

Dialectic in the titles of the five exercises of autobiography in *Manual of painting and calligraphy*

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Abstract: *Manual de pintura e caligrafia* (*Manual of painting and calligraphy*, 1977) was the first novel Saramago wrote after 30 years of «silence». My study concentrates on the dialectic in the titles of the five exercises of autobiography that the protagonist H. (Saramago) is doing in this novel, which, followed by the imaginary voyage to Italy treasures, give us keys to decipher Saramago's perception of the world. Everything is dialectic; nothing has one dimension, like the Renaissance painting, which presents multidimensions. It is a permanent dialectic, a kind of polyphony which will be further developed in his later novels. *Manual* is a kind of autobiography due to the real contact with Saramago's life upon which he declared in many interviews. It is a journey to the *other* and the *self* without the confrontation with the distant Renaissance era, which allows the aesthetic and ethic distance; but rather with the next door's neighbours, the nearby streets, in Lisbon, that for a long time H. tried to ignore until he met M. and due to her virtues H. came to confront with the aesthetic and ethic closeness.

Keywords: *Manual of painting and calligraphy*; dialectic; autobiography; aesthetic; ethic.

A dialética nos títulos dos cinco exercícios de autobiografia do *Manual de pintura e caligrafia*

Resumo: *Manual de pintura e caligrafia* (1977) foi o primeiro romance que Saramago escreveu após 30 anos de «silêncio». O meu estudo concentra-se na

dialética nos títulos dos cinco exercícios de autobiografia que o protagonista H. (Saramago) faz neste romance, seguido pela viagem imaginária aos tesouros da Itália, que nos fornece chaves para decifrar a percepção de Saramago sobre o mundo. Tudo é dialético; nada tem uma dimensão, como a pintura renascentista que apresenta multidimensões. É uma dialética permanente, um tipo de polifonia que será desenvolvida nos seus romances posteriores. *Manual* é uma espécie de autobiografia, devido ao contacto real com a vida de Saramago, sobre o qual ele declarou em muitas entrevistas. É uma viagem para o *outro* e para o *eu*, sem o confronto com a longínqua era renascentista, que permite a distância estética e ética; mas sim com os vizinhos do lado, as ruas próximas, em Lisboa, que durante muito tempo H. tentou ignorar, até que conheceu M. e, devido às suas virtudes, H. veio a confrontar-se com a proximidade estética e ética.

Palavras-chave: *Manual de pintura e caligrafia*; dialética; autobiografia; estética; ética.

Creio que a nossa biografia está em tudo o que fazemos e dizemos, em todos os gestos, na maneira como nos sentamos, como andamos e olhamos, como viramos a cabeça ou apanhamos um objecto do chão. É isso que a pintura quer fazer [...]. Uma narrativa de viagem serve tão bem para o efeito como uma autobiografia em boa e devida forma. A questão está em saber lê-la.

José Saramago, *Manual de pintura e caligrafia*

Manual de pintura e caligrafia (*Manual of painting and calligraphy*, 1977) was the first novel Saramago published after 30 years of «silence». The protagonist is a mediocre painter fed up with his work and with the upper classes that hired him to paint their portraits and chooses to replace the painting with writing. But writing, too, is reflective and abandons him in a state of alienation, away from the vibrant life and the meaning that people around him experience. The novel is located historically near the revolution in Portugal on 25th April 1974. In this article, I shall reveal the dialectic in the titles of the five exercises of autobiography that H. (Saramago) is doing in this novel. I shall try to come to some conclusions which will offer the readers new perspectives deriving from this book.

The title *Manual of painting and calligraphy* is a possible kind of invitation to read in a book that in common is a manual, and it is impossible to ignore the

fascinating insights typically offered by each guide. The two other elements in the title will wisely guide us to two arts that the book deals with: painting and writing. In *Manual of painting and calligraphy*, Saramago excels a deliberate attempt to break through the traditional boundaries of all art. The process of contemplating the protagonist H. passes is an attempt to transcend borders between the two skills and an aspiration to provide impressions and illusions one can find in each of these arts. H. naturally goes through the art of painting and voluntarily enters the craft of writing. In this gradual transition, he does not give up the dominant dimension of the art of painting — which is the space and moves on to the art which centrality is a matter of time. He undoubtedly succeeds in producing a synthesis between the two arts, and thus Saramago's writing employs the fascinating combination of time and space that coexists peacefully and conveys a proper sense of simultaneity, all through the linguistic dimension.

This novel, written in the first person, documents a profound reflection of a man in his fifties who decides at some point to write autobiographical exercises. At the center are five autobiographical exercises, each of which bears a different title and the multiple accompanying meanings that explain the transition to the art of writing. We meet here an ars-poetic book of an artist who speaks of the sources and the processes which direct him to this writing. It is an experienced writer who talks about the cognitive process of writing at the beginning of which he rewrites, copies, learns how to tell about life, especially in the first person, and therefore learns the «art of carefully removing the veil», which represents the familiar words that traditionally speak of truth and lies, historical truth and literary truth. Three great authors come to his mind immediately: Daniel Defoe, who tells the fictional story *Robinson Crusoe*; Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his book *The confessions*; and Marguerite Yourcenar, who wrote an imaginary novel called *Memoirs of Hadrian*.

Everything is dialectic and contains multi-dimensions, like the Renaissance painting (through perspective). I shall demonstrate how the imaginary voyage to Italy in these five exercises is crucial in perceiving Saramago's points of view developed in his later writings:

Now I can clearly see those who were my life-masters, those who most intensively taught me the hard work of living [...] Of those masters, the first was, undoubtedly, a mediocre portrait-painter, whom I called simply H, the main character of a story that I feel may reasonably be called a double initiation (his own, but also in a manner of speaking the author's) entitled *Manual of painting and calligraphy*, who taught me the simple honesty of acknowledging and observing, without resentment or frustration, my own limitations: as I could not and did not aspire to venture beyond

my little plot of cultivated land, all had left was the possibility of digging down, underneath, towards the roots.¹

The first exercise in autobiography in the form of a traveler's tale.
Title: *The impossible chronicles*

The poetics of travel deals mainly with three major areas: **the imaginary journey** that typically reveals classic myths, legendary and allegorical texts from ancient and medieval times as utopian. In the modern literary journey, all images portray without reference to circumstantial perception. **Travel literature** that traditionally relies on historical texts directly produced from trips related to trade and discoveries, of discovery and scientific inquiry, as well as in the remarkable journeys of writers who decide to express in writing their distinct impressions and concrete steps accurately. **A journey of literature** and the problematic of the journey intentionally serve as a literary component. The stories saturated with the imagination and intertextuality in a literary organization (Alzira Seixo 1998: 17).

Travel stories typically characterized by a realistic description of exploring numerous sites. Going on a journey marks a process in which one stops in a specific place to observe, to conduct genuine dialogue properly, to understand, and to write (*ibidem*: 13). From the dawn of culture, the poetics of the journey is full of legendary symbolic stories. Most modern travel stories deal with «human existence» and accurately portray a traveler who, without wishing to, is remotely involved in his story and naturally connects him through remarkable adventures carefully woven throughout the text.

The journey described in *Manual de pintura e caligrafia* is metaphorical, a journey with personal internal time for the protagonist (Saramago himself). It is a journey that typically allows him to lay down in his literary text his world view on religion and its emissaries and about socialism and capitalism, and even his active membership in the Communist Party.

In this first exercise in autobiography [...], I enter Italy on my knees. There I speak of a deity who metes out justice, there on the periphery rises Mecca where pilgrims flock, with whose culture I have nothing in common, whereas I can now see (or saw before) that I share the culture of the pilgrims who crawl (on their knees) to Fatima, along the roads and

1. Extract from the lecture which was given by José Saramago before the Royal Academy of Sweden in the occasion of his Nobel Prize, *How characters became the masters and the author their apprentice* December 7, 1998 (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1998/saramago/lecture/>).

within the sanctuary, making votive offerings, confessing their sins aloud and nourishing Moloch in their own way (Saramago 1994: 82–83).

In Milan, the police entered the university, but the reactionary press wrote articles praising the authorities. It reminded H. of the years of the Spanish War (1936–1939) when Lisbon's police caught the hero of the novel with a low quality printed papers, still damp with ink, protesting fascism. The documents signed by **Frente Popular Portuguesa**, the Communist party to which Saramago belonged.

I was interrogated by the chief of police. I was kept standing while he remained seated. Then they locked me up in a cell for two hours. I was no longer weeping. Slumped in a chair, I was dumbfounded, sitting there in almost total darkness. The guards outside were chatting among themselves while their chief telephoned headquarters two or three times, repeating the same question over and over again: «Should the prisoner be taken below or what?» They finally released me and said I should consider myself fortunate. Those «below» had decided I was not worth bothering about. However, they took my name and address (*ibidem*: 86–87).

The first question provoked from this title is, why are the chronicles impossible? Saramago is employing in this novel a combination between the two defined chronicles done by Carlos Reis in *Dicionário de narratologia* of the **historiography chronicle** and the **press chronicle** (Reis&Lopes 1998:87–89). Saramago is artfully combining the two distinct kinds of chronicles. We confront an attempt here to properly integrate new writing, the style of a chronicle with literature writing. Mostly everything is written in the first person, which is typical to autobiography.

Referring to his experience as a writer of chronicles, Saramago said: «[...] I think that to understand who I am, one must go and read **the chronicles**. The **chronicles** tell everything. (And probably more than the work that came after), what I am as a person, as sensibility, as a perception of things, as understanding the world: all these exist in the **chronicles**»(Reis 1998:42).

Afterward, in this book, he repeats these last sentences and says: «except for the novelist that I became» (*ibidem*: 52).

CR — In 1977, you published a novel called *Manual of painting and calligraphy*; Is that somehow an autobiographical novel? Is it a learning novel? How do you look today at what you called «Essay on romance»?

JS — Today, I look at this as I could not look then, of course. *Manual of painting and calligraphy* is probably an apprenticeship book; but it is also (and I have said it several times) perhaps my most autobiographical book (Reis 1998: 38–39).

CR — why did you subtitle the first edition of *Manual de pintura e caligrafia* to *Ensaio de romance*, and above all, why is that later that subtitle does not appear in subsequent editions? Is it a chance or is there a purpose in it?

JS — I have the title *Ensaio do romance* because I was more or less conscious that there is in this romance something different, a kind of reflection on the Romance itself. *Manual* is a novel that successively makes reflections, a novel in a state of thinking, a good or bad, right or wrong, but this is not what counts. (And at that time I did not think of that), in a certain way you can say that *Manual* is an **Essay of romance**, enters into this classification of the novels that deal with reflections. It would consider to me merely pretentious for someone to think that I arrived at what I am now because this was my first romance, the reason for this an **Essay of romance**. If I were presented with this idea, I would reject it immediately. Well, I entered into a game (that appears in all my works until today), I reversed the terms and proceeded to call *Manual essay of romance*, which offered me some satisfaction, because in fact, as a romance it was an essay, in the sense of the attempt: as one said «let's go there to see what is given by this», and when later on, the book was re-published... (Reis 1998: 139–140).

This **first exercise**, in the form of **voyage narrative**, reveals precisely the direct questions of the necessary connection between the political situation in **Portugal** and those exposed from the voyage to **Milan, Italy**. The voyage to Italy undoubtedly makes it possible for H. to reflect upon writing, upon himself and his country. Selective meaningful memories provide the opportunity to compare between the two fascist regimes (of Italy and Portugal).

Writing in first person is an advantage but it is also akin to amputation [...] If this narrative were not in the first person, I should have found it an even better way of deceiving myself. in this way I should be able to imagine every thought as well as every action and word, and in putting them all together I would believe in the truth of everything, even in any inherent falsehood, because that falsehood, too, would be true (Saramago 1994: 88).

The second exercise in autobiography in the form of a chapter of a book. Title: *I, The Venice biennale*

This exercise is written in a chapter from a book. Chapter in a book typically describes an excerpt from an entire story that provides a beginning, middle, and end. The chapter comprises only one episode within the whole story.

The familiar word Biennale typically contains a **dualism** and means every two years. We know the **Biennale in Venice** is a very prestigious exhibition of the best artists in the world. And over here is H., a mediocre portrait artist, **is and is not** there. H. attends this exhibition but he is conscious of his inability to exhibit good work there. However, H. is an artist and possesses the «**talent**» to observe and appreciate fine art carefully and to reasonably ask the «**proper**» questions upon art and its direct relation to the individual, to practical reality, and society.

Mentioning in this exercise, *Death in Venice* of **Thomas Mann** provides an excellent opportunity to discuss several subjects: the ultimate price that art demands fiercely from an artist; the writer who is writing about another artist, who describes an artist; the art of writing, painting and directing. H. is the aside artist who tries to understand the other artist and his art. By seeing Giotto's paintings, he sincerely wants to experience art as a completed total.

This second exercise, which has more courage in narrating, is also very cautious and precise, and it lost the spontaneous that characterized the first exercise. The dilemma is — **spontaneous opposite to artificial** — what is superior in art. Writing is a more efficient way to reveal the truth. And second writing means «eternal repetition».

My task is now something else: to discover everything I can about S.'s life and put it in writing, to differentiate between **inner truth** and outer skin [...] To separate, divide, confront and understand. To perceive. Precisely what I could never attain while painting (*ibidem*: 15-16).

Second writing, in which we are more conscious, naturally brings the **authentic memories** of the protagonist (Saramago), and the profound sense of being in a «**desert**» is growing: «The second language, without the first, is useful for telling stories and together the two of them constitute the truth» (*ibidem*: 101-102). H. allows himself deliberately wandering without a map or itinerary (*ibidem*: 95). Venice, the only city in the world, declaring its death, she knows it and, being a fatalist, is not unduly concerned: «Between life and death, between the spelling of death and the spelling of life, I go on writing these things» (*ibidem*: 105).

Writing in the first person and weaving the story with personal memories, H. had a conversation with Adelina, his girlfriend, who wants to understand. She said later she did not know he was traveling to Italy:

I don't understand why you've called this article (it is an article, isn't it?) «a first exercise in biography». How can a travel book be considered biography? I'm not sure that it can, I really don't know, but I couldn't find anything more interesting to write about. Either it's a travel book or a genuine autobiography. In any case, why should you want to write your biography? (*ibidem*: 89).

Reality and fiction correctly are a dialectic declaration arising organically through the entire book and in this exercise as well. The fifteenth chapter ends with the hero's proper understanding of the ability or evident inability to accurately translate reality and draw it into art — be it the art of painting or the art of writing.

[...] In a painting these would be two very similar shades of the same color, the color «to be», to be precise. A verb is a color, a noun a symbol. In the desert, only nothingness is everything. Here we separate, distinguish, arrange things in drawers, storerooms and warehouses. We commit everything to biography. Sometimes we give an accurate account, but our judgment is much more reliable when we invent. Invention cannot be compared with reality, therefore it is more likely to be faithful. Reality is untranslatable because it is plastic and dynamic. It is also dialectic. I know something about this because I studied it at one time, because I have painted, because I am writing. Even as I write, the world outside is changing. No image can capture it, the instant does not exist [...] This is not the time for the desert. It is no longer time. It is not yet time (*ibidem*: 105–106).

«**I paint the saint**» is another significant revelation of H. To paint **Saint Antony** is a symbolic action. «**To paint the saint**» is **to conquer the saint** and all that he traditionally represents. It is a way to examine the sanctity of this saint with a critical point of view, which will fill an enormous place in later works (such as in *Memorial do convento*; *O evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo*). Earnestly seeking for the truth in life, in creation, in the smallest nuances of our private entity is the chief concern of the second exercise.

The third exercise in autobiography in the form of the chapter of a book. Title: *The buyer of postcards*

In the **dialectic** process, the contradiction between the «**real art**» and the miniature presented in the postcard is exceptionally significant here. The post-

card represents a kind of «**essence**» of the masterpiece. It also allows the viewer the possibility to confront the artwork in one glance. Mocking the tourists who enter a museum, it is said:

[...] They (the tourists) feel lost in this new kingdom where there is a freedom to be won; that freedom commonly described as a work of art [...] The picture postcard, in the hands of the bewildered traveller, is a surface he can cover easily, something he can take in at a glance, which reduces everything to the tiny dimensions of an inert hand. Because the real work of art awaiting him inside, even when not much bigger, is protected from untrained eyes by an invisible net which the living hands of the painter or sculptor outlined as they laboriously invented the gestures which brought it into being (*ibidem*: 113).

Vitale da Bologna remains the artist that H. will copy one of his paintings, from a postcard in which one can naturally see a structure of an underground prison that these applicable laws bring to absurd. H. will sustain to reproduce this painting, and the prison represented in the postcard will be an implication to reality (his friend Antonio is in prison, Antonio? **Saint Antonio?** Prison?). This exercise enables H. to naturally think about the possible meaning of his «**desert**»:

Desert — to desert. The dictionary defines the first of these as «noun: desolate, uninhabited, uncultivated, solitary place. Abandoned, unfrequented. A place where no one wishes to go. jur. The willful abandonment of a loyal or moral obligation. n. desolate or barren tract: a waste: a solitude». And the dictionary says of the latter: «v.t. to leave: to forsake v.i. to run away: to quit a service, as the army, without permission».

I ask myself how writers and poets have the nerve to write hundreds or thousands of pages, millions upon millions if you put them all together, when a simple dictionary definition or two would suffice, if carefully pondered, to fill these hundreds or thousands or millions upon millions of pages (*ibidem*: 123).

The **desert** is metaphoric; it is not enough; it will have inhabitants to stop being significant to H. feeling of solitude. The farewell letter he received from Adelina causes him to believe that painting is more accessible than writing. He paints without conscious volition but with no chief difficulty. Writing is much more complicated. Choosing the exact words, the significance, the pain in the word of the other, the feeling of being deserted, the sense of loneliness derived by Adelina's words is more significant than any glance on a painting.

History and fiction are other subjects coming out in this exercise, revealing the striking coincidence of the historical events which typically lead the entire world to potential disasters and considerable pain. Jesus and history are relevant when one is visiting **Renaissance** art in Italy. What would all the Christian painters paint if Christianity never exists? And what is brought out of this potential confrontation with art is: Artificial opposite to Reality — Truth; The Apparently opposite to the Revealed; Naïveté opposite to Sobriety; the Exploitation opposite to being exploited; Absurdity opposite to Necessary or to Simplicity; from the «there» (Italy) defined in particular by the aesthetics to the «here», (Portugal) defined as «life» and politics; The approach to «here», to real life, is possible concerning the aesthetic distance.

Perspective represents a sort of illusion in painting, and what about reality? Do we properly look at reasonable things with a perspective approach? Or are we, therefore, engaged in the present that we forget to consider other angles? Christian's painting is a possible way to present the **Aesthetic**, but not the **Ethic**.

The human and supernatural story of Jesus and his rebirth, the frescos and chapels everywhere, the **Aesthetic** is so beautiful, brings us to tears. But all this instantly summon to Saramago, in his unique way (ironic in *O evangelho*, still naive in *Manual*) a limitless possibility to fiercely criticize society, church, naïveté, moral degeneration, misjudgment, de-humanization.

Referring to the **Colonial's War**, the reality in actual time: «Me, alive, while men dying in Africa, Portuguese men whom I sent to their deaths or consented should die, men so much younger than me...» (*ibidem*: 128).

Can Saramago's work be allegedly accused of being a «Conscript Literature»? If *Manual* is a possible kind of a chronicle, as Saramago declared above, is that writing fiction is an efficient vehicle to raise his political ideas? Or by merely mentioning his nationality and belonging, the critical author becomes more human and succeeds admirably in passing his humanistic ideas?

The hero, providing his story in the first person, can no longer escape the historical reality around him. He cannot stay closed in his private studio and paint portraits of wealthy people. He lives peacefully, and many of his people undoubtedly die in the war, and he rightly says they are younger and better than him. Thus, he instantly recalled what Unamuno noted in 1936, against General Millán-Astray, who enthusiastically supported Franco and also the composed hymn of the Spanish at that time (*ibidem*: 128).

The fourth exercise in autobiography in the form of the chapter of a book. Title: *The two hearts of the world*

The two hearts of the world represent another **dialectic** attitude towards the world. The two hearts of the world presented by two beautiful Italian cities: **Florence** and **Sienna**.

Florence — the heart of the world but closed and inaccessible. It is a city of unique masterpieces, in which you can easily get lost, as there are lousy road signs and many monstrous streets. To look for the city center and the Piazza della Signoria is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Florence has supreme self-confidence, to sincerely believe the sophisticated traveler can stroll in its streets without the needed help of a local guide.

Observing the art, H. is contemplating art's life and human life. **Eternity** opposite to **temporarily**, the **existence** opposite to the **transient**. The museum of Uffizi is open to everyone, like all the other museums in the world, but in it, there is an ambitious attempt to contain the «**most admirable art**» in a particular hierarchy as having an aim **to Conquer Eternity**.

And there is **Sienna**, the beloved, the city which genuinely provides H's heart with joy. «Such a friendly place, where everyone appears to have drunk the milk of human kindness» (Saramago 133). Exquisite paintings of **Ambrogio Lorenzetti**, «the most beautiful in the world», and the precious secret of **Sienna**, whispered in his ear that none can ever understand, but he will hear it until his dying day. **Sienna**, with its art that combines **tough** and **delicate** and therefore remains a place where one can choose **to live** but maybe also **to die**.

This **exercise** allows H. to ask himself questions about his writing path, is it an autobiography, in the gap between **Florence and Sienna**? Can he discover a middle way between a painter and an author, because «I am not writing a novel...» (*ibidem*: 137). Therefore, he faces the possible revelation that the difference between the two creations is minimal as the difference between the two tones of the same color.

To write a book means to be related to «**the other**». As a result of this exercise (and this subject will appear in the final exercise too), the conscious of the existence of «**the other**» reveals. H. feels the need for something or someone in his life, but he cannot yet point what he desires precisely. At this stage, «**the others**» are those who seem to be the less important, like **Adelina** and **Sandra**, but they evoke the writing. It will be interesting that when he meets M., his «genuine love», he will not need to write, at least not for a particular time.

In my opinion, everything is biography. I insist with even greater reason, as someone in its pursuit, that everything is autobiography (autobiography? reason?). It (which of them?) enters into everything like a thin blade

being inserted into a slot in a door in order to spring the lock and force entry (*ibidem*: 135).

As we know in the biography of Saramago, at an early age, his parents decided to send him to a technical school so he could serve as a locksmith's apprentice (*ibidem*:138-139). A novel that contains so many autobiographical layers comprises not just a novel telling a life story. It is a novel that tells the birth of a **writer**, of **writing** and is therefore distinctly an **ars-poetic** romance:

I am whispering in my dream and write down that whisper. I do not decipher it, I write it down. I seek phonetic symbols which I put down on paper. And so a language comes to be written which no one can read, let alone understand. The prehistory is so very, very long. Men and women go around there entering and leaving caverns, and the history which will count them (enumerate them, narrate them) remains to be written. Unconsciously those fingers are already counting in my dream. The numbers are letters. It is history (*ibidem*: 140).

H. is contemplating his last writing, and he finds out that it was too **virtuoso** and **witty**, and this is against his will to write **clearly**. Do his own words capture him? Or is it a possible kind of **music** playing on a single string, but with many exceptional gestures that are properly compensating the remarkable lack of other tones? A **fragmentation** writing of dreams «organized here into coherent incoherence» (*ibidem*: 142).

The fifth and final exercise in autobiography in the form of a travel book. Title: *Lights and shadows*

Lights and shadows are a familiar motif in **Renaissance** painting, a massive component in the creation of **perspective** in **Renaissance**. **The choice of Italy and the classic Renaissance era is not casual**. In the **Renaissance**, talented artists wanted to reach **perfection**. They carefully looked for the perfect style and form and struggled on the way in all essential components of the painting.

To achieve an aesthetic illusion of three dimensions, as if it is reality, they intentionally used several possible ways: correct perspective; playing with light and shadow; an aesthetic illusion of successful close and distant; proper proportions; right anatomy; the organic movement; stable compositions; creation of sequence and harmony; sequence in non-sequence; rationale approach; before every painting they prepared beforehand to design; light and shadow as a median to express their ideas.

Does not the art of a refined Renaissance, besides, contain a loss of individual authentic spirituality? In writing, **Saramago** is breaking the specific rules of the Renaissance painting intentionally. Writing, which is **not accurate**, is **fragmentary, personal, associative, poetic, and reported at the same time**.

Lights and shadows are also **dialectics**, which undoubtedly bring closer to reality. **Lights and shadows** are the chief constituents in H.'s life. Many deepening **shadows** wreathed his life through all the autobiography writing, and **Lights** promptly begin to gleam towards the end when M. appeared at his door. But this meeting is not extremely simple as it seems to be. H. feels a kind of **euphoria** as a result of falling in love, but precisely the encounter with M. demands a confrontation with **«real-life»**, happening outside his studio. No more the confrontation with the **distant Renaissance** era, which allows **the aesthetic and ethic distance**. But the next door's neighbors, the nearby streets, in Lisbon, that for a long time H. attempted to ignore. So close and yet so distant, was H. with and near life. Due to her moral virtues, M. demands from him **the aesthetic and ethical closeness**. Sec and sometimes **obscure** writing change into **clear** writing and with **a poetic plenitude**, in which the love scenes between M. and H. are described.

The first remarkable thing perceived by H. in M. is her **eyes**. Examining her eyes for six hours of their conversation caused an enormous change in this **anti-hero**. Until that moment, H. used his **eyes** to observe art masterpieces, so **eyes** and **vision** were very significant, but the look was from the **outside** into the **inside**. And this look correctly is to see «the other carefully», and **the other** is the **woman** M. who is connected to reality and **Portugal**, her corrupt country. She describes **Portugal** as a big prison, so it makes no difference if you are in real prison (like her brother Antonio), or in a metaphoric prison. The leaders created draconic laws and life similar to a prison, also when you are so-called **«free and happy»**.

The metaphysical aspiration towards the «other» is the same transcendental aspiration to the other in absolute terms. Something that accurately expresses the imperfection in us, the profound sense of something we have undoubtedly lost and must find. Only genuine love can be carefully considered the evident satisfaction of this hunger. Being «yourself» and being in touch with the other.

M. interests me because I spent six hours conversing with her without ever feeling tired or praying for silence. M. interests me because she has a forthright way of addressing people, a manner of speaking which cuts no corners, penetrates walls, cuts through all physical and mental reservations. M. interests me because she is a beautiful woman and because she is intelligent or vice versa. In a word: I am interested in M. [...] With age and experience we learn to use words with caution. We misuse them,

put them back to front without noticing, until one day we discover they are as threadbare as old clothes [...] New faces are appearing on the horizon of my desert [...] And M. who smiles at me from afar [...] who use words as if they were glass splinters and who suddenly approaches and kisses me? I repeat: the hour of fear is nigh. Perfection fleetingly exists [...] «I've certainly enjoyed meeting you». She said. Taking the utmost care with my lettering. I wrote these words over and over again. I travel slowly. Time is this paper on which I write (*ibidem*: 204–208).

This exercise moves from the «**aesthetic distance**» to the «**ethic proximity**». To be a painter of portraits, is it **Narcissism** or a possibility to straighten your look into the mirror and see yourself and the other? To penetrate «**the self**», so the portrait becomes a self-portrait?

This **exercise** proves once again that the choice of Italy is not accidental. **Italy**, «**the cradle of art**» is also «**the cradle of Fascism**». **The first exercise** starts the voyage from **Milan**, where graffiti is calling for **freedom** are noticed on the city walls, and **final exercise** brings us to **Rome, Todi**, and **Naples** in which graffiti praises the **Neo-Fascist**, and pictures of **Mussolini** are still sold in shops. Italy and its art are only a reasonable excuse to be related to the «**here and now**» of Portugal, and **autobiography disguised in fiction**, is a creative way to describe a whole bunch of ideas, feelings, and thoughts.

H. is describing a journey from **Milan to Rome** — The Fascism is in the background. No doubt, a relative political connection is learned from **Italy to Portugal**. The fascism doctrine presented by **Mussolini** (Saramago 1994: 152), instantly reminds us of the active presence of the dictators of that time: **Franco, Hitler, and Salazar** (Saramago 1994: 185). H. mentions that **Neo-Fascism** still exists in Italy. It is a historical paradox that in such a cultural environment, where great art could grow — also fascism can flourish.

Finishing all the exercises, H. concludes that all of them are worthless without the **interpretation** presenting after each one of them. He adequately understands that as voyage memory, as a tourist guide, purely aesthetic describing in these exercises, nothing is exciting more than a modest gesture of a **Sunday painter**. The significant voyage is towards life, towards writing, of contact with death to live and to become more considerable towards thou self and respect yourself.

But these pages exist and my task remains unfinished. The exercises, yes, but not what came before. Certain things are now becoming clearer. I would even go so far as to say that they now seem quite obvious, whereas in the past there was only chaos and confusion. They represented another kind of labyrinth, undoubtedly reducible to a straight line but re-

sisting any such reduction, becoming entangled and compressing the spaces and making circulation impossible (*ibidem*: 154-155).

Everything is dialectic, and like the **Renaissance** painting, which presents **multi-dimensions** (through perspective), nothing contains **one dimension**. Such is H. ambition in his first writings to present a **multi-dimensioned** world, something that will remain a crucial issue in later works of **Saramago**. A permanent dialectic obtains a kind of **polyphony**, existing already in *Manual*, and develops enormously in other books.

To conclude:

Manual is not an autobiography book just due to the exercises of autobiography. However, due to the significant contacts with **Saramago's** life, diffused in this book mentioned above in the dialogues with Carlos Reis (1998), in the Nobel Speech, I quoted above, and upon which he declared in his diary and many interviews.

In his *O caderno* (2009), which are texts he wrote in his blog, Saramago wrote a text he titles: *Biografias*:

Creio que todas as palavras que vamos pronunciando, todos os movimentos e gestos, concluídos somente esboçados, que vamos fazendo, cada um deles e todos juntos, podem ser entendidos como peças soltas de uma autobiografia não intencional que, embora involuntária, ou por isso mesmo, não seria menos sincera e veraz que o mais minucioso dos relatos de uma vida passada à escrita e ao papel (Saramago 2009: 33).

Umberto Eco, who was asked to write a preface to this diary published in Italy, wrote:

Saramago *blogger* é um zangado. Mas haverá realmente um hiato entre esta prática de indignação diária sobre o transeunte e a actividade de escrita de «opúsculos morais» válidos tanto para os tempos passados como para os futuros? Escrevo este prefácio porque sinto ter alguma experiência em comum com o amigo Saramago, que é a de escrever livros (por um lado) e por outro a de nos ocuparmos de crítica de costumes num semanário. Sendo o segundo tipo de escrita mais claro e divulgador que o outro, muita gente me tem perguntado se eu não despejaria nas pequenas peças periódicas reflexões mais amplas feitas nos livros maiores. Não, respondo eu, ensina-me a experiência (mas creio que o ensina a todos os que se encontrarem em situação análoga) que é impulso de irritação, a dica satírica, a chicotada crítica escrita à pressa, que fornecerá a seguir o material para uma reflexão ensaística ou narrativa mais desenvolvida. É a

escrita diária que inspira as obras de maior empenho, e não o contrário. Por isso, o público de **O caderno não é necessariamente o mesmo que o dos romances, pois nele Saramago se aproxima da crônica.** (Eco 2009, my emphasis).

Baptista-Bastos, a friend of Saramago met his in Lanzarote and published his interview in a book:

BB — Mas o *Manual* contém aspectos **autobiográficos**.

S — O caso do *Manual* é bastante estranho porque é talvez **o meu livro mais autobiográfico**, não no que tem a ver com o que sucedeu ao pintor, porque aí tudo isso é pura imaginação, mas há referências, pequenas notas, ao longo do livro que são como *flashes*, iluminações, imagens que me ficaram desse tempo (Baptista-Bastos 1996: 29).

BB — Saramago, porém, escrevera, anteriormente, um romance portentoso, *Manual de pintura e caligrafia*, que rasga horizontes novos aos horizontes até então visíveis do romance português. E, da minha opinião, o primeiro romance português de situações, organizado na convicção de que cada fragmento narrativo constitui parte de um conjunto universal, sendo também, um universo em si mesmo [...] É, também, **o romance mais autobiográfico do autor**, tomando esta classificação com todas as precauções devidas. Uma autobiografia transporta uma confissão remançada e remanejada, na qual ele se julga a si próprio, aos seus sentimentos em ruptura, às suas perplexidades políticas e morais, através não só da personagem principal como das relações criadas pelos silêncios e pelas demoradas descrições (*ibidem*: 72-73).

We can also find a reference to autobiography in Juan Arias's book that is also an interview with Saramago.

No meu caso, creio que há **uma coerência muito forte entre a pessoa que sou**, a vida que tenho, a vida que vivi e o que escrevo... Quem está a contá-las sou eu. O espaço que existe entre o autor e a narração por vezes é ocupado pelo narrador, que age intermediário, por vezes como filtro, que existe para filtrar o que possa ser demasiado pessoal (Arias 1998: 26).

And also

[...] **Os meus livros, os meus romances, são a minha biografia**, mas não uma biografia corrente, em que passaria ao romance o que está a

acontecer. Não, são biografias num sentido mais profundo, não no circunstancial. O que acontece... é que apareça perante o leitor a pessoa que sou... (*ibidem*: 56- 61).

The external journey serves only as a simulation exercise in thinking and imagination, in a possible and impossible chronicle. The journey is the journey of one single person. There is no journey here with people, no journey on people. In one or two sentences, the people of numerous cities are mentioned, and always in sentences that possess the taste of judgment.

The book deals with visual objects, which penetrate the eyes. Vision represents a kind of metaphor, a projection of the journey toward inner content, and is related to responsibility, solidarity, and love. The motif of sight that appears already in this early book will carefully pass through the other books of Saramago.² Here the hero «sees but does not see» simultaneously. It is an innovative way to glance from the outside to the inside. A comprehensive view that typically allows the esthetic distance that seems to be necessary for those who paint and those who write.

Blindness or seeing are issues that bother Saramago, in their allegorical sense or their metaphorical symbol. Some examples: the protagonists in the novel *Blindness*; the blind muezzin in *The history of the siege of Lisbon*; or Fernando Pessoa in *The year of the death of Ricardo Reis*, who can no longer read after his death; and Blimunda in *Baltasar and Blimunda* who can see into the bodies of the people.

The «vision», not in its physiological sense, is inherent to a few. Every Saramago's novel has a rebellious hero who says «no» in one way or another. Hero or heroine (in many cases, the woman is the heroine who sees), who is unwilling to continue to surrender to this vision's castration. In *Blindness*, people lose their will, and losing the desire means losing sight, the understanding that can be otherwise.

Vision and blindness are directly related to free choice and moral responsibility. Sight and blindness relate to the body performances of men and women

2. **To look, see and observe** are different ways of using the organ of sight, each with its own intensity, even when there is some deterioration, for example, to look without seeing, when someone is distracted, a common situation in traditional novels, or to see and not notice, when the eyes out of weariness and boredom avoid anything likely to tax them. Only by observing can we achieve full vision, when at a given moment or successively, our attention becomes concentrated, which may just as easily result from a conscious decision as from an involuntary state of synesthesia, whereby what is seen pleads to be seen once more, thus passing from one sensation to another, arresting, slowing down the process of looking, as if the image were about to be produced in two different places in the brain with a temporal discrepancy of a hundredth of a second... (Saramago José, *The history of the siege of Lisbon* 1996: 146).

in every circle. If I see — it means that I understand, I can choose, and I can do otherwise; I am morally responsible for my actions. If I see — I can lead society to another place, where brotherhood and possible solidarity exists between human beings.

Saramago minimizes bodily descriptions, and thus allows us readers to activate the imagination and «beauty is definitely in the eyes of the beholder». In *Manual*, endless sentences are reoffering to the eyes. Eyes who see the beauty of Italy and its treasures. Eyes of the people he painted, the eyes of the women he met during his life. The different look on M., which changes the way he looks at «the other», especially her, but also her parents and the people outside his studio.

Lingering in the doorway, M. stood there looking at me. The first thing I noticed was her eyes: bright, hazel, tawny, the color of gold, big and open, staring at me like windows and who knows, perhaps more open inwardly than outwardly. The hair, short, the same color as her eyes but then darker under the electric light [...] **But let me remind you that there have been six hours of eyes**, words, and pauses. It was only in the restaurant, for example, that I became aware of that curious tremor on her lips which the waning evening light in my apartment had prevented me from noticing sooner (Saramago 1994: 196 my emphasis).

Beauty is inner, and the absence of beauty is also internal. It is difficult to draw the portrait of the protagonists, but when they see the inner face of the person standing in front of them and experiencing feelings of love they can see the ugliest man/woman as if they are beautiful, as in the description in *Baltasar and Blimunda*:

this aging couple is the scandal of the town of Mafra as they hug each other in the public square, but perhaps because they have never had any children, they still think of themselves as being younger than they are, poor deluded creatures, or perhaps they are the only two human beings who see themselves as they really are, which is the most difficult thing of all, and now watching them together, even we can perceive that they have suddenly become physically transformed (Saramago 1987: 312).

There is a difference in the physical behavior of the men versus the women. Most of the male characters in Saramago's work appear as behaving in a way that indicates physical violence. Blind people use violent language and beat other blinds. Blinds rape women, and their behavior is aggressive. Soldiers holding weapons and behaving differently than they might have been in their

civilian lives can be found not only in the novel *Blindness* but also in other novels such as *Seeing* or *Death with interruptions*. The blind people neither inside the mental institution neither see themselves nor through the other. The doctor's wife also does not see herself in the mirror, but only through the others.

The gaze always requires distance — I see myself through the other. Brotherhood is connected to the gaze and not to the activity. The fellowship is a kind of gaze that passes through the eyes, so the power of fraternity is in the power of the seer. While visual ability is neutral, vision is not neutral, and it depends on the way we see and reflect our emotional modus. The gaze requires closeness, and the farther something is, and the less we see it. To see your gaze, I have to see your eyes; therefore, what determines the gaze as compassion is sometimes physical proximity.

On the other hand, an existential distance intensifies alienation. H. is confessing that the eyes of M. were the moment when he started to see her. The first thing noticed by H. in M. is her **eyes**. Looking into her eyes for another six hours of their conversation made a significant change in this **anti-hero**. Until that moment, H. used his **eyes** to observe art masterpieces, so **eyes** and **vision** were very substantial, but the look was from the **outside** into the **inside**, while now he looks from the **inside** to the **outside**. And this look is to observe «**the other**», and «**the other**» is the **woman**.

I suggest the possibility of «moral contemplation», and one may ask: Is there such a thing? To explain what I mean, I will contrast it with what I call «immoral contemplation», which is a degrading, humiliating, threatening, frightening observation. It is how most of Saramago's characters behave like a herd; people who are willing to accept what is before them without rebelling against it. Heroes that we can say that they have «moral contemplation» are those who are unwilling to take anything that is imposed on them and is, therefore, extraordinary, and the story is about them. It is the free choice against determinism: When I believe in the deterministic worldview, then everything is predetermined, and I become one of the herds. When I'm not ready to accept the verdict, I'm unusual. For example, Raimundo Silva and the famous «No» in *The history of the siege of Lisbon*, who looks at history with a moral eye. He does not agree to leave the «yes» of most people, even when they are led as a herd to commit crimes in the name of religion (the Crusades, or the killing of Muslims during the siege). Blimunda and Baltasar in the novel *Baltasar and Blimunda*, two simple, illiterate figures manage to emerge from this deterministic world and choose to join the priest, the man of a vision, who has come out against the church.

Although the history of literature proved that estimated literature could flourish in a harsh atmosphere, the author of *Manual* is manifesting that strict rules, like those adopted by **Renaissance** art, are not always an advantage. To

develop an unusual perspective, one has to «**release**» himself from «these laws» so that «truth» is not necessarily «**the appeared**».

H. in «Manual» is a master of purely purposeful art. For the sake of livelihood, there is no spirituality in his art. Painting has become for him an art that takes out the power of spirit, and therefore H. appeals to the art of the word — where he thinks there is still more spirituality. H. is a master of contemporary art, portraiture, producing works of art without enthusiasm, working with chilled heart, and dormant soul. Painting portraits is a short-lived art, and in a moral sense, it ends when the atmosphere that created it changed (his minority of clients).

Isn't the Renaissance the perfect art is also taking out certain spirituality? And perhaps the apparent object of these paintings allows for spiritual continuity, although it sometimes becomes a kind of «Production line»' of religious themes. (The Crucifixion of Jesus, Jesus' descent from the cross, saints and their lives, St. Mary, and many more).

H. chooses literature — using words because the word has two meanings — one direct and the other inner — this is the pure material of poetry and literature, the material that only this art can use and by which it speaks to the soul.

In Manuel, one art must learn from other art, and learning must be fundamental. The comparison brings them together in the reunification of the inner aspiration. Each art has its powers to fill its place with the skills of another craft. The dialectic in this book between the art of painting, sculpture with the renaissance art he found in Italy and the art of writing brings forward the question of harmony that is first and foremost based on the principle of contrast, and it is the highest principle of the art of all ages. However, our distinction is the inner contrast, which stands alone and rejects any assistance (which is now bothersome and unnecessary) from principles from other harmonies.

H. goes from the principle of perspective, typical of the Renaissance painting, to the «area of thought» and then he adopts the literature. H. felt that he had to choose for himself art by which he could express his true freedom, but also his honesty, the «inner necessity». *Manual*, however, exists in the primary writing — something primeval, immature, but with the message of a promising unique fiction of Saramago to be followed.

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