “O (meu) Iberismo” (1988), an early interest in Spanish culture, especially literature and painting, made him adopt a different view of the Peninsula and his home country. This became a geographic separation in 1993 when Saramago decided to move to Lanzarote after suffering the hostility of the Church and the Catholic public who condemned *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), and after the “censorship” exercised by the Portuguese government when it excluded his novel from its list of candidates for the European Book Award.

Besides being a stubborn Communist and atheist, Saramago maintains an Iberian vision that injures patriotic feelings and the traditional discourse of

Portuguese identity as set against Spain, deeply rooted even among intellectuals. Large parts of the Portuguese public consider Saramago something of a seduced renegade, alluding to his marriage with the much younger Sevillian journalist Pilar del Río in 1988. The author himself denies being monopolized by Spanish public life, which indeed has naturalized him as “uno de los nuestros,” and praises instead the huge generosity of Spain while stressing his indelible Portuguese nature.<sup>2</sup>

Saramago's acquaintance with Spanish culture started much earlier than this recent series of events. It started even before his overt claiming of an Iberian identity in the novel *The Stone Raft*, published in 1986, the same year that Portugal and Spain together joined the European Community. The author reclaims a common peninsular identity that has been buried by the anti-Hispanic definition of Portugal since the 17th century, a split that enabled both Portugal and Spain to be turned into mere playthings in the power politics of France and Great Britain. Saramago's reclamation stems from the *Iberismo* tradition cultivated by intellectuals and educated upper-class circles of the 19th century (Molina), which the author transforms into a new cultural, social and political concept of “trans-ibericidade” (Saramago “O [meu] iberismo”): the peninsula must regain its position as the European center of mediation with Africa and Latin America (Saramago “Descobrir”). But this wishful thinking remains unspecified, blurred into a general solidarity of the South, which runs counter to the existing economic force of the North.

When speaking of reclamation, Hispanists immediately think of Juan Goytisolo's *Reivindicación del Conde Don Julián* (1970). In this famous novel, pure Spanish identity is betrayed by recovering the Arabic nature of Spain. Without any allusion to Goytisolo, Saramago commits a similar betrayal by mingling Portuguese and Spanish identity.<sup>3</sup> He looks upon the Peninsula as one cultural space with a common history and a common future, turning it from its peripheral status into a new center of a less centralized Europe (Saramago “Europa”). But the comparison with Goytisolo is faulty. The huge difference between reclaiming Arabic and Iberian nature is obvious: in the first case there is a radical transgression in terms of civilization that is absent in *The Stone Raft*. The comparison nevertheless helps to understand the different condition of Portugal: whereas Spanish identity is defined against “los moros,” Portuguese identity is defined first against “los españoles” and only secondly by the context of the *Reconquista*. This clear opposition

dissolves from the moment we recognize "Spanish" identity as Castillian identity, admitting thereby other peninsular identities such as the Catalans who define themselves against "los castellanos." This explains, on the other hand, the minor scale, restricted to a few intellectuals, on which the Arabic legacy is reclaimed in Portugal. Certainly Saramago's *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* is aware of this lack, and compensates for it by introducing a double focalization from within the Moorish Lisbon and from outside the city walls, thus questioning the national and religious identities of both sides, the besieged inhabitants and the "multinational force" under the command of Afonso Henriques. But this partial, mingling perspective never achieves the vehemence of the Goytisolian *reivindicación* of Arabic nature (Grossegess "Rückforderung").

Saramago's interest centers on the common Iberian heritage. His overall view of the Peninsula, which draws comparisons and looks for common ground, is still an unusual attitude in Portugal, bearing in mind the scarcity of Spanish history, culture and literature in traditional education. Knowledge about Spain is limited to a few negative commonplaces that match the anti-Hispanic discourse of national identity present since the battle of Aljubarrota in 1385, still idealized as the affirmation of the country's eternal independence from Spain. This situation is counterbalanced by the general ignorance of Portuguese affairs in Spain, except among intellectuals and a restricted public in Galicia.

Saramago's vision of a common Peninsular destiny does not emerge at once with *The Stone Raft*, but grows steadily in the course of his whole literary evolution, and is influenced by the author's autodidactic incursions into Spanish culture and history, which have been understandably overlooked by Portuguese scholars.<sup>4</sup> Ever since Saramago's first volume of poetry, *Os poemas possíveis* (*Possible Poems*, 1966), Antonio Machado has been revealed as a main reference for the Portuguese author's own poetics. The epigraph of the book, borrowed from Machado's "Proverbios y cantares" of 1919 and dedicated to José Ortega y Gasset, will be repeated throughout Saramago's whole work and can be understood as his general motto: "Demos tiempo al tiempo: / para que el vaso rebose / hay que llenarlo primero" (in Alan S. Trueblood's English translation, "Don't try to rush things: / for the cup to run over, / it must first be filled" [189]).

This plea for slowness, for the space of time to be filled entirely instead of existing in a state of rapid and often amnesiac advance from present to future,

finds continuation and larger exposition in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*, the first edition of which in 1977 bears the significant subtitle “ensaio de romance” with the two meanings: “an attempt at a novel” and a “novel essay.” Various experiments in painting and autobiographical writing define the gradual progress of a professional portrait painter, named H, towards political consciousness. Viewing the history of the Peninsula, he perceives the eternal interweaving of authoritarian regimes and oppressive structures, from the Inquisition active in Portugal and Spain to the simultaneous dictatorships of Salazar and General Franco.<sup>5</sup> When he recognizes himself as a passive henchman of the dictatorial status quo, he begins to prepare his “birth” into a new life of political participation and sexuality, in spite of his age of nearly fifty—a basic plot structure that characterizes the whole (male) fiction of Saramago since *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*. A woman always appears who “gives birth” to new life and new history, somehow ripening the still timid revolt of the man in the midst of a midlife crisis (Grossegese, *Saramago lesen* 71, 74-77).

Precisely in the course of his comparative consideration of Spain, mingling the past with the present and the collective with his own individual situation, H recognizes himself as “the portrait-painter of the protégés and protectors of Salazar and Marcelo and their oppressive secret police” (185). In the same moment, the Machadoian sentence “demos tiempo al tiempo” shows up, illustrated by the example of a Spanish painter: Francisco Goya, serving the royal court with his portrait art, mirrors—across almost two centuries and the Spanish-Portuguese border—the condition of H as a passive henchman awakened to political consciousness. H’s later stage corresponds to the Goya of the *Caprichos*.

Time only needs time. The popular rising in Madrid in 1808 only found Goya prepared in 1814. It is true that history goes faster than the men who paint and record it. (186)

This lack of synchronization between the speed of events that become history and the slow human consciousness of historical meaning or sense is the heart of the matter as it appears reflected in Machado’s sentence. *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* can be considered Saramago’s basic text with autobiographic “flashes” (as the author recognizes in the interview included in Baptista-Bastos 29). This first-person narrative is rooted among social and

political structures that shape the individual awareness of history as the basis for a necessary collective project. The “ensaio do romance” reveals that Saramago’s *écriture* is moved by his own mortality and the search for the birth of self-consciousness, inspired not only by the reading of Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Mémoires d’Hadrien* (1951), but also by the knowledge of Socratic maieutics.<sup>6</sup> The written book is only the product of “an identified portion of humankind” (Saramago, [No title] 174) that should take part in the making of a (more) human history, understood as a space where past and future coexist. We presume that Saramago in 1965/66 had already read the philosophical lessons of Machado’s Juan de Mairena. The Portuguese writer adopts wholeheartedly Machado’s/Mairena’s theory of the apocryphal as a collective project to be promoted by literature:

I advise you to make a foray into your living past, which constantly transforms itself, and which you should, in full conscience, correct, amplify, purge, and structure anew until it becomes your own true creation. I call this past apocryphal to distinguish it from the other kind, the irreparable past that is the one investigated by history... (Machado, *Obra* 2018)

A critical reader may object that Machado is too remote in time and space to gain importance for the poetics of a Portuguese writer in 1966 and 1975. Such a reader may further argue that the Latin American novel or the concepts of post-history and postmodernism are more relevant lessons for a writing that revivifies the past as a space of deliberate anachronism.<sup>7</sup> This opinion was voiced by the general drift of reviews concerning *Baltasar and Blimunda* and *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, especially abroad. The argument is convincing when one thinks of the literature industry as subject to fashions, which the well-informed Saramago could not have ignored. But we must also admit that obedience to fashions precisely contradicts a philosophy based on the Machadian concept of the past as “blended with the present and always affected by the future” (Machado, *Obra* 2018). I would argue that Saramago, aware of literary fashions, wanted to revitalize Antonio Machado as a poet and as a philosopher in a manner different than, yet quite complementary to, his revitalization of Fernando Pessoa via the hypothetical survival of the heteronym Ricardo Reis, exposed to the Lisbon reality of 1936.

In both cases, the making of history as a collective project depends on an individual change of mind, prefigured by Antonio Machado and an undead,



more subversive Fernando Pessoa. There is no doubt that the Machadian philosophy is regarded from a Marxist angle, extensively quoted in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (156-57). Immediately after drawing the aforementioned analogy between Goya and the painter H, the narrator asks himself about his possible part in the making of history: "if I were to have some role to play tomorrow, what events of today would be waiting for me?," passing this question on to both Goya and Marx (186). The idea of a coming history awaiting humankind in its process of political emancipation, or, in Marxist terms, of the revolutionary struggle, implies a notion of human history as a paradoxical, predetermined possibility of overcoming capitalism: like a religion of salvation, but without any God from above.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Saramago fuses Machado's notion with the historical materialism that employs theology in a sort of *materialist Messianism*.<sup>9</sup> Within this construct, the Portuguese writer also comes to reinterpret the native tradition of Sebastianism, especially in *Levantado do Chão* (Grossegasse "Messianismo"), approximating a Marxist version of post-history.<sup>10</sup> The difference is that in Saramago individual conscience—although transgressing the framework of bourgeois formation—still maintains an important role: "when I say that there is no Socialism in the Socialists, I am turning everything inside out, because I believe that Socialism is a state of mind" (Saramago, in Baptista-Bastos 45).

Obviously, critics could not ignore Saramago's firm Communist convictions, which never were concealed by the author. But his opinion of Antonio Machado, whom he considered "perhaps the greatest poet of this century"—instead of Pessoa, as the Portuguese public may have expected—was understandably ignored. This declaration, given in an interview (Saramago, Interview 26), has neither provoked protest among patriotic intellectuals (even though it was made at the high point of the "Pessoa-fever" in the mid- to late eighties), nor has it motivated critics to look for reasons in *The Stone Raft*, published at the time of the interview. The similarities with the previous *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* have not yet been noticed—perhaps due to the apparently categorical difference between a novel of historical revision and an uchronic fiction.<sup>11</sup> To me, it seems quite obvious that both novels are based particularly on Saramago's concept of human history, developed from *Os poemas possíveis* to *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*.

Naturally, Saramago's poetics have a more complex basis than Antonio Machado, as we have already seen. But it is significant that the saying

"Demos tiempo al tiempo" appears throughout all of his novels. Although the average reader will not perceive this as an unmarked instance of intertextuality, considering it as a rather straightforward commonplace, I am convinced of the textual memory active in the author's mind. There, the Machadian "proverbio" remains as an important reference next to the sentences of Benedetto Croce and Ortega y Gasset, which Saramago quotes over and over in essays and interviews: "all history is contemporary history" and "I am myself and my circumstance" [*yo soy yo y mi circunstancia*].<sup>12</sup>

The latter statement derives originally from Ortega's "History as a System" (1935), where the Spanish philosopher defines life as making (*faciendum*) and self-project. Saramago, who often speaks about the "human project" (Baptista-Bastos 41), certainly noticed that this definition fits in well with the ideas about the revitalization of the past that Antonio Machado significantly dedicated to Ortega y Gasset. Another Spanish writer and philosopher illustrates the central problem of the lack of synchronization between the events that become history and the slowness of human consciousness: Miguel de Unamuno appears in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* and *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* in quite a similar way.

In the first novel, Unamuno makes an appearance after another Spanish painter who knew how to combine art with a call to political consciousness and solidarity: Picasso, with his famous picture about the air raid on Guernica in 1936. Like the case of Goya and the popular uprising in Madrid of 1808,<sup>13</sup> the narrator points out the possible memory and even the possible prefiguration of this example across time and space, as it arrives in the mind of H under the difficult conditions of the Portuguese Estado Novo. Inspired by the Renaissance art of Vitale di Bologna, he begins to paint a new Saint Anthony without a halo or a book, thinking at the same time about the horse of Saint George. He imagines himself able to duplicate life thanks to a time in slow motion, or even to make time turn backwards, not in order to repeat everything but to make choices and sometimes to halt, as if following literally the advice of the Machadian "proverbio" to fill time. At the same time, H is searching in his "apocryphal past" for the birth of his political consciousness:

To take St George's horse as painted by Vitale da Bologna and lead it away, heading for Lisbon or coming from Bologna, through Spain and France, through France and Spain, to Paris, to the Latin Quarter, to the rue des Grands-Augustins, and to say to Picasso: "I say, old man, here's your model." At that time in Lisbon,

a child who knew nothing about Guernica and very little about Spain except for the Battle of Aljubarrota, was clutching some soggy leaflets in his hands, and unwittingly distributing the political manifesto of the Portuguese Popular Front... (128)

This unconscious collaboration of the innocent boy with Portuguese groups in favor of the Spanish Republic, followed by the traumatic experience of a severe police interrogation, could have provoked—through the feeling of injustice and curiosity—the “birth” of the self, according to Marguerite Yourcenar (*Manual* 85).

At this point, the example of Miguel de Unamuno appears, related to the theme of deficient synchrony. It is only many years later that H gets to know what the political situation of Spain under General Franco was like, and what exactly happened during the celebration of the *Día de Hispanidad* in 1936 at the University of Salamanca. It is only in the last years of his life that the ancient rector Unamuno, formerly a supporter of the Franco party, became aware of his error. On that 12th of October 1936, he delivered a brilliant speech to express in public his repudiation of the barbarous new regime, in answer to the war-crippled General Millán Astray whose ceremonial address had culminated in the abominable shout “¡Viva la muerte!” [Long live death!], to be repeated over and over in Franco’s times. Remembering Unamuno’s late but brave act, the painter H is aware of his own belated awakening to political consciousness, ashamed of his (too) long passive tolerance for a dictatorship engaged in colonial warfare:

Me, Portuguese, painter, alive in the year 1973, in this Summer which is almost at an end, in this encroaching Autumn. Me, alive, and dying in Africa, where there are Portuguese men whom I sent to their deaths or consented should die, men so much younger than me, so much simpler, and with so much more to offer than me, a mere painter. (128)<sup>14</sup>

In the second novel, the heteronym Ricardo Reis, who miraculously survives his creator Pessoa for the period of nine months, regrets that he must finally die without hearing the brave speech the ancient Unamuno made a few months before his death. He only knows the earlier Unamuno, who hailed the Franco regime as the salvation of Western Christianity. But the already dead Pessoa yields to the insistence of Reis and reveals to him the



still unmade statement of rebellion (330-31). Unamuno's late change of mind mirrors the dilemma of Ricardo Reis, who represents in Pessoa's universe the most detached among the three main heteronyms, the one who views the "spectacle of the world" from a superior position of indifferent calmness. In Saramago's fiction, however, Ricardo Reis is a man going through a midlife crisis who alienates himself more and more from his perfect poetry and passivity, and who experiences instead a sexual plenitude and a desire to participate in the making of another course of history, represented by the historical revolt of Portuguese sailors against Salazar's dictatorship. Nevertheless, Reis remains on the threshold: he only observes the uprising with tears of sympathy but without making any attempt to actively intervene, as he stands at the Alto de Santa Catarina, high above the Tagus river where the sailors have failed to join their two warships to the forces of the Spanish Republic. With the hypothetical scream of the Adamastor statue at Alto de Santa Catarina, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* ends in a way similar to most of Saramago's novels, in the sense of presenting an apocryphal past through a prism of historical materialism: the paradoxical, predetermined and open ending announces a possible "rebirth" of the individual man or humanity and invites the reader to participate actively in the making of history.

The comparative view of the Peninsula, present in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* and *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* through imagined journeys of pictures, voices and personalities in space and time, becomes the main narrative plot of an Iberian voyage in *The Stone Raft*. In conformity with the cultural identities of Spain and Portugal, it is at the same time an ocean voyage and an overland journey, with intertextual references to the emblematic fictions of both countries, *Os Lusíadas* by Camões and *La vida de Don Quijote y Sancho Panza* by Cervantes.

Antonio Machado also applied his theory of an "apocryphal past" to the destiny of Spain. In the poetry of *Campos de Castilla* (1907-17), there appears "a utopian meaning that the apocryphal acquires, as an attempt at inverting or critically reconstructing history" (Abellán 103). The central idea that the past is as unwritten as the future can be found in the final part of the poem "El Dios ibero" (CI; English translation by Trueblood):

¡Qué importa un día! Está el ayer alerta  
al mañana, mañana al infinito,

hombres de España, ni el pasado ha muerto,  
 ni está el mañana—ni el ayer—escrito.  
 ¿Quién há visto la faz al Dios hispano?  
 Mi corazón aguarda  
 al hombre ibero de la recia mano,  
 que tallará en el roble castellano  
 el Dios adusto de la tierra parda.

[What does one day matter! Yesterday stands poised  
 to face tomorrow, tomorrow faces the infinite:  
 men of Spain, the past has never died  
 nor is tomorrow—nor yesterday—yet written.  
 Who has looked on the face of the Spanish God?  
 My heart awaits  
 The men of Iberia with the mighty hand  
 who shall carve from Castilian oak  
 the stern God of the drab-brown land.]

These verses, which certainly impressed Saramago, may guide our way from *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* to *The Stone Raft*, where the future sense of history is immediately related to the actual possibilities of the Iberian Peninsula in 1986. The latter novel could be read as a complementary, revivifying “year of the death of Antonio Machado.” Contrary to Lisbon’s past in 1936, *The Stone Raft* is about a hypothetical near future, which nevertheless has anachronic elements. Already the motto “Every future is fabulous” (Alejo Carpentier) indicates that this narrative is looking for the utopian possibilities of the “other side of history.” The “synchronicity of intentional coincidences” and the “meaningful and concentric overlapping and interpenetration of lives and events at all levels” (Daniel 540) could be seen as those features of *The Stone Raft* that reflect the transfer of the Machadian plea to fill time onto the plot by synchronizing events and consciousness.

The death of Antonio Machado is mentioned already in the second chapter, at the moment when the miraculous gap between the Peninsula and the European continent has grown to an irreversible extent, causing the depopulation of the French border region and leaving only the dead behind. At the same time, the narrative discourse, while commenting on its own

revivifying capacities, establishes a significant link with Saramago's fiction of Pessoa:

The dead souls, having died, stayed behind, with that persistent indifference that distinguishes them from the rest of humanity, if anyone ever said otherwise, or suggested, for example, that Fernando Pessoa visited Ricardo Reis, the one being dead and the other alive, it was his foolish imagination and nothing else. But one of these dead men, in Collioure, stirred ever so slightly, as if hesitating, shall I go or not, but never into France, he alone knew where, and perhaps one day we shall know too. (22)

It is remarkable that the reflection on the indifference of the dead as opposed to the activity of the living causes a digression that pertinently questions the initial opposition: the dead begin to speak and to move. While the names Fernando Pessoa and Ricardo Reis indicate clearly the characteristic Mennipean dialogue situated on the threshold between life and death of *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, Machado remains unnamed here. He is only recognized by the reader who knows that Collioure is the border village where Machado died, on 22 February 1939, after an exhausting journey across the Pyrenees while fleeing from the troops of the Franco regime. The role of intertextuality is vital for the comprehension of the meaning and of the implied author's intentions, not only in the case of *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* but also in that of *The Stone Raft*, which, at the first glance, seems much less complex. It is the latter, however, that requires a Portuguese reader interested in Spanish literature and culture.

In the fifth chapter of *The Stone Raft*, the reference to Machado continues within the narrative of the Peninsula afloat in the ocean and the collective tour of five people who have come together from Portugal, Andalusia and Galicia. The reference appears when the two Portuguese, José Anaiço and Joaquim Sassa, are on their way to visit the Andalusian place called Venta Micena near Orce where the bones of the oldest European, nicknamed "the Orce Man," were found. They want to meet Pedro Orce, an old pharmacist, who feels the earth shake beneath his feet. Immediately before this encounter, the Portuguese travelers read the news that the bones of Antonio Machado have been stolen and brought back to Spain, and reflect on it: what would happen to the bones? José Anaiço has the following opinion:

If, despite the ups and downs of life and the reversals of fortune, everything has its place and every place claims what belongs to it, what remains of Antonio Machado today must be buried somewhere in the fields of Soria, beneath a holm oak, the Castilian word is *encina*, without any cross or tombstone, nothing but a tiny mound of earth.... (61)

The mention of the fields of Soria and the Spanish word "encina" lead back to the poetry of *Campos de Castilla*: the praise of the oak in "Las encinas" (CIII) that brings together the soil of all Spanish regions ("El campo mismo se hizo árbol en tí, parda encina [The field itself became tree in you, drab-brown oak]") reinforces the telluric divinization in the poem "El Dios ibero," which refers to the Iberian oak in the verses that precede the abovementioned final part: "No dio la encina ibera / para el fuego de Dios la buena rama, que fue en la santa hoguera / de amor una con Dios en pura llama? [Did not the Iberian oak / furnish sound branches for the blaze of God, / limbs that were one with God in purest flame / on the sacred bonfire of love?]." José Anaiço's idea of Machado's re-burial under an oak tree somewhere in the "fields of Soria," also recalls Machado's poem in memory of Francisco Giner de los Ríos (CXXXIX), written in 1915, only three days after the death of this charismatic "master" of the Generación del 98. It ends with the following verses (English translation by Trueblood):

Su corazón repose  
bajo una encina casta,  
en tierra de tomillos, donde juegan  
mariposas doradas...  
Allí el maestro un día  
soñaba un nuevo florecer de España.

[Let his heart be at rest there  
in an oak's pure shade,  
where the wild thyme draws  
the flitting yellow butterflies ...  
Up there the master dreamed one day  
that Spain would flower again.]

Machado's similar, hypothetical re-burial in *The Stone Raft* reclaims the spiritual heritage of the Generación del 98 for the "new blossoming" of the whole Iberia.<sup>15</sup> The description of the grave without any cross or stone is important, because it prefigures the identical funeral of Pedro Orce at the end of the novel. Instead of a cross, Joana Carda plants her elm branch over the skull of the defunct Pedro, who is buried precisely in the place from which the bones of the Orce man once were excavated (229). Replacing the cross, Joana's stick, which at the beginning may have miraculously caused the breaking away of the Peninsula when she casually used it to scratch a line in the dirt, does not restrict itself to symbolizing the suffering of humanity:

The sacrificial cross, the tree of life, the Biblical tree of Jesse, a symbol of fertility and renewal, it is also a stick that draws a line in the sand, the pointed stylus that invents the letter and registers the word. (Rebello 348)

Both at the level of the narrated journey and at that of the poetic discourse, Pedro Orce has a "fertile death" that revivifies Antonio Machado as an *author* of an Iberian religion of salvation lacking a God from above. His concept of Christian Communism (Abellán 89) certainly had some influence on Saramago. In the course of the journey, Pedro Orce represents among the members of the touring group "el hombre ibero," the son of the Iberian God, of the "stern God of the drab-brown land" who comes out of the Iberian soil. It is Pedro, accompanied only by the guide dog Constante (the name refers back to the dog in *Levantado do Chão*), who has the night vision of being a "Messiah of Iberia." He imagines himself able to move a petrified boat (which really exists upon the rocky Galician coast) and with this boat the whole Peninsula: "he absurdly began to imagine that this petrified ship was indeed sailing and towing the peninsula..." (168).<sup>16</sup>

Such an interpretation is even more convincing when we think about the later novel *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), which elaborates an alternative, "apocryphal" biography of Jesus already sketched out in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*. It is a Jesus who becomes aware (albeit too late) of being manipulated by God his Father, "solemnly enthroned in the heavens" (*Manual* 82), and who struggles in vain to prevent the subsequent centuries of Christian theocracy full of martyrdom and bloodshed from happening (122). But there persists the "other side of the history" of Jesus as the son of a God who comes from within the earth as a reincarnation or



return of the oldest man, Adam. His skull beneath the Cross indicates, according to the Adam legend, the fertile death of Jesus as well.<sup>17</sup> Saramago's interpretation in the tradition of Orphic theology, already insinuated by the detailed description of Albrecht Dürer's *Groë Passion* in the first chapter of *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, blends perfectly with Marxist doctrine in a way that recalls Ernst Bloch's *Prinzip Hoffnung* and *Atheismus im Christentum*—probably familiar to the Communist atheist writer (Grossegesse “Evangelho”). The peculiar nature of Pedro Orce indicates, from this point of view, a kind of Iberian Jesus who denies his heavenly Father, but follows the Iberian God of the soil.

In order to justify this interpretation, we return to chapter six of *The Stone Raft*. It begins with a description of Venta Micena as a place, arid like the desert, where the devil had his first dwelling and might have led Jesus into temptation. At the same time, the infernal nature of this Andalusian region is linked to the memory of Federico García Lorca<sup>18</sup> as a martyr of the Spanish soil that also had drunk plenty of Moorish and Christian blood. But now this soil remains still unprepared for the revitalization of the past—“why speak of those who died so many years ago, if it is the land that is dead, buried within itself” (66)—prefiguring the (Messianic) expectation of a “new Iberian history” at the end of the novel through the symbol of the elm branch: “The elm branch is green. Perhaps it will flower again next year” (292).

The two Portuguese travelers meet Pedro Orce in a way that recalls Jesus gathering his apostles when sitting together under an olive tree.<sup>19</sup> They decide to go by car to the Andalusian coast, a trip described as the possible beginning of a larger expedition to another world, in order to verify with their own eyes that the Peninsula is drifting away from the Rock of Gibraltar: “Let’s go and see the rock as it passes” (70).<sup>20</sup> But first Pedro Orce shows the arid soil of Venta Micena to José Anaíço and Joaquim Sassa, a place that they have already visited. There, as we may now say, the skull of the Iberian Adam was found, and there—what a remarkable coincidence—Pedro Orce was born and will be buried, thus insinuating the concept of a fertile death linked to the destiny of the Peninsula. Venta Micena, near Orce, is a kind of Iberian Golgota or Calvary, which literally means (place of) the skull, mirrored subsequently by the complementary place of Villalar, significantly located “not far from Toro, Tordesilhas, and Simancas, all of them touching closely on Portuguese history in terms of a battle, a treaty, archives” (275-76). But

Villalar means nothing to the Portuguese members of the group. It is precisely Pedro Orce who explains the battle of Villalar: in 1521, the Spanish communities revolted in vain against the Emperor Carlos V, a foreign sovereign who also was supported by the Portuguese D.Manuel. The explanation triggers reflections by the group about alternative history, imagining the loser as the winner and extending this idea to the Portuguese defeat *par excellence*, Alcácer-Kebir. The battle of Villalar seems to prefigure the basic idea of *The Stone Raft*: a desired revolt of the people against a Peninsula ruled by foreign economic powers with the consent of the Portuguese and Spanish governments. Saramago's fiction of the stone raft refuses the actual situation, reinventing Villalar as Golgota or Calvary of the Iberian man: the dog Constante, Orce's inseparable companion, dreams that he is excavating the bones. Two days later, boys playing around in the fields find a heap of skulls (246).

The composition of analogies and intertextual links within *The Stone Raft* and within Saramago's work and poetics prove the apocryphal vision of the Peninsula to be a vision of the other side of history still awaiting its future fulfilment. Pedro's burial with the elm branch over his skull denies the Crucifixion by using the opposing concept of the Great Adam, the Makantropos who is born from the earth and returns to it, thus renovating himself. Saramago emphasizes the female component, imagining a collective pregnancy of all the women of Portugal and Spain, perhaps fertilized by the "great stone falling southward," the Peninsula transformed into an island (283). The ancient Pedro Orce, gifted with an unexpected sexual capacity, presumably makes Joana Carda and Maria Guavaira pregnant, thus confirming his privileged Adamic role. The promise that the elm branch over Pedro's skull will blossom next year signifies a final call to the reader to assume his or her role as an Iberian man or woman, on a Journey to the Iberian God.

This allegorical fiction can not be imagined without the revisitation of Antonio Machado and the resurrection of his poetry and philosophy within the narrative plot of an apocryphal "trans-ibericidade" (Saramago "O [meu] iberismo"). Arriving at this provisional conclusion of our short journey through Saramago's fiction and poetics, let us return to the *Poemas possíveis* of 1966, where the final verses of the poem "Criação" already suggest the future message of his novels: "To make of the Earth a God who might deserve us, / And to present the Universe with the God it awaits."

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the collection of interviews conducted by the Spanish journalist Juan Arias, Saramago admits, however: "in a way it is possible to say that I inhabit an idea of Portugal that no longer coincides with the Portugal of today" (Arias 56).

<sup>2</sup> See García, "Recelo en Portugal," for a summary of the discussion of the "protagonismo español en el Nobel de Saramago" in the Portuguese press.

<sup>3</sup> The reader may wonder about the Portuguese reception of Goytisolo's novel. Indeed, it is curious to observe that the Portuguese translation (published in 1972 by Dom Quixote) was based on the 1971 French edition by Gallimard, to the point of including J. M. Castellet's extensive foreword directed to the French reader.

<sup>4</sup> In the late 1970s, Saramago translated (from the French edition) the well-known *Historia de España* by Fernando Díaz-Plaja (*História da Espanha*, Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> The presence of the Inquisition is illustrated in the text by a long quote from the decree by King Fernando VII reintroducing the institution (261-62). Saramago's treatment of the Inquisition as a common fault of Portugal and Spain recalls Antero de Quental's analysis in "Causes of the Decadence of the Peninsular Peoples in the Last Three Centuries" (1871), where the author already pointed out the danger that the two will become "two shadows, two ghost nations, amidst the countries that surround us!" (85).

<sup>6</sup> Saramago's later essay "Os três nascimentos" (1991) gives an important self-interpretation. See also Grossegese, "O grito de São Bartolomeu."

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of this question see Grossegese, *Saramago lesen* 34-37 and 79-91.

<sup>8</sup> In Baptista-Bastos's interview with Saramago we find a critical reflection on this subject: "The past tells me that all human projects, hopes or utopias, must not be approached (and I think I am already cured of this) in the spirit of optimistic finalism, which deep down does not differ much from religions of salvation" (Baptista-Bastos 41-42).

<sup>9</sup> We can only speculate as to whether Saramago read Walter Benjamin before 1977 or much later. In *Blindness*, the presence of Benjamin's "Angel of History," his famous interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, seems quite obvious (see Lima, "A cegueira").

<sup>10</sup> In Marxism, utopian possibilities exist which belong to "the other side of history" (Steiner 413-24).

<sup>11</sup> As defined by Ansgar Nünning (273-74), discussing Wesseling (100-05). Nünning has a more critical attitude toward the precipitous labeling of novels as postmodern.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Saramago "História e ficção" 20, and Saramago in Serra and Planells 6.

<sup>13</sup> Both Goya and Picasso reappear in Saramago's later comparative reflections on the political responsibility of the writer ([No title] 172).

<sup>14</sup> [Editor's note] Giovanni Pontiero's translation of this passage has been slightly modified for the sake of accuracy.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the plural Iberian vision of Miguel de Unamuno (García Morejón; Marcos de Dios).

<sup>16</sup> Thus continuing the central metaphor of Saramago's poetics, the moving statue or the moving stone, within the general project to dissolve petrifications (Grossegese, *Saramago lesen* 17-29; Grossegese, "O grito de São Bartolomeu"). On the boat of San Andrés de Texido, see Frier, "José Saramago's Stone Boat."

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed reading see also the mythical interpretation of the hero in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* by Vera Bastazin (56-60).

<sup>18</sup> Evoked by quoting Rafael Alberti's famous "Balada del que nunca fue a Granada," dedicated to the memory of Lorca, which ends with the final call: "Venid por montañas, por mares y campos. Entraré en Granada" (*Baladas y Canciones del Paraná*).

<sup>19</sup> David Frier suggests here "the implicit equation of the Peninsula with an alternative Christ" ("Ascent and Consent" 135).

<sup>20</sup> Saramago makes here an ironic analogy to the historic maritime expeditions to conquer the new world: "from these same southern parts men set out to discover the New World, rugged and fierce, sweating like pigs in their armor, steel helmets on their heads, they advanced sword in hand to fight the naked Indians, clad only in feathers and war paint, an idyllic image" (70).

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