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PESSOA IN SARAMAGO*

«Saberemos alguma vez quem somos?»

(José Saramago, "O General della Rovere", *A Bagagem do Viajante*)

«Muito do que se escreve não passa de glosas do já dito.»

(José Saramago, "Vendem os deuses o que dão", *Deste Mundo e do Outro*)

I.

Throughout literary history writers have always had to deal with the influence of their literary ancestors on their work with different degrees of anxiety, as Harold Bloom demonstrated in his seminal work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Although it is not my aim to analyse Bloom's theoretical presuppositions here, it is a fact that, while some writers transform this anxiety into an almost unbearable burden, others acknowledge the legacy of an outstanding literary personality, subtly and aptly transforming it into an interesting exercise of inventiveness which highlights and questions the importance of their ancestor's work, as well as establishing a dialogue with it through innovative aesthetic devices and techniques.

Within the Portuguese literary context, two names have triggered off different reactions: Luís de Camões and Fernando Pessoa. To some 20th-century poets Camões and Pessoa represented the aforementioned 'burden' on two different levels: the level of literary production and the

* I thank Elena Zagar Galvão for having revised this paper.

level of pragmatic reception, as if Camões and Pessoa were the 'angels in the house' that had to be killed so that authors could write and be read freely.

It is widely known that part of Pessoa's work can be read as an attempt to deal with Camões's importance in Portuguese culture. *Message* is a long poem which undoubtedly rests on Pessoa's need to reassess Camões's role in his own poetry and in the construction of the Portugal Pessoa imagined. In other words, it is impossible to read Pessoa's *Message* without entering into dialogue with Camões's *The Lusiads* or even thinking that Pessoa in some way wanted to reincarnate the idea of the «Super-Camões».

Within the context of 20th-century Portuguese literature, José Saramago's various attempts to deal with Camões's and Pessoa's legacy are quite interesting. Saramago openly acknowledges both authors' influence on his work as a plus. By doing stimulating exercises of quotation (Matei Calinescu [1991], and Adriana Martins [2006]) in the domain of different literary genres in a rich post-modern vein, Saramago pays homage to both writers and simultaneously questions the protocols of reading that have shaped Camões's and Pessoa's reception. He places special emphasis on the ideological uses political regimes have made of the poets' literary works, and, more specifically, on the implications of the mythical configuration of Portuguese national identity by Salazar's ideological machine. In other words, in his texts Saramago tries to 'misread' Camões and Pessoa (I am borrowing the verb 'to misread' from Bloom on purpose) in order to revisit and reassess former readings and ideological manipulations of both poets' works.

In this essay I am particularly interested in 'misreading' Saramago as both a literary inheritor and a critic of Pessoa. My aim is to demonstrate that in the 1998 Nobel Prize Winner's literary project Pessoa is a permanent hallmark, which is curiously never characterized as a burden. In other words, in Saramago's work Pessoa appears as a kind of ghost that comes and goes between this world and other worlds, never representing a threat to the writer or, I would dare say, to the reader. On the contrary, in Saramago's works Pessoa and the stress on Pessoa's intertexts enhance the discussion on representation, mainly because Pessoa allows Saramago to address, through his fictional texts, the fragmentary character of any representation. The latter emphasizes

¹ I am obviously borrowing the image from Virginia Woolf's essay «Professions for Women» (1988), even though Woolf uses the metaphor in a different context.

not only the impossibility of a total representation of the empirical world – dealt with by Saramago from a post-modern perspective – but also the refined degree of artifice that literary texts might embody.

Starting from the assumption that *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* represents the exponential aesthetic and labyrinthine illustration of Saramago's feigning ('fingimento') in his attempt to overcome the anxiety of Pessoa's influence in his work, my objective is to demonstrate how, from the very beginning (i.e., from the chronicles), Saramago's literary works reflect Pessoa's influence on three different levels: (i) technical-compositional; (ii) thematic; and (iii) ideological. An analysis of these levels in some representative literary chronicles from *Deste Mundo e do Outro* (1971) and from *A Bagagem do Viajante* (1973) will show how the ghosts of Pessoa and of those who inhabit his soul configure and determine the perspective of alterity privileged by Saramago throughout his literary project and particularly in his novels.

II.

On various occasions, Saramago stated that everything related to his literary project could be found in his chronicles, which leads me to search for Pessoa's traces in the aforementioned volumes. As I pointed out elsewhere, inspired by Saramago himself in his chronicle 'Viagens na Minha Terra' ('Travels in my Homeland'; my translation) from *Deste Mundo e do Outro*, Saramago's chronicles should be viewed as pre-texts that have shaped the writer's novels, since the chronicles represent a kind of laboratory of creative writing². Moreover, as Maria Alzira Seixo (1987) noted, Saramago's chronicles reveal the main issues later developed in his novels (from *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* onwards) and allow the writer to refine some of the narrative devices that would be decisive in the writing of his novels. Among the latter, the narrative voice acquires special relevance. If it is a fact that we cannot dissociate the chronicle's narrator from Saramago himself, since he is the one to stroll, observing people and commenting events, it is equally undeniable that the complex nature of Saramago's narrators and their relationship with the reader in novels such as *Baltasar and Blimunda*,

² In his chronicle 'Viagens na Minha Terra' ['Travels in my Homeland'] (*Deste Mundo e do Outro*, pp. 51-53) Saramago asks: «Chronicles, what are they? Pre-texts or testimonies?» (my translation). On Saramago's chronicles as pre-texts and a laboratory of creative writing, see Adriana Martins (1999:101).

The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis and *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* have their origins in the chronicles.

I shall start by referring to the title of the volume published in 1971, *Deste Mundo e do Outro* ['From this and another world', my translation]. It is symptomatic that the very title of this first volume of literary chronicles alludes to the importance Saramago gives to the articulation of this world (connoted with the empirical or the present-time world) and other possible worlds (notably fictional or the world of the past, of the memories)³. It is worth remembering that Pessoa excelled at expanding his world and his soul into several others, which is demonstrated by his sophisticated and labyrinthine heteronymy. This does not mean that Saramago creates heteronyms in his chronicles. However, his interest in questioning the representation of the empirical world through the chronicle sets him apart from other chroniclers, who remain constrained by the limits of the daily events that usually provide the writer with the matter for his/her chronicles. Saramago goes beyond the so-called *real* world or the world of the present or the past in order to call his reader's attention to the ambiguities of representation, be it literary or not, which definitely favours the dialogue between fact and fiction as well as between the self and the *other*.

The choice of a title which refers to more than one world makes Saramago's chronicle gain an epistemological dimension that should be understood as a means of self-knowledge (the chronicler's as well as the reader's) allowing the chronicler to view himself and, by extension, the reader too, as a kind of traveller through physical, literary, and temporal spaces. It is this option that makes me recognize echoes of Pessoa's quest for himself through his texts and those of his heteronyms. The opening text of *Deste Mundo e do Outro*, which tells the story of a man who lives outside a walled city and wants to cross the wall, reinforces the value of that search, mainly when the narrator, in the first and last paragraphs of 'A Cidade' ('The City'), uses the classical opening of fairy tales 'era uma vez' ('once upon a time'), thus marking the passage to the fictional world and revealing, by the end of the text, that the city is the man himself, whose name is Saramago's first name, José⁴. In other words, by giving his name to the walled city, the writer is suggesting that his chronicles represent a kind of inner voyage

³ Cf. Adriana Martins (1999:98).

⁴ Cf. Isabel Moutinho (1999:82).

through which the *other* who inhabits the self will emerge in a process that might be extended to the reader as well.

Saramago's appeal for the construction of possible worlds and for the underlying search they imply⁵, which would be superbly accomplished in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* in the 1980s, is already evident in 'Travessa de André Valente', also from *Deste Mundo e do Outro*. What interests me in this chronicle is, first of all, Saramago's fictional modelization of characters, and, more specifically, the importance the writer gives to the potentialities contained in the dimension of the fantastic, through the narrator's encounter with Bocage's ghost in Lisbon, and, afterwards, through the specific reference to the Jardim of Santa Catarina ('Saint Catherine's Garden'), where both characters establish a dialogue. In fact, as Horácio Costa (1997: 108) already pointed out, this text may be considered an embryo of *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, novel in which Saramago not only resurrects Pessoa from the dead, but also transforms Ricardo Reis into a fictional character, making him return from Brazil after he has heard about Pessoa's death, thus outliving his creator and starting a dialogue with him in the narrative economy⁶. At this point, it should be noted that in the novel, although the fictional Reis and Pessoa's ghost meet in different parts of Lisbon, Reis chooses the neighbourhood of Alto de Santa Catarina to rent the apartment where he is visited by Pessoa's ghost. That part of Lisbon, from where ships can be seen from afar, thus acquires particular importance in the text.

By talking to Bocage's ghost in his chronicle, Saramago acknowledges the late poet as an important literary personality of the Portuguese cultural scene, suggesting, through the modelization of a ghost, how poets inhabit the national cultural memory, crossing the blurred borders between this and other worlds, despite the passage of time. This suggestion is reinforced by the subtle incorporation of one of Bocage's verses in the chronicle, incorporation that anticipates the various exercises of quotation that would later appear in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* through the insertion of excerpts from Reis's odes and Pessoa's verses. The same process of addition was used to assimilate headlines of national and international newspapers published in 1936, crucial to the analysis of the representation of the world in the

⁵ On Saramago's construction of possible works, see Adriana Martins (1994).

⁶ As far as this chronicle is concerned see, among others and besides Horácio Costa (1997), Adriana Martins (1999) and Isabel Moutinho (1999).

1930s. That process also allows Saramago to play a game with the reader in a curious and artful way. Indeed, some of the lines included in the novel were created by Saramago himself, but a reader who is not acquainted with Pessoa's and his heteronyms' works could easily attribute these lines to Reis, as if Saramago himself were playing the role of one of Pessoa's heteronyms, attitude that could be interpreted in a playful way as an attempt to overcome the anxiety of Pessoa's influence on his craft⁷.

A very interesting variety of the exercise of quotation done in 'Travessa de André Valente' can be found in 'Vendem os Deuses o que Dão' (*Deste Mundo e do Outro*, pp. 117-119), a chronicle in which Saramago openly refers to Fernando Pessoa and to his poetic craft. By stating in the second paragraph that 'muito do que se escreve não passa de glosas do já dito' ('much of what people write is a gloss of what has already been said'; my translation), Saramago glosses Pessoa's verse (Horácio Costa, 1997: 106-108) to stress the inner struggle for the soul, thus retrieving the main issue of the opening text of this volume. However, the most interesting aspect of this chronicle rests on the writer's acknowledgment of glossing texts already written, aspect that becomes quite relevant when novels such as the aforementioned *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (as far as the poetic gloss is concerned) and *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (regarding the possible representations of historiography) are considered. In a later phase of Saramago's literary project, it is worth calling the reader's attention to the puzzling process of intra- and inter-gloss that is embodied in *The Double*, through which Saramago enters into dialogue with his own literary project as a whole, highlighting its self-reflexivity and the writer's consciousness of his work in a manner that resembles, to some extent, Pessoa's quest for his fragmented soul through his and his heteronyms' poetry. Unfortunately, this discussion obviously overcomes the scope of this paper.

Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos (1995) considered Saramago's transformation of Pessoa's heteronym, Ricardo Reis, into a novel's character a fictional gesture or, as she aptly called it, a 'fictional trap'⁸.

⁷ On Pessoa's ghosts, and, in particular, on the allegory of Pessoa as a ghost in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, see Paulo de Medeiros (1998).

⁸ Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos specifically refers to Saramago's device in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. On the same issue, see Adriana Martins (2006, chapter 9).

Borrowing the idea of a fictional trap from her, let me now turn my attention to a text from *A Bagagem do Viajante*, entitled 'O General della Rovere', in order to comment on another instance of Pessoa's influence on Saramago's writing. Adapting Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos's expression to my aims, I find two kinds of fictional traps in this chronicle. The first one has to do with the technical-compositional level, for Saramago tells the story of a character of Roberto Rossellini's film 'Generale della Rovere', a swindler whose real name is Brandone. Brandone works for the Nazis, playing the role of General della Rovere (who has in fact been killed) in order to denounce a chief of the Italian resistance. What interests me is the fact that Brandone assumes General della Rovere's personality in such a way that he transforms himself into a different kind of man. As far as the technical-compositional level is concerned, Brandone's modelization reminds me of Pessoa's feigning. However, it is mainly on the thematic level that this chronicle denotes Pessoa's influence, for the transformation of Brandone into General della Rovere leads me to approach Saramago's interest in the thematic of the double, one of the most important and prolific themes within his literary project, which I consider another kind of fictional trap, since the double clearly addresses the issue of otherness and the writer's need to call his reader's attention to the dangers of erasing differences. Who could forget the transformation of H. the painter into H. the writer in *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*, or the parallels between Raimundo Silva and Mogueime in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, or Blimunda and the doctor's wife as a kind of twin souls in *Baltasar and Blimunda* and *Blindness*, or Pessoa's ghost as a double of Pessoa and the Saramaguian Ricardo Reis as a double of Pessoa's heteronym in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, or the echoes of Raimundo Silva in the fictional composition of Sr. José in *All the Names*, or that of Tertulian and of his double in *The Double*?

If the figurations of the double in Saramago reflect Pessoa's influence, the same can be said, on the ideological level, of the association Saramago makes of the chronicler with the traveller, which becomes evident when considering the titles of the two volumes analysed in this paper. The chronicler travels between this and other worlds carrying his observations and experiences in his luggage and converting the latter into a matter for fiction. I believe that Pessoa's influence becomes evident in the relevance the chronicler gives to his gaze ('olhar'). This relevance leads me to stress the gradation 'olhar, ver, reparar', whose translation into English is problematic. 'Olhar'

means 'to look at', whereas 'ver' means 'to see', thus the passage from one level to the other implies visual sharpness. In Portuguese, 'reparar' is semantically ambiguous, for the verb can mean 'to take notice of' and 'to mend' at the same time. This gradation of visual acuity pervades Saramago's literary project, acquiring particular significance both in epistemological and ideological terms. Saramago's aim is to deepen the reader's knowledge of the world, transforming him/her not only into a critical subject, but also into someone who intervenes in the world in order to transform it into a fair and just place.

It was Maria Alzira Seixo (1998: 177-179) who called my attention to the fact that in Pessoa, especially in *The Book of Disquietude*, attributed to his semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares, the issue of the voyage represents more than a theme, becoming a kind of discursive intellectualised search of the subject, process that is closely associated with the writer's view and consequently with the reading/interpretation of the world. I consider the axiological and ideological potentialities of this process particularly fruitful in Saramago's chronicles, because in texts such as, for instance, 'Jogam as Brancas e Ganham' ('The White Pieces Play and Win') and 'Ir e Voltar' ('To Go and to Return'), from *A Bagagem do Viajante*, the chronicler assumes himself as someone who has a role to play through his stories: he not only tries to discover and understand the ambiguities of the world he contemplates as a passer-by, but also leads his reader to search for his inner self and collective role, thus actively intervening in the same world. In this sense, the close relationship the chronicler establishes with the reader, trying to enter into dialogue with him/her, goes, in my opinion, beyond Bernardo Soares/Pessoa's reading of the world, since in Bernardo Soares, and according to Maria Alzira Seixo (178), the passer-by's gaze feeds an ironic and nihilistic hermeneutic project. Despite the apparent scepticism that emerges from Saramago's chronicles, his literary project fed by his inexhaustible wish to intervene in the world cannot be considered nihilistic, for, as the reader learns after reading *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, and contrary to Pessoa's Ricardo Reis's belief, wise is *not* the one who contemplates the world. Thus, I firmly believe that Saramago's chronicles already stress this ideological aspect.

III.

In sum, this brief study on Pessoa's influence on Saramago's literary chronicles proves that, from the very beginning of his literary project, Saramago tried to acknowledge and deal with Pessoa's overwhelming ascendancy over his work and over the Portuguese culture in general. To return now to Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence, I am convinced that, through his chronicles understood as pre-texts to his novels, and through the devices I have analysed, Saramago anticipates that he is able to 'misread' his precursor's work, aspect that would be confirmed by the publication of his novels, when he definitely inscribed his name among the 'strong' writers and poets of the western canon.

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PESSOA I SARAMAGO

Streszczenie

Pisarze portugalscy XX wieku zajmowali wielokrotnie dwuznaczną postawę wobec dziedzictwa i tradycji. Luis de Camoes może służyć tutaj jako przykład. Z jednej strony Camoes jest twórcą literatury portugalskiej; z drugiej zaś strony dzieło jego wytworzyło ważną tradycję i obowiązek kultu, który decydował o formie i stylu literatury portugalskiej oraz o recepcji tekstów literackich w Portugalii. Jose Saramago wielokrotnie wypowiadał się na temat pisarzy oraz dzieł, które posiadają decydujące znaczenie w procesie formowania jego dzieł.

Heteronimy Pessoa oraz dzieła Camoesa i samego Pessoa wywarły istotny wpływ na twórczość powieściową Saramago. Powieść *Rok śmierci Ricarda Reisa* stanowi subtelny przykład dialogu między Saramago a Pessoa i Ricardem Reiszem występującym w roli jednego z heteronimów Pessoa. Tematem owego dialogu jest estetyka i ideologia powieści Saramago.

Dzieła Saramago potwierdzają wpływ Pessoa na trzech płaszczyznach: 1. kompozycyjnej-warsztatowej, 2) tematycznej; oraz 3. ideologicznej. Artykuł „Pessoa i Saramago” skupia się na kronikach Saramago aby wykazać w jaki sposób Pessoa i jego heteronimy kształtują w dziele Saramago obraz oraz perspektywę inności (otherness), to znaczy tego, co stanowi rdzeń jego własnego projektu literackiego, szczególnie w powieściach.