Portugal and Iberian Peninsula in two of José Saramago’s novels

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The 1980s were marked, within José Saramago’s literary production in romance, by the proposal of revisiting the History of Portugal, narrowing the relation between the domains of History and Literature, inside a critical point of view that came to mark the works and the writer’s social role along all his production. In 1980, Levantado do chão presented us with a saga of centuries of oppression, perpetrated by the Alentejo landowners against the rural workers, who would see the possibility of better life conditions only in the late XX century. Such a work consolidated the style by which Saramago would be known, and it remained for the studious as a mark. In 1982, Memorial do convento is published, which for over twenty years, would be the best known from the author’s vast works, until the launching of the movie adaptation from Ensaio sobre a cegueira (1995) by Fernando Meirelles in 2008.

The author chose to focus on a specific period of the Portuguese history, the reign of D. João V, which lasted from 1707 to 1750. Also from a very delimited time period, the year 1936, which was lived in Portugal, will bring the novel O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis, published in 1984. A jangada de pedra, title that comes next, widens the focus geographically, which (re)takes the Iberian Peninsula as scenario and symbol, in a historical time that we can qualify as contemporary but appointing to a future that is, since the epigraph we will talk about later, fabulous. The decade finished with História do cerco de Lisboa, from 1989, in which geographically the author returns again to the Portuguese territory, specifically to the city of Lisbon (scenario practically exclusive both in this novel as in the Manual de pintura e caligrafia e O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis) in two historical moments that complement one another, the year 1147, when there is the siege of Lisbon mentioned in the title of the novel, and the decade of 1980, “present” from the fable making, in which the History of the XII Portuguese century is revisited, in different ways.

By making, then, a very brief balance of the decade in terms of the author’s production according to the prism of the relations between History and Literature, we notice that these relations have been privileged in each of the novels mentioned. The actual communication proposes to show in two novels consecutively published by José Saramago in the appointed period – A jangada de Pedra e História do cerco de Lisboa – how the questions relating to Iberian context and to the nation are treated.

A jangada de pedra

The novel is preceded by an epigraph taken from the work of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, specifically from the novel El reino de este mundo. Before we examine the content of the epigraph, the choice by Alejo Carpentier puts the reader promptly in the pathway of the magical Latin-American realism, from which this Cuban author was one of the first ones to conceptualize and he
approaches the Saramago’s book to the literature produced in Latin America. By analyzing the content of the epigraph: “Todo futuro es fabuloso”, it seems to indicate that the work will talk about the future and that this one, like any other is “fabulous”, word that indicates that it is liable to be told, therefore “fabled”, as well as being “extraordinary”.

Passing to the fable itself, there is room for a very brief paraphrase. Five are its main characters: Joana Carda, Joaquim Sassa and José Anaíço (Portuguese), Pedro Orce and Maria Guavaira (Spanish). Each of the characters will have a leading role in some action or target of some behavior that seems to have supernatural nature; Joaquim Sassa launches a heavy rock into the sea and it describes a surprising route; José Anaíço starts being followed by a flock of birds wherever he may go; Pedro Orce feels the earth quaking suddenly, although the seismographs do not confirm it, and at last, Maria Guavaira starts undoing a sock and as she performs the task, the sock stops diminishing but not the wool, which starts to fill up a whole room in her house. The five unusual circumstances coincide with the moment when there is a long fissure in the soil, close to the Pyrenees, exactly in the boundary between Spain and France, such fissure that later gets radical, meets a second fissure, both of them stretching themselves and causing the separation between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of the European continent. The mentioned characters end up meeting by the initiative of Joaquim Sassa who, having heard of Pedro Orce on the news on TV, leaves in search of him, thinking that the unusual facts that happened to both could have some relation with the separation between Europe and the Iberian Peninsula.

It must be noted, promptly, the particularity of the central characters casting being chosen between Portuguese and Spanish, in such a way as to being three Portuguese and two Spanish, being the latter a representative of Andalusia and the other one from Galicia, significant regions in mythological-literary-linguistic terms for the Portuguese culture. To complete the casting, a sixth one is added: a dog, which, at the moment when the first fissure becomes bigger, it jumps from the French territory to the Spanish territory. This dog also carries traces of the supernatural. According to the narrative, when Joana Carda, in some point of the Portuguese territory, risks the floor with a Negrillo wand, all the dogs in the French location of Cerbère start barking at the same time. The narrator searches, in the name of the French location, connections with Greek mythology, in Cérbero, the three-headed dog that keeps guard by the hell’s entrance, and informs the readers that there is in Cerbère “rooted superstition, or firm conviction” (SARAMAGO, 2006, p.7), that “in that small place, the community of Cerbère, department of Eastern Pyrenees, had barked, in the Greek and mythological ages, a three-headed dog that by hearing the name of Cerbère responded, if called by the boatman Caronte, its handler” (SARAMAGO, 2006, p.7) and that, historically, the dogs in town had always been mute. That specific dog, named Ardent (“ardente”, in Portuguese, onomastic choice that refers, maybe to the hell-like regions, dominated by the fire in the western imaginary), will lead the group formed by four characters in search of the last one of them, the Galician Maria Guavaira.
The reference to the animal that incorporates and leads the group to meet the last character is not in vain in this narrative where dogs, horses and donkeys will play a detached role, as we will see later.

The magical realism announced in the epigraph starts to become evident by the acts or extraordinary circumstances to which each central character is subjected to and by the relations between the group constituted and the movement of the Peninsula itself. It should be said that, although the epigraph makes reference to the future, the narrated events happen apparently in the contemporary moment – there are no temporal marks of the moment in which the unusual events and the apprehensible daily life (means of communications, cars manufacturers, life style evidences) can be attributed to any point in the 1980s, which saw the book be published. The reference to the car, a Citroën known as the 2CV or two horses, model fabricated between 1948 and 1990 in Europe and considered to be a popular car is one of the few manufacturers that is precise to indicate the possible years in which the “fabulous future” will begin: the decade of the 1980s. Notwithstanding the statement that the separation and dislocation of the Iberian Peninsula happens in a fabulous future, the fable boosts the characters to situations where the past of the Peninsula is visited: for example, the group starts motorized, in a two horse-powered vehicle and, when it stops working and is replaced by a galera – a kind of cart – pulled at first by a horse and to which it is aggregated a second horse later, being that the group starts to call the pool formed by animals and galera as “Two horses”.

We can notice another curious return to the past in the following situation: the jobs of teacher, apothecary and office clerk played by the male central roles are left in function of a wandering life from the group of clothing trade (“fancaria” and “bufarinharia”, according to the text), being that the itinerant traders remind the reader of an Iberian Peninsula of feudal temporality.

In *A jangada de pedra*, from the choice of the theme to the group of leading role cast, Portugal and Spain come united – reintegrated as in a past before the establishment of the national states and turned to themselves. The group formed by Portuguese and Spanish people reunites and walks by communally. From the reunion of the five men with the dog, they go to Galicia (where they meet Maria Guavaira, the fifth element in the human group) to the Pyrenees together - traversing the Iberian Peninsula in the longitudinal direction. And it is exactly when they come together to the actual extreme east of the “jangada de pedra” (n.t.: Stone raft) in which the peninsula turned into, that it detains itself. The present “jangada de pedra” (n.t.: Stone raft) is close to the ancient colonial possessions – in Africa and Central and South Americas – and ends up fixing itself in an equidistant way between Europe, America and Africa, after spinning in a rotational movement on itself for about a month, emulating, in our reading, the internal cycles that develop in the narrative.

We would like to address now, how is it shown in this narrative the nation and the Iberian context in the imagined and fabulous future described by the narrator? Few times in *A jangada de pedra* we see the word “nação” (n.t.: nation). The most significant ones will refer to the “North-American
nation” and those mentions are found almost at the end of the narrative. The most significant part in on page 262 from the edition used to study and it makes reference to the moment when the stone raft in which the Iberian Peninsula had turned into stops. This part points to the international positioning facing the situation, and it seems to us that the mentioning to the North-American “grande nação” (n.t.: big nation) echoes the game between the several national states positioning before the new situation of the old Iberian Peninsula:

From a perspective of practical politics, the issue being discussed in the Europe and in America was the zones of influence, that means, if, despite the distance, the peninsula, or island, should conserve its original ties with Europe, or if, by not cutting them completely, should be directed, preferably, to the designations and destiny of the great American nation. In spite of not having hopes of exerting decisively influence on the issue, the Soviet Union reminded again and again that nothing could be solved without their participation in the discussions, and nevertheless they reinforced the squadron that from the beginning they had been following the wandering journey, beyond, undoubtedly, the other powers squadrons, the North American, the British, the French. (SARAMAGO, 2006, p. 262).

There is a brief theme exploitation of the conflicts between the governments of Portugal and Spain as well, but the narrative has its core in the wanderings of the five central characters by the territory of the ancient Peninsula changed into a stone raft in such a way that the political news is set aside. By adopting, as we said, a life style close to the archaic, the group of characters unites, forms couples and goes by throughout the territory that, moves itself as well, either to the sea, or, later, in a last counterclockwise rotation movement (diabolic sense, according to the narrative) before the total stop.

We believe that, in terms of Iberian context, one of the most notable aspects is in the intertext with great narratives from the Iberian Peninsula. Notwithstanding the references to other authors and works: the Bible, Otelo (Shakespeare), Frankenstein (which appears as adjective, Mary Shelley’s work), Charles Dickens, Vinte mil léguas submarinas (n.t.: Twenty thousand leagues under the sea) (Júlio Verne), among others, are the references to the works and characters from the Iberian literature that are not only the most abundant, but also the most significant ones.

On the very first page of the text, page 7 of the used edition, Joana Carda is, according to the narrator, “in a place in Portugal whose name we will come to remember later”, a clear intertext with Don Quixote de la Mancha, which, we must remember, goes on, “em algum lugar da Mancha de cujo nome não me quero lembrar”1 (n.t.: somewhere in the English channel whose name I don’t wish to remember). As in this example, the intertextuality with the work and the literary personality of the authors Miguel de Cervantes, Luís de Camões, Vasco de Lobeira/Garcí Rodriguez de Montalvo, Rodrigues Miguéis, Antonio Machado, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Juan Ramón Jimenez, José Saramago is a powerful engine in the narrative and a working instrument with the Iberian context in A jangada de pedra.

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1 In free translation from the article’s author.
We would like to comment on some of these exploitations of literary material for the composition of Saramago’s novel in order to enact the literary history of the Iberian Peninsula in the narrative and promote in the “fabulous future” in which the actions unfold, an effective dialogue with the literary past of the peninsula. The intertext along with Cervantes’s masterpiece, for example, takes place by the mentions to Don Quixote himself, to Sancho Pança and, finally, to Rocinante, the horse. When Maria Guavaira and Joaquim Sassa leave to steal a horse, which was needed to help move the “galera” in which the characters travel, the picture of both returning to the campsite followed by the loyal dog is compared to the medieval past through literature and specifically by the quotation from *Amadis de Gaula*. We quote:

> When the day was light, already distant from the place of the theft, they started to notice people in the fields and on the roads, but none of them knew the horse, and even if they did, or could recognize, they wouldn’t take notice of it, so admirable and naive was the picture, so to say medieval, the maiden sitting on the horse, and in front the wanderer knight, pedestrianly walking by, taking the horse by the reins, which fortunately he had not forgotten to bring. The dog completed the charming view, which to some looked like a dream, to others a sign of change in life, they just don’t know that they are nothing but two mean horse stealers, it is really true that looks can be deceiving, what is generally ignored is that they deceive twice, reason why maybe the best thing will be to trust the first impressions, and don’t proceed with the investigation. For this reason today there will be plenty of people saying, This morning I saw Amadis and Oriana, she on a horse, he walking by, with them a dog, Amadis and Oriana couldn’t be them, once no dog has ever been seen with them, I Saw it, and it suffices, one witness is worth a hundred, But in life, the love and adventures of these two account for no dog, So we continue to write the life, and as many times as necessary to fit all, All, That is, the maximum possible. (SARAMAGO, 2006, p. 217).

The present fable dialogues, then, with the literary past. However, the most notable intertext we located in *A jangada de pedra* is with the work *Platero e eu*, from the Spanish Juan Ramón Jimenez. Having been published, in a fractioned way, in 1914, *Platero e eu*, gets the edition considered to be the first complete one, in 1917. The narrative, conducted by a I-narrator that doesn’t reveal himself, but is built in counterpoint and dialogue with a donkey called *Platero* from his property, which along with the narrator, lives the daily life of a small location in Andalusia, retaken in an intense way in *A jangada de pedra*. In the the Saramango’s narrative, Roque Lozano, a peasant from the same region as Juan Ramón Jimenez – Roque, Saramago’s character from Zufré, province of Huelva, and Jimenez from Moguer, in the same province – appears at the beginning of the narrative (page 60 of the edition we made use of), riding his donkey Platero, being questioned by the characters Joaquim Sassa and José Anaíço about the route to the village of Orce. Later in the narrative (page 114), we see Roque and Platero going towards the extreme east of the Iberian Peninsula, to try to see Europe. Afterwards, from page 269, of our edition that has 291 pages, Roque Lozano and Platero will reappear and will be incorporated to the group of central characters, remaining with the group until the end of the narrative.

Due to the persistence of the incorporation and dialogue with *Platero e eu*, we believe that it is productive to look a bit further into the original work and its reuse in Saramago’s novel where, so we think, the intertextuality has the role to dialogue directly with the question and with the Iberian traditions.
Platero e eu presents, according to Professor Pedro Benítez Pérez, “a cyclic structure, because its episodes, relatively independent among themselves, go on from spring to spring, until the year is over” (Jiménez, 2010, p. XV). Inside a cyclic structure, life in the small village of Andalusia is seen by the narrator who almost always has his donkey Platero as company, with whom he plays the part of the smaller histories where they interact with the local population and with nature. Platero e eu is a work marked by the senses, by a very pronounced sensuality. Smell, taste, sight, hearing, touch, are very well exploited by the author who was primarily a poet, in the portrayal of life exploding in sensations in the small village and in its surroundings. In A jangada de pedra, Saramago creates the character of the peasant Roque Lozano, who differs completely from the narrator of Platero e eu, obviously a young man of learning who strews the narrative in first person of references from the European culture, such as the Fra Angelico’s pictures, Beethoven’s music and Oscar Wilde’s writings. Roque Lozano is a rude peasant, who, at the beginning of A jangada de pedra, with Platero, goes through the route that will be covered by the group of Saramago’s characters. The difference is that the group will go through the old peninsula together, from Galicia and will get to the extreme east. Roque will head for the extreme east, to see Europe (which he ended up not doing, because he only sees water, like the rest of the characters), from his village called Zufre. When meeting Pedro Orce near the end of the narrative and being incorporated to the group intended to move the old apothecary Orce to his homeland, Roque seems to symbolically embody to the narrative to the framework represented by one of the most representative parts of the XX century Spanish literature – we must remember that Juan Ramón Jiménez won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1956.

In A jangada de pedra the sensual-tender component is very central in the narrative. The couples formed between Joaquim-Joana, José-Maria show the idealization of the man-woman love present in much of José Saramago’s works and, in this novel, exacerbate the habitual limits of love between specific couples to contemplate the figure of the older man and close to death, Pedro Orce, with moments of sensual love lived with two female characters who act apparently moved by a feeling of compassion. The announcement, almost at the end of the narrative (on Page 266 of the edition we used) that both of them were pregnant triggers internal conflicts in the love relationships of both of them, and the merely personal issue is supplanted, little after (on Page 280 of the same edition) by the announcement that all or almost all of the fertile women in the territory claim to be pregnant at the same time, pointing to a possible erotic overflow that would have affected not only the central characters of the narrative, but also all the inhabitants of the ancient Iberian Peninsula and reinforcing the characteristic of the magical realism to which the narrative sticks to from the epigraph. Another interesting point of contact between Roque Lozano and Pedro Orce, both, we must remember, Saramago’s characters, is that it has to reunite them, according to the narrator, the homesickness of the same «pátria» (n.t.: homeland), in this case identified with the Andalusia region to which they pertain
and to which the group travels to in the final pages of the narrative, which ends up nevertheless, without reaching the respective lands.

The fabulous future in *A jangada de pedra* shows itself as an Iberian future, of physical detachment between Peninsula and Europe with geographic approach to the old colonies, whereas, internally, the Iberian ties are made by the loving couples between the Portuguese and the Spanish, with the consequent generation of children borne from parents of both nationalities. It is, above all, a future that retakes the past, seen from the transport perspective– the trade of an automobile Two Horses by a *galera* pulled by two horses; work perspective– the replacement of works that are typical of the contemporary European society for itinerant commercial activities linked to the peninsular past and, finally a future where they resume the ties with aspects from the literary works that had marked the history of the Iberian Peninsula.

*História do cerco de Lisboa*

The novel was published three years after *A jangada de pedra*. Thus the epigraph is, once more in Saramago's work, a joke with the existence of a pretense *Livro dos Conselhos*. According to the epigraph: “While you don’t reach the truth, you won’t be able to correct it. However, if you don’t correct it, you won’t reach it. Nevertheless, don’t resign yourself”. Typical statement of the ingenious discourse, where the play on words reveals one of the novel’s central questionings: the search for the truth and the possibility of correction that was established as truth.

The fable suggests the combination of two time frames: a “present” that can be set in the 1980s in Lisbon and the past of the same town, especially in the months before the siege of 1147, the siege itself and the war that favored the Christians at the expense of the so-called “Moors”, making the episode part of the consolidation of the Portuguese nationality. The “present” is the time when the reviewer Raimundo Silva lives. By making the book review of a historian about the siege of Lisbon in the XII century, Silva decides, for various circumstances, to alter with a “no” the meaning of one of the sentences, ending up modifying for a short period of time – until the moment when the mistake is discovered – a historic truth: the crusaders in the XII century helped the Portuguese to expel the “Moors” from the city of Lisbon.

The fable as we can see dialogues with the epigraph: where would it be the search for the truth in a text dedicated to the writing of History as science and how and to what extent correct the text? There are various textual levels: the one in which the reviewer does his work and, at times dialogues, first with the historian and later with his boss Maria Sara, another, representing the daydreaming of the reviewer, which will be later used by him to compose a fiction and yet a third one, the one that represents the text from the historian about the siege episode. There is an interesting encounter between the first and the last of these textual levels that corresponds to page 40 and the following pages of the edition we used for the present study. Raimundo Silva reaches the end of the historian text on a cold night in Lisbon. Already very annoyed because in “four hundred thirty-seven pages it was not
found a new fact, a polemic interpretation, an unpublished document, not even a reinterpretation” (SARAMAGO, 2003, p.34 and 35), the narrator says that there, at the end of the historian book, Raimundo Silva could use “the ardent expression of a fervent patriotism” (SARAMAGO, 2003, p.40), and the narrator calls the attention of the reader to what the historian wrote, such discourse interrupted by the reviewer and by the narrator himself. We quote:

On the top of the castle the growing Muslim came down by the last time and, definitely, for good, beside the cross that announced to the world the holy baptism of the new Christian city, he rose slowly into the blue of the space, kissed by the light, tossed by the breeze, coming proudly for the victory, the flag of D. Afonso Henqiues, the corners of Portugal, shit, and if not cared for the bad Word leads the reviewer to the national emblem, is the legitimate outburst of one who, having been ironically reprimanded by the naive imagination mistakes, will have to consent, except for others not his, when what is arising his enjoyment, and with due right, is the launch in the margins of the paper a rain of outraged deleting, but we already know, he won’t do it, for with amends of this size the author would be vexed. (SARAMAGO, 2003, p. 41).

The double anachronism: neither corner edges, nor crescent moons existed in this period in the flags mentioned, promptly perceived by the reviewer (as in another point in the pre-publication of the historian’s book, anachronistic caravels sailed the river Tejo centuries before its invention). However, the option taken in this case was not to correct it because this attitude would result in the need to rewrite all the final part of the book, which, written the way it was (and containing mistakes), it was beautiful, exciting and patriotic.

It is understood then the clear correspondence with the text in the epigraph: what to correct? Where is the truth? In some other parts of Silva’s review, the narrator is so ironic, but without interventions of the consciousness flow or the reviewer’s speech, the continuity – in the historical discourse in the historian’s book (which we already know, brings nothing new) – of repeating histories that evoke the supernatural of a religious character to explain historical issues. It’s the case of the Ourique’s miracle, ironically questioned by the Saramago’s narrator – which seems to produce here the daydreams of the reviewer - on page 155 of the edition we used, when the crusader’s spokesperson, Guilherme da Longa Espada, after failing to reach a financial agreement with the king, says:

Enjoying as he was, the king of Portugal, the efficient and easy assistance from Our Lord Jesus Christ, for example, in the dangerous grip that was said about the battle of Ourique, would hardly seem to the same Lord the crusaders in transit presuming to replace him in the new company, by the advice they gave, if they wanted to receive it, the Portuguese on their own should go to the combat, because they had the victory guaranteed and God would thank them the opportunity to prove His power, this time and as many other times as solicited. (SARAMAGO, 2003, p. 155)

Again and this time by the daydreaming of the reviewer Raimundo Silva, we can weave a dialogue between the epigraph mentioned and its challenge, get to the truth to correct it or correct it to get to the truth. What exactly is there to be corrected in a conventional text like the historian’s is in the center of the novel’s questionings. In a moment, at the end of the 1980s, when most of the European countries were doing deep reviews into the way of seeing their historical past, in the Saramago’s fiction
it’s staged the necessary review of a series of aspects of the Portuguese historiography, in that moment still so full of symbols and religious myths that it seemed that only through fiction would one be able to get to some kind of truth: a fictional truth that the reviewer searches through the rehabilitation of secondary figures in the historical chronicle, Ouroana and Mogueime, by whose prism he prefers to look at the conflict.

Curiously, the “present” of the fable of the História do cerco de Lisboa is practically all occupied by the narrative of the attempts by Raimundo Silva to write fiction and by the love story between him and Maria Sara. Almost all the action happens in this past, which, as very intense, invades at all times the “present” of the fable, either by Raimundo’s daydreaming, which mixes the times in one of his few exits, the one when he feeds himself in the Milk place A gracios, and at the same time he daydreams about the possible relations that would be established by the time of the siege in 1147. We quote:

The city is a chorus of mourning, with all this people that comes in escaping, shooed by Ibn Arrinque’s troops, the Galician, may Allah fulminate him and condemn him to deep hell, and the unfortunate come in a lamenting state, blood oozing from their wounds, crying and screaming, not few are the ones who have stumps instead of hands or cruelly earless, or noseless, it’s the warning that sends forth the Portuguese king. And it seems, says the milk place owner, that there come crusaders by the sea, God damn them, about two hundred ships, things are very bad this time without a doubt. Oh, poor people, says a fat lady, wiping a tear, who right this moment come from The Iron Gate, it’s a clothesline of misery and disgrace, the doctor doesn’t know which side to take care of [...]” (SARAMAGO, 2003, p. 54 e 55)

The past is at the same time seen by the perspective of the present, which is invaded by it: by the Portuguese language with its particular expressions (“Ai, coitadinhos”, “Malditos sejam”) (n.t.: “oh, poor people”, “God damn them”), by the regular goers of the Portuguese Milk place at present (the fat woman, the man Who drinks the Milk leaning against the counter), in a Lisbon of the present context in a popular kind of trade. We should also highlight the geographical superposition – Silva lives in a building that is on the old Alfofa Gate, one only doesn’t know, in the “present” moment, if either inside, or outside the siege – it helps in the time superposition between the past of the XII century and the present of the XX century. The central focus of História do cerco de Lisboa is the questioning of the past from the present (1980s, as we said). How to deal in this present, with the «historical weight», with the past that in the contemporary time continues to be read by some historians (like that one, with no name, who wrote one more history about the siege of 1147) in a conventional way. The anti-conventionalism comes in the work of this specific author in a wrong way: by attempting to give the narrative some colors and to thrill the reader, he makes gross errors like those appointed above, at the same time as his historical investigation is seen in a critical way by Raimundo Silva, an average-cultured man: there is nothing new in the historian’s book, only one more volume to take its place in shelves at bookstores, libraries and houses.
The Saramago’s novel puts the reader in the face of several questions: how to revisit the History in this ending that is so anodyne? Anodyne maybe because seen by the eyes of the calm reader or if we consider it more widely anodyne in terms of the slow retake of the country’s rhythm that had been shaken by the April 25th 1974 and that in the 1980s entered the European Economic Community? Is fiction the proper terrain to the questioning of the official discourse that insists in miracles (like the Ourique’s miracle) and on the inclination of the celestial bodies in favor of Portugal?

The past crossed the present in an intense way and, we would say, devastating. As we said, little time and little space are left to the present, such time when the narrative lingers on the love issue of the « siege » from Maria Sara to Raimundo Silva (or is it the opposite?) and the reconstruction of the reviewer’s conventional life after breaking the established law and putting the « no » in the historian’s text, creating, for a few days, a lie in a History book. The love affair between Maria Sara and Raimundo Silva appears due to the transgression and is surrounded by the writing of a history of the fictional siege by Raimundo, considering that the love game depends on the continuity of a revisit to the past that both of them undertake, but Raimundo lives the leading role by the writing.

The Iberian dimension found in A jangada de pedra and in other Saramago’s novels, such as O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis, doesn’t appear in the História do cerco de Lisboa. It’s a narrative centralized more than in Portugal, in Lisbon itself, place of the siege in the past, of the consolidation of the nationality by the expelling of the « other », « unfaithful », « moor », in a visit/revisit to the foundations of the nationality and on the strong imbrications between religiosity and political power that marked the country for centuries. The past so present in História do cerco de Lisboa seems to signalize for the moment, in the Saramago’s work, in which the dialogue with the past of his country is more intense and for that reason more focused: one episode in History, a city, two temporalities.

Bibliographic references: