

Editorial

Saramago: love and engagement

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November 16th, 2022 marks the centenary of José Saramago. The literary and civic history of this exceptional writer is fundamental to the exercise of his homage. It is a propitious moment to celebrate his long life, in addition to his 88 years physically by our side, as well as for us to think about the broad range of themes that emanate from his beautiful work. Internationally renowned, having received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1998, the Portuguese author is an unique persona, as proven by the fact that his expression goes beyond the line of literary to step into a political behavior, which is committed to life, in his own words: “We go round and round, but in reality, there are only two things: either you choose life or you walk away from it [...]” (GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 33). This commitment to life is based on communism, on Karl Marx’s ideas, which he faithfully assumes: “I am not a communist writer, what I am is a communist who is also a writer, which is different [...]”. And yet:

There is something which I would call hormonal communism. It’s as if hormones would determine what a person must be, would maintain a close relationship with facts, with life, with the world, with society. It’s like a state of mind or one’s hormones define oneself forever. I believe that’s what happens with me in relation to communism [...]. (GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 365).

Hereupon, it cannot be forgotten that Saramago’s socialism is not Marx’s scientific socialism; Saramago’s socialism, even though it has Marxist roots in essential aspects such as its humanitarian moral engagement and the building of a society which is fair to everyone, claims the tradition of freedom and individual responsibility. It combines individual freedom with an idea of society (of collectivism, we might say) not marked (or

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less marked) by the separation between explorers and explored, between oppressors and oppressed, between the richest and the poorest: "It's not utopia. Communism is a possibility [...]" (GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 368); "Marx was never so right as now [...]" (GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 368).

These affirmations, which might seem far from reality or even contradict what Saramago said in other moments, are fundamental for us to understand the essence of the thinking, of the civic and political actions, of the literary and non-literary writing of the author of **Essay on Blindness**; and, above all, they are fundamental if we compare them to the other ones, also Saramago's, which seem the opposite: "Revive Marx? No. We are in different times. Something more creative than the simple indignation, which is legit, is necessary to change things [...]" (GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 369). All things considered, it is notable that Saramago's dialectics, without ceasing to be materialist and instituting themselves in the class conflict ideas, surpasses the materialism in the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**.

José Saramago was a libertarian socialist. There is no residue of contradiction in terms in this epithet; we use it to name the full assumption, in Saramago, of the individual duties which freedom imposes (or offers) to each one of us, who shouldn't sacrifice our freedom to free ourselves of responsibilities. Being a socialist as Saramago isn't equivalent to believe that, in the end of History (which Marx never situated chronologically), there will be a perfect society, common to all men and women. José Saramago wasn't naïve nor excessively optimist in regards to human nature and the indetermination of History and to prove it we have his statements and literary writings.

Saramago's Literature, especially the novels, leaves no doubt about the breadth and depth of the author's knowledge about human beings and human societies (consciously plural). Perceive in his writing and ideas and ideals the announcement, tacit or explicit, of the end predicted by the Marxist science (the annulment of all differences between people and human groups) is a mistake and an injustice which apropos Saramago never accepted nor tolerated.

Let's consider José Saramago's Marxism a little bit more, as we understand it. In the article "José Saramago's 'magical' historical materialism", André Santos Campos writes: "the problem at hand is that of explaining

what kind of historical materialism can be found in Saramago's fiction, that is, how Saramago can preserve it in harmony with his non-naturalistic fiction [...]" (CAMPOS, 2018, 67). This question leads to another: the compatibility or incompatibility between this historical materialism and the magical elements (or "impossible", "improbable") so present in the literary works of Saramago; works the author himself defines as "realist" many times, which leaves us with another contradiction apparent or real. To answer these questions, we will also verify if the constant and unequivocal Marxist references present in Saramago's statements materialize or not (and how) in his literary work.

In other words: Saramago's novels translate a conflict between the institutionalized power and a top-down conception of the productive forces of History. These two elements, just by themselves, combined with the Marxist frame of reference in which Saramago actively puts himself as a citizen, sustain the historical materialism of novels such as **Baltasar and Blimunda** and **Essay on Blindness**. As to keep this affirmation valid, we must emphasize and understand a (apparent) contradiction (or contrast): it is a question of perceiving the reason why the energy that trigger the transformation movement from down-top consists of, first of all, in improbable elements (impossible or magical).

At first sight, the improbabilities which act so actively in the social transformation (with the "passarola" or Blimunda's gift) suggest that at last it is not legit to discuss about historical materialism strictly in Saramago's novels. However, there is a contrast, not a contradiction, between the Marxist historical materialism and the improbable elements of Saramago's fiction. It's in this contrast that Saramago's historical materialism is born, which surpasses Marx's by installing, at the very center of change in the productive forces, one or many improbable elements, typical of characters such as Blimunda, Ricardo Reis, the doctor's wife, the Algor family and Jesus.

These "improbable" components (characteristics, behaviors, actions, events) are at the same time metaphorical and symbolic, obviously, and their relevance becomes more evident if we use the terms "spiritual" and "spirituality" to try to understand them. These words raise and are many times substituted by another, "spirit", which is the immaterial principle of human beings' superior functions: the intellectual thinking or, differently,

the intellect and its processes and results (verbal language, concepts, judgements); the ethic-moral, cultural, aesthetic and sociopolitical inventiveness; the will and desire; the philosophical reasoning in general; the free “I”. “Spirit” has a synonym which is central in the human history and which Marx and Hegel use with different meanings and functions: “idea”. These words are essential for us to perceive the thesis we are defending.

For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of “the Idea”, is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought. (CAMPOS, 2018, 102).

To the idealism defenders, the spiritual originates the material; to the materialism supporters, the proposition is reverted and it is the material which originates the rest. To Saramago, the material and ideal combine themselves in a way which can be understood above all if the starting point is that characters such as Blimunda Sete-luas and Baltasar Sete-Sóis cannot be simply ended in generalist readings, romantic and idealized. In the deep and unconditional spiritual strength of these figures – unique but at the same time representatives of the idealistic energy which can be developed by other men and women –, converge all Saramago’s reinterpretation of Marx’s materialism and a stimulating perspective about the relation material-ideal:

Unlike Marx, the material world does not simply determine the ideal world, and, unlike Hegel, the ideal world does not determine the material world; rather, materialism remains valid and immune to idealist influences with reference to objective historical laws, but idealism becomes entangled in materialism with reference to the subjective specificities of the true agents of History, that is, the individuals constituting the masses. (CAMPOS, 2018, 71).

José Saramago solves or attenuates the polarization which has conducted many History’s tragedies: the radical opposition between material and ideal, and between collective and individual, which, to him, don’t constitute opposite forces, but a pair which must dialogue (and has been) intimately.

The inexplicable, in José Saramago, symbolizes the “powers”, or better, the capabilities or the possibilities of each character (and of every one of us). This magical realism in which the characters move ends a renovation massage, it is an energy that comes to us through the Saramago’s literary discourse. Let us think about **The Stone Raft**. The “negrillo” wand, the stone, the endless ball of yarn, the man and the dog who feel the earth move beneath their feet, and the author adds that, in the dog, the blue yarn in its mouth and its function as a silent guide, as well as the Iberian Peninsula dislocating through the Atlantic as if it were a raft, are the literary representation of everything which is unpredictable and new; of everything which doesn’t fit in the planned society, which limits the most elementary individuals freedoms. It wasn’t the “negrillo” wand which draws the singular line which changes Joana Carda’s life; it was Joana Carda herself which in that moment transcended:

Joana Carda finishes her explanation. This is where I came to think about my life, there must not be a quieter place in the world, but also restless, you don't need to tell me, but if you hadn't come here you wouldn't be able to understand, and one day, exactly two weeks ago today, when I was crossing the clearing from one side to the other, to go and sit in the shade of a tree beyond, I found this wand, it was on the floor, I had never seen it before, I had come here on the day before and it wasn't here, it looked like someone had carefully set it down, and there was no sign of footsteps, the footprints you can see are mine, or old, from old people who passed through here a long time ago. They are on the edge of the clearing, Joana Carda still retains the men, these are the last words, I lifted the wand from the ground, I felt it alive as if it were the whole tree from which it had been cut, or that's how I feel now when I remember, and in this moment, in a gesture that was more of a child's than of an adult's, I draw a line which separated me from Coimbra, of the man with whom I lived, definitely, a line which cut the world in two halves, you can see it from here. (SARAMAGO, 2015, p. 151).

The availability of each one of these characters to go out of themselves and go to the other is a metaphor of understanding which Saramago’s literature proposes to each one of us and to the world as a mosaic of human beings, countries, peoples, languages, cultures. The new society which Joana Carda, José Anaiço, Joaquim Sassa, Maria Guavaira and Pedro Orce build

are established in the freedom and responsibility of every one, in personas who are unique and search understanding in one another. These Joana Carda's words express well these independence and recognition desires of who is also ready to defy the conventions and review the past, in the name of a renewed future:

If I went to Lisbon to look for them, it wouldn't have been so much because of the unusual from which they are connected, but because I saw them as people separated from the apparent logic of the world, and that's precisely how I feel, it would have been a disillusionment if they hadn't come with me, but they did, somethings might still make sense, or might make sense after I have lost it all, now you should follow me. (SARAMAGO, 2015, p. 151).

Independent women, men capable of altering their sexist view of the world, women and men who contribute to the common good outside the stereotypes (for example: Joana Carda decides to sleep with José Anaiço in the same room and in the same bed and rejects the loving and sexual feminine passivity; the five (Joana Carda, José Anaiço, Joaquim Sassa, Maria Guavaira and Pedro Orce) drive the car alternately; Sassa e José Anaiço cook: there it is how, schematically, the plot can of **The Stone Raft** can be defined, the trip of these characters through the Iberian Peninsula. This "family" trip can also be seen as a metaphor of the trip desired by Saramago to the new Iberia, the island which should travel South, so as to create a new plurality conducted by equality.

Saramago's Marxism articulates masterly with love, in its plural and unexpected manifestations of spirit and flesh. Pilar del Rio, reflecting about the meeting of reader-writer of Saramago's works and taking as an object his creation path, by him called "From the statue to the stone", advices: "Consider it's Saramago's literary map you will go through, and in his company. It does not matter: it happens always in moments of love [...]"(SARAMAGO, 2013, p. 14).

The advice doesn't limit its focus to the writer-reader, but to the Saramago's own action-word. In his works, we find love in many compartments. For example, the worker man: "No company in the world can be above the people who work there. It's utopic, it's idealist, mas it's the only human way to see things [...]"(GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 145); the

dog: “Lost, the name suits it well. There is another one which would suit best, which is, Found [...] It was lost and was found [...]”(SARAMAGO, 2000, p. 53); the woman: “The love story of my romances, deep down, are history of women, the man is there like a necessary being, sometimes important, is a nice figure, but the form is the woman’s [...]”(GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 266); the literature: “Words bring the wisdom of the lived [...]”(GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 188) Portugal: “I don’t know to what extent this country needs me, but I know to what extent I need it. I like even the not so good things about it. There is something much more important than this, which is called patriotism; it’s a carnal relation, of roots [...]”(GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 99); the relationship between couples: “I have learned that the loving feeling isn’t strongest when one is older, love is a lifelong possibility, and if it happens, you must receive it [...]” (GÓMEZ AGUILERA, 2010, p. 35); and so much more which guide this feeling.

Taking Saramago’s faithful squire advice, this dossier collects articles and essays whose writers peruse the way of treating love in Saramago’s work, this feeling always taken in an ideological position, whether in regards to couples behaviors, whether in regards to the homeland, to humanity, to history, etc. Hereafter, these texts are announced, collecting from its own words the ways of love present in Saramago.

The first article is a declaration of love to Saramago, written by Professor Lélia Parreira Duarte: “Whoever stays silent when I went quiet cannot afford to die before saying everything: in honor to Saramago”. She proposes, as announced by the title, to acclaim the Portuguese author. She dedicates herself to this, remembering “the **Raised from the Ground**’s arrival at Brasil, the first novel analysis and the characters evolution who, initially, were voiceless, underprivileged and ‘forgotten’, become capable of uttering their own discourses and came to be leaders of a transformative revolution [...]”. Not satisfied with these ideas, the professor focuses on some other feminine characters, from other Saramago’s novels, as to evidence José Saramago’s tenderness towards the strong women whom he boasts of having been the creator as well as the creature. Finally, she also discusses how the question of religion is an object of reflection to a pessimist communist and an atheist, in truth a great humanist, “always worried about a problematizing dialogical enunciation, able to witness the sufferings and maneuvers of power [...]”.

The scholars Augusto Rodrigues Silva Jr., Marcos Eustáquio de Paula de Paula e Sara Gonçalves Rabelo, analyze **Death with Interruptions** (2005) articulating the collective, explored in the first part of the novel, and the human and amorous dramas lived by the cellist and by the feminine death. Thanatography enables the verification of these elements as engines of debate that crosses politics and philosophy, systems and human conditions in “Saramago’s alcoves”. Bakhtin and Marx are the base for all this reflection on the “desalienating” character instigated by the amorous and thoughtful impulses of this philosophical novel of passions as essential activities. José Saramago finds the “the real other area of knowledge – love”, as “Death with Interruptions: José Saramago in the thanatography he loves”.

Daniel Vecchio’s article, “The possible love in Saramago”, brings the love stories written in **Baltasar and Blimunda** (1982) and **The History of the Siege in Lisbon** (1989), reflecting upon how they consist in subtle and broad manifestations of feelings and affections exchanged between men and women. The comparison elucidates the building of a materialized love in the possibility of living, as the author himself affirms in the Juan Arias’ interview-book, **Saramago: the possible love** (2000): the love represented in his narratives is always “possible”, without excessive sufferings or unrealizable tasks, far, therefore, from the conventional representations which are attached to the physical and idealizers aspects of love relationships.

Fernângela Diniz da Silva names her article “The Year 1993: Eros as resistance in the prelude to the Saramago’s fiction”, analyzing the work in which José Saramago narrates people’s journey against persecution and violence brought on by authoritarian forces, which are responsible for controlling and submitting them to hostility. According to Fernângela Diniz da Silva, “one of the elements which are figurativized as supporting force is love, particularly the love related to erotism [...]”, which gave a chance to the study of love and sex in this production, with special interest in both the thematic and figurative constructions, and in the emergency of uncanny effects related to the events.

Frederico Dias, in “Love and adaptation in **The Double**, by Denis Villeneuve and José Saramago”, analyses Saramago’s work and its film adaptation, entitled **Enemy**, by Denis Villeneuve, and the different love conceptions present in both productions. The line of reasoning of this study is the one which understands novel and film with isonomy, without

creating a hierarchical relationship between them. Thus, the film director is understood with the same authorial power as a literary author, with the freedom to alter the source material as he finds it necessary so his worldview is present in the final product.

In “Without an Arm in Paradise? Reflections on Lukács’ Irony in Saramago”, Isabela Padilha Papke reflects upon Lukács’s irony concept, the eighth inferno canto, Malebolge, of **Divine Comedy**, and Saramago’s works such as the chronicles **The Traveler’s Baggage**, **The Double** and **Manual of Painting and Calligraphy**. It is a reflection upon the revealing writing of self-seeking, an eternal battle fought by the author, “which proves itself here, valid, and it is grateful for the fact that, this Lukács’ irony, defined as a self-recognition of impotence, emerges as a strike of literary potency, of survival, of the only ironic way of which only irony is capable of being [...]; according to the writer herself.

“Gender and genre in Saramago” is the article of José Leite Jr. In it, the professor explores the meanings of the word “gender” and “genre”: the speech genre and the gender as in female sexuality, considering the fact that Saramago is notable for the appreciation of female gender in all literary genres he created, poetry and prose. The excerpt analyses allows us to deduce that the figurative female variants reaffirm the adjuvant actantial invariant, whereas the woman helps the subject to acquire cognitive and pragmatic competences without which the narrative contract realization would be frustrated. Therefore, the study shapes the transgressive value of the female gender as the power of unmasking the ideological dissimulation as a human love practice.

The essay “The aesthetics of the objectified man: engagement and narrative in **Essay on Blindness** and **Essay on Lucidity**, by José Saramago”, written by Junia Saraiva, studies how these works show the transformation of man into a bestialized being under the capitalism system, which turns him into a victim of his own creation. According to the author, Saramago reproduces this human bestialization in the writing through his own instigating aesthetic, revealing the uneasiness which mirrors the social capitalism brutality.

Mateus Roque writes his article based on the idea that José Saramago is a historical author, studying from this essential element that, through his creative lens, is able of poetically unfolding in various allegorical and

representative forms of the concrete world, past and present, as to be in dialogue with historians, especially the Annales French school. However, the genesis of his perception is Karl Marx, supporting itself in the conception of total History, in other words, the one which aims to comprehend, in the same narrative plan, all historical subjects, rich or poor, cleric or lay. Therefore, the article “In defense of a total History: the literary and historical in José Saramago” elucidates how this conception materializes in literature.

On the other hand, Renata Villon analyses the importance of sight in the process of erasing subjectivity in the article “Blind who can see, but do not see, the dehumanization of the other in **Essay on Blindness**”. Having in mind animalization theories, the author comprehends that the work approaches a blindness much bigger than the physical one, which is the blindness towards the Other, and how it's been damaging the human and non-human relationships equally. By contrast, “the true sight is the one that consider the Other, and that violence and desolation depicted in the work and that happen every day is due to a lack of empathy to everyone and everything that is considered less than human [...]”.

“In search of the unknown self: wandering, love and subjectivity in **The Tale of the Unknown Island**” by José Saramago”, is the article by Vanessa Cardozo Brandão. In this study, the author considers the fact that José Saramago writes about the theme of travel on a recurring basis. She contemplates that, from a philosophical perspective, one can immediately perceive the theme as a reflection on man and his journey in the world, a life journey, of the being, of the being-in-the world, according to Heidegger. She keeps contemplating that, in a double interpretation, the journey can also be read as a journey of the text itself – a journey of writing, a journey of reading, traveling with meanings in motion, wandering like the traveler himself. Finally reflecting upon **The Tale of the Unknown Island** (1998), chosen for this work, the double reading of the journey as a theme is also seen through the reflection on subjectivity. In it, the idea of subjectivity is presented, crossed by the encounter with the Other as an adventure, based on the loving relationship as presented in the text.

For us, organizing this material was one of the many situations from which we can confirm how Saramago has become a paradigmatic persona, in both his literature and posture of active thinking, as a sharp critic of this

world, involving all of us in his digressive prose, implacable discourses, love position, always in a ethic-aesthetic alignment.

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