

# An intertextual Intertwining of Mystic Nationalisms; Saramago's Post-Modern Challenge to the Pessoaan and Salazarist Discourses in *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*

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Approaching contemporary Portuguese fiction in light of its relationship to questions of national identity and the post-modern concern with exposing fissures in the monoliths of History, an exceptionally complex and fruitful starting point is José Saramago's 1984 novel, *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*. This work is a clear attempt to deconstruct and problematize the symbols and ultranationalist ideology of Salazar's Estado Novo'. By re-presenting many of the historical events as well as the socio-economic and political landscape of 1936 Lisbon, Saramago effectively demonstrates the relativity and propagandistic nature of the official, repressive, reductionist discourses controlled by the Salazar regime.

Saramago, however, has a larger project in mind than a simple dismantling of Salazar's proto-fascist political ideology. Thus, while refraining from a direct analysis of Portugal's contemporary situation, he illuminates much of the problematic grounding; perhaps most clearly and troublingly visible in the Salazarist appropriations and manifestations; of still pervasive if perhaps no longer dominant discourses on Portuguese national identity. Saramago, it would seem, is distrustful

of any universalizing, reifying, mythic, or utopian discourse that would define Portugal or a Portuguese messianic vocation. Demonstrating, as Ellen Sapega has put it, "a lack of confidence in the traditional or pedagogical discourses of identity", Saramago contrasts and intertwines the Salazarist discourse with a number of other corresponding and competing discourses, in what might be read as an effort to relativize all potentially reductionist uses of language. He encourages a reflection on History in general terms, unveiling the discursive mechanisms of its construction. He achieves this in *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis* through what Helena Kaufman has termed "historiographic commentary":

Este tipo de comentário historiográfico, que reflecte sobre o construir da História, constrói uma das características essenciais que distinguem a ficção histórica contemporânea do romance histórico tradicional. . . . Somente na ficção histórica contemporânea a História em si surge como tema que recebe tratamento reflexivo-historiográfico ó correspondente às tendências da historiografia actual. Enquanto a metaficção historiográfica, como o romance de Saramago, continua a

recorrer a uma visão metafórica da História ou da relação presente/passado, a visão utópica foi totalmente rejeitada e substituída pelo olhar irónico e consciente (132-33).

This historiographic commentary is sustained by the revelations and observations of an omniscient and critical narrator and the reflections, conversations, and respective gazes of two primary characters who bring to the text their own historical dimension and immense discursive baggage. Through these two characters; Fernando Pessoa, Portugal's most celebrated poet since Camões, and one of Pessoa's heteronym's, Ricardo Reis; Saramago introduces into the narrative the Pessoaan discourse — "um grande intertexto cultural português", as Kaufman describes it (131) — which then engages throughout the novel in a dialogue, directly and indirectly, with the Salazarist ultranationalist political narration of the Portuguese nation.

It is this dimension of Saramago's novel that I would like to explore in this paper: the juxtaposition and intertwining of the Pessoaan and the Salazarist discourses, and the implicit critique of both thus made by the author. As Fernando Arenas has written:

O regresso de Ricardo Reis a Portugal em 1936 (um ano depois da morte de Fernando Pessoa) implica a sua inserção na História (aqui o Ano do título do romance é crucial). ... a inserção do Ricardo Reis-personagem e Fernando Pessoa-personagem fantasma na História (no Portugal Salazarista), que permite ao autor de fazer, duma parte, uma crítica mordaz ao regime de Salazar, e doutra parte, uma crítica igualmente mordaz ao Fernando Pessoa-ente político e ao Ricardo Reis-ente estético, que reflete até certo ponto o modo de estar político do seu criador (39).

In discussing this complex intertextuality and metatextuality, it will be useful to

explore in greater detail Pessoa's own concerns with reformulating and reinvigorating the Portuguese national identity/mythological discourse in an era of relative socio-economic stagnation and political instability. Without intending a conveniently reductionist reading of Pessoa's literary output and its powerful existential and spiritual dimensions, for the purposes of this essay the exploration of Pessoa's work will be confined to the surface level evidence of his political ideology and its relationship to the Salazarist rhetoric and symbolism that Saramago resurrects in his novel.

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Perhaps the most apparent intersections of Pessoaan thematics and Salazarist political rhetoric and symbolism center around the utopian discourse of the imminent advent of King Sebastian's Fifth Empire. Under the leadership of a single, unifying spiritual and political figure, Portugal was to emerge as the center of a European empire which would be truly global. As Pessoa wrote in defense of Portugal's privileged bid for the position of leader of a new world order:

Este critério tem a confirmá-lo a própria sociologia da nossa civilização. Esta é formada, tal qual está hoje, por quatro elementos [inherited from the First through Fourth Empires as identified by Pessoa]: a cultura grega, a ordem romana, a moral cristã, e o individualismo inglês. Resta acrescentar-lhe o espírito de universalidade, que deve necessariamente surgir do carácter policontinental da actual civilização. Até agora não tem havido senão civilização europeia; a universalização da civilização europeia é forçosamente o mister do Quinto Império (Portugal, Sebastianismo e Quinto Império 123-124).

Pessoa also grounded his conception of a Portuguese-led Fifth Empire in his characterization of the distinct nature of the past

imperial mission of the Portuguese. The ancient imperial impulse of the Portuguese aspired to the discovery of new lands and the conversion of their populations to Christianity, rather than simple material domination. The idea of conquest was, according to Pessoa, never a factor of great importance in the Portuguese colonial experience. It was his assertion that Portugal was the European nation that had exhibited toward, and inspired in, other races and nations the least amount of hatred, thus favoring it as a globally unifying force. Pessoa verifies his assertion with a specific differentiation between Portuguese and English imperialisms:

Os índios da Índia inglesa dizem que são índios, os da Índia portuguesa que são portugueses. Nisto, que não provém de qualquer cálculo nosso, está a chave do nosso possível domínio futuro. Porque a essência do grande imperialismo é o converter os outros em nossa substância, o converter os outros em nós mesmos (Portugal, Sebastianismo e Quinto Império 129).

Pessoa, thus, conceived of the Portuguese Fifth Empire as cultural, spiritual, and linguistic/literary rather than material: "an imperialism of poets"; or the Portuguese language as the fatherland, transcending the traumatic experience of geo-political and economic decline Portugal had suffered since the sixteenth century. As Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos writes: "The 'broken tradition' of the Portuguese seaborne empire will thus be made to give way to an imperialism of language and of poetry" (89). Pessoa's self-appointed mission, revealing his literary as well as nationalistic/patriotic aspirations, was to re-invigorate Sebastianism with new poetic life, to recuperate and transform the myth of the Fifth Empire as a "credible fiction", as a transcendent spiritual and

unifying force. Pessoa felt that Sebastianism was unique as a salvageable source of national inspiration and unity. As Gilbert R. Cavado has noted, as early as 1912, Pessoa had prophesized the coming of a "Super-Camões" as well as a man of political force and power who would restore Portugal to its former glory and triumphantly usher in a Luso-European civilization of truly global dimensions (61). And as Pessoa asserted in writings from 1924:

O sebastianismo tem sido incompreendido. Tomado por uns como sendo uma mera superstição popular, por outros como um devaneio imperialista da decadência, o facto é que ele tem sido, em geral, tido por assunto desprezível e obscuro . . . . Desprezível está longe de serótanta pela razão, estritamente exotérica [sic] e sociológica, de que o sebastianismo é o único movimento profundamente nacional que tem havido entre nós, tendo toda a força de um movimento religioso, que é, e todo aquele cunho nacional que falta a todos os movimentos políticos entre nós . . . (Portugal, Sebastianismo e Quinto Império 133).

Pessoa's concerns with fictionalizing into poetic language, and thus revitalizing, the Sebastianist myth would coalesce into *Mensagem*. Exploring the rich thematics of Portugal's past glories and its fall into relative obscurity; the fog into which Sebastian disappeared and from which will inevitably return; Pessoa also appoints himself as the singer of the Fifth Empire. As Santos writes:

The poet's task is then to recreate the myth as fiction in the language of poetry, such being the only credible future Portugal could still hope for. In other words, *Mensagem* as the Fifth Empire.

So, *Mensagem* must be understood as Pessoa's vision of Portugal's possible fulfillment as a nation, but way beyond national-

ism, as the very change of title — from Portugal to *Mensagem* — also stresses (89).

The ideological utility and quasi-religious, populist potential of Sebastianismo was far from lost to the Salazar regime. For Pessoa, the nationalist evocation of the mythologized glories of Portuguese imperial history and its idealized, distinguished nature in the face of rival (and equally doomed) European imperial projects was a spiritual rather than material endeavor; the fount of a poetic renaissance that would be the cornerstone of a new utopian project of Christian/Portuguese cultural imperialism. For the ideologues of the Estado Novo, however, the exploitation of the myths of the past and the messianic discourse of Sebastianism and the Fifth Empire took on two very real political/material dimensions, as identified by Helena Kaufman. First, it became the moral justification for the existence and defence of the still remaining African and Asian colonial holdings, "em nome da protecção de 'raças inferiores'-um 'imperativo categórico da história que as gerações presentes e futuras devem perpetuar." Secondly, it infused the regime with a global mission, transforming Salazar into "o salvador da moralidade cristã resumida na trindade Deus, Pátria, Família, no salvador da civilização ocidental na sua luta contra a heresia comunista" (134).

Saramago; via his narrator, the exceptionally naïve readings by Reis of press accounts and the text of his surroundings, and the tired, perhaps disillusioned comments by Pessoa; denounces the ideological appropriation of a reifying narration of Portuguese identity and destiny. He challenges not only the Salazarist "orgulhosamente sós" doctrine of Portuguese supremacy and its messianic role in a newly emerging world order, but also, indirectly and with

great irony, the nationalist, "glorious past, glorious future" construction of identity represented or poetically re-prophesized in the Pessoaan literary discourse:

Diz-se, dizem-no os jornais, quer por sua própria convicção, sem recado mandado, quer porque alguém lhes guiou a mão, se não foi suficiente sugerir e insinuar, escrevem os jornais, em estilo de tetralogia, que, sobre a derrocada dos grandes Estados, o português, o nosso, afirmará a sua extraordinária força e a inteligência reflectida dos homens que o dirigem. Virão a cair, portanto, e a palavra derrocada lá está a mostrar como e com que apocalíptico estrondo, essas hoje presunçosas nações que arrotam de poderosas, grande é o engano em que vivem, pois não tardará muito o dia, fasto sobre todos nos anais desta sobre todas pátria, em que os homens de Estado de além-fronteiras virão às lusas terras pedir opinião, ajuda, ilustração, mão de caridade, azeite para a candeia, aqui, aos fortíssimos homens portugueses . . . (Saramago 81).

Specifically addressing the political and even commercial appropriation of, or appeals to, the Fifth Empire discourse and the popular spiritual devotion to the Virgin of Fátima, Reis' thoughts, despite his pagan intellectual nature, are pursued by a statement of the exceptional religious fidelity of the Portuguese people: "Fiados de Deus e Nossa Senhora desde Afonso Henriques à Grande Guerra." Though he cannot remember whether it appeared in a newspaper, a speech or sermon, or on an advertisement for a mysterious product called Bovril,

a forma fascina-o tanto quanto o sentido, é um dizer eloquente, estudado para mover os sentimentos e afervorar os corações, receita de sermão, além de ser, por sua expressão sentenciosa, prova irrefutável de que somos um povo eleito, . . . é verdade que

chegámos atrasados à construção do quinto império, passou-nos adiante Mussolini, porém não nos escapará o sexto, ou o sétimo, . . . Que já estamos no bom caminho é o que se recolhe da declaração proferida por sua excelência o senhor presidente da República . . . , disse ele assim, Portugal é hoje conhecido em toda a parte e por isso vale a pena ser português, sentença esta que não fica atrás da primeira, ambas enxundiosas, que o apetite de universalidade nunca nos falte, esta volúpia de andar nas bocas do mundo, depois de no mar alto termos andado . . . (313).

Saramago's (and Pessoa's) Ricardo Reis; athlete and perpetual political spectator if far from actor; is less than immune to the power and draw of this rhetoric, presumably like the old men who spend their days looking longingly or, perhaps, instinctively toward the sea:

Reis . . . reentrou no mundo exterior pela porta grande da patriótica afirmação do senhor presidente. . . . [E]stavam lá os velhos a ver chegar os barcos que vinham visitar a terra prometida de que tanto se falava nas nações, e não percebiam por que entravam tantos, embandeirados em arco, apitando as festivas sereias, com a marinhagem alinhada nos conveses em continência, . . . valeu a pena esperar oitocentos anos para sentir o orgulho de ser português. Do Alto de Santa Catarina oito séculos te contemplam, ó mar, os dois velhos, o magro e o gordo, enxugam a lágrima furtiva, lastimosos de não poderem ficar por toda a eternidade neste miradouro a ver entrar e sair os barcos, isso é o que lhes custa, não a curteza das vidas (314).

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Despite the obvious common groundings of the Pessoaan and Salazarist discourses juxtaposed in Saramago's novel, the relationship between Pessoa's politics and those of

Salazar's Estado Novo is much more complex. Although Pessoa often rhetorically attempted to distance himself from the overtly political; "Não tenho sentimento nenhum político ou social. Tenho, porém, num sentido, um alto sentimento patriótico." (qtd. in Simões 610); he wrote extensively, if not lucidly, about his ever-shifting political philosophy. As Gilbert Cavaco summarizes the poet's politics: "Fernando Pessoa was against the monarchy, the concept of democracy, communism, socialism, fascism, and António Salazar" (70).

As discussed in Robert Brechón's biography, the question of Pessoa's relationship with the Salazar regime remains a source of controversy. Ingel Crespo flatly asserts that Pessoa, from the beginning, was opposed to the dictatorship. According to Alfredo Margarido, Pessoa was, from the beginning, a complicit supporter of the regime and only broke with it openly in the early months of 1935: "os anos 1933-1934 são, pois, um período de colaboração com o poder" (qtd. in Brechón 535). Brechón himself draws a conclusion from this debate favoring the position of Margarido:

. . . [S]e pode concluir que em 1932-1933 Pessoa não é nem um salazarista fervoroso nem um anti-salazarista convicto. A sua adesão ao "Estado Novo" é racional, e provisória. "Margarido parece-me resumir bem a sua posição ao dizer que 'Pessoa, como tantos outros portugueses, hesitou perante a Ditadura, apoiando-a, antes de começar a duvidar, não da ideia de Ditadura, mas dos homens que a geriam.'" Como muitos dos seus compatriotas, ele espera um salvador para o País (537).

Saramago, to his credit, does little to clarify or simplify and much to further problematize Pessoa's relationship with the Salazar regime. Saramago permits his Pessoa a number of direct and harsh critiques and

ironic characterizations of the dictatorship, including an intertextual reference to a series of satirical, anti-salazarist poems, including "Sim, é o Estado Novo", "Poema de Amor em Estado Novo" and "António Oliveira Salazar" which were actually published posthumously (Pessoa, *Páginas de Pensamento Político-2* 81-86):

você sabe que eu, um dia, fiz aí uns versos contra o Salazar, E ele, deu pela sátira, suponho que seria sátira, Que eu saiba, não, Diga-me, Fernando, quem é, que é este Salazar que nos calhou em sorte, ... o ditador português, o protector, o pai, o professor, o poder manso, um quarto de sacristão, um quarto de sibila, um quarto de Sebastião, um quarto de Sidónio, o mais apropriado possível aos nossos hábitos e índole (Saramago 270).

Saramago's Pessoa-ghost, in a conversation with Reis, ironically critiques the Salazarist ideological appropriation of Portuguese religious sentiment; the troubling political use of God and the self-styled messianic role of Salazar:

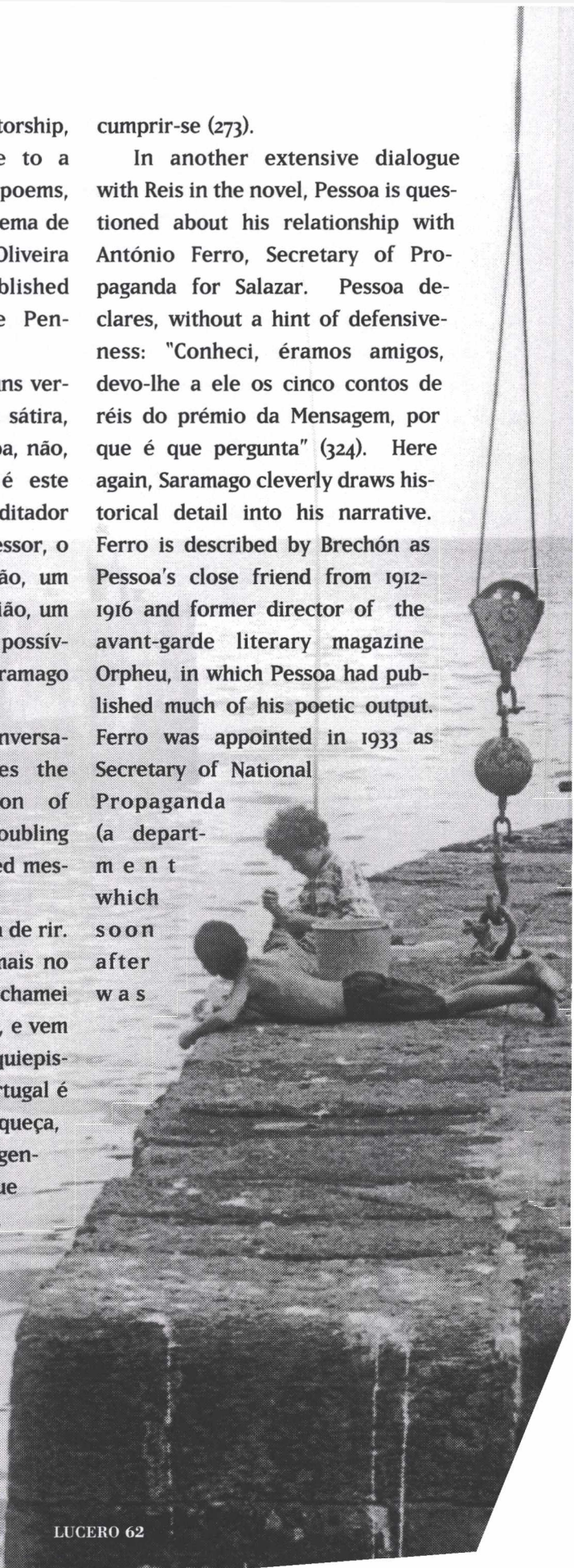
Ai esta terra, repetiu, e não parava de rir. Eu a julgar que tinha ido longe de mais no atrevimento quando na Mensagem chamei santo a Portugal, lá está, São Portugal, e vem um príncipe da Igreja, com a sua arqui-episcopal autoridade, e proclama que Portugal é Cristo, E Cristo é Portugal, não esqueça, Sendo assim, precisamos de saber, urgentemente, que virgem nos pariu, que diabo nos tentou, que judas nos traiu, que pregos nos crucificaram, que túmulo nos esconde, que ressurreição nos espera, . . . nem sequer precisávamos de receber o Salazar de presente, somos nós o próprio Cristo, Você não devia ter morrido tão novo, meu caro Fernando, foi uma pena, agora é que Portugal vai

cumprir-se (273).

In another extensive dialogue with Reis in the novel, Pessoa is questioned about his relationship with António Ferro, Secretary of Propaganda for Salazar. Pessoa declares, without a hint of defensiveness: "Conheci, éramos amigos, devo-lhe a ele os cinco contos de réis do prémio da Mensagem, por que é que pergunta" (324). Here again, Saramago cleverly draws historical detail into his narrative. Ferro is described by Brechón as Pessoa's close friend from 1912-1916 and former director of the avant-garde literary magazine *Orpheu*, in which Pessoa had published much of his poetic output. Ferro was appointed in 1933 as Secretary of National

Propaganda

(a department which soon afterwards



renamed Secretary of Information) (Brechón 537). That same year he published a book of conversations, entitled very simply *Salazar*, in which the dictator is compared to the *Desejado*:

And it would be said now that the profile of Dr. Oliveira Salazar had been lost in the mist like the *Desejado* when a wave of the revolution, still in motion, brought him again to the Terreiro do Paço, to the Ministry of Finances (qtd. in Cavaco 66).

Pessoa, in reality as in Saramago's fiction, adamantly rejected the construction of Salazar's image as a saviour or messiah ushering in the awaited Fifth Empire. He is said to have refused receipt of Ferro's book, and instead thanked him with a line of gently ironic condemnation, "exprimindo a sua 'inteira admiração pela firmeza sùtil e a mestria publicitária' demonstradas pelo amigo" (Brechón 538). Saramago's Pessoa offers a far less gentle critique of Ferro:

Disse António Ferro, na ocasião de entrega dos prémios, que aqueles intelectuais que se sentem encarcerados, nos regimes de força, mesmo quando essa força é mental, como a que dimana Salazar, esquecem-se de que a produção intelectual se intensificou sempre nos regimes de ordem, Essa da força mental é muito boa, os portugueses hipnotizados, os intelectuais a intensificarem a produção sob a vigilância do Victor, . . . O Ferro é tonto, achou que o Salazar era o destino português, O messias, Nem isso o pároco que nos baptiza, crisma, casa e encomenda, Em nome da ordem, Exactamente, em nome da ordem (325-326).

This outburst is followed by a very clever exchange between Reis and Pessoa, which relativizes Saramago's own revisionist representation of Pessoa, and perhaps challenges any attempts at a reified understanding of political dimensions of Pessoa's

thought:

Você em vida, era menos subversivo, tanto quanto me lembro, Quando se chega a morto vemos a vida doutra maneira, e, com esta decisiva, irrespondível frase me despeço, irrespondível digo, porque estando você vivo não pode responder (326).

Despite Pessoa's anti-Salazarist sentiments and rejection of the notion of the *Estado Novo* as the awaited Fifth Empire, certain discernibly consistent aspects of his political philosophy closely paralleled those of the dictatorship, and there are at least two gestures of active collaboration, via his relationship with Ferro, with the regime. First, as Ferro actively began to develop an official discourse which was to construct the spiritual dimension of the regime; a "política do Espírito", as Ferro borrowed the concept of Paul Valéry; Pessoa authorized the organization of a campaign to include his poem, "Mar Português", into the official school curriculum (Brechón 538). Second, as alluded to above, Pessoa published *Mensagem* and subsequently entered it into a competition newly established by the Secretary of National Propaganda. Although Pessoa denied having published the book with the intention of entering it into the competition, he also wrote: "O livro estava exactamente nas condições (nacionalismo) de concorrer. Concorri" (qtd. in Simões 653).

Ironically, Pessoa's work received a consolation prize, having been judged second to an overtly anti-communist work of "ridiculous literary value" by a Franciscan friar. João Gaspar Simões asserts that *Mensagem's* recognition, and an increase in the amount of prize money received by Pessoa, was due to the intervention of Ferro, "o único . . . em condições de compreender o valor e o sentido da obra de Fernando Pessoa" (654).

To be certain, Pessoa initially held much

faith in the 1926 revolution which ushered in the dictatorship and eventually brought Salazar and the policies of the Estado Novo to power. Pessoa believed that the dictatorship would be a temporary "state of transition" into the impending Fifth Empire. As outlined by Gilbert Cavaco, Pessoa initially defended the dictatorship based upon three clear premises:

(1) Portugal does not have a unified political philosophy . . . and, therefore, there can be no regime or social order [under a democratic republic] because latent civil war is always present; (2) there cannot be a constitution, which is the definition of a regime, because there is no "national ideal"; and (3) there is no public opinion that is the basis of the other two. The vote is an expression of the individual opinion, and even collectively it represents only the opinions of the electorate (65).

Pessoa held consistent faith in the need for a strong leader or an oligarchic "leader-plus-system" which would cut across the factionalisms and confusions he attributed to Republic and reunite the Portuguese in the name of a clearly identified common good (which he, via his resurrection of the Sebastianist ideal, would help to define). As Neil Larsen and Ronald Sousa write:

Such notions, and the rhetoric linked up with them, bespeak a situation in which elements of the bourgeois system, weary of the confusion generated by the Republic, seek national reunification, a return to normalcy — and justify that return in the "liberal" terms of individual fulfillment in a nation depicted as a spiritual entity (108).

What Pessoa shared with the quasi-fascist ideology of the Salazar regime was the anti-democratic notion of the inability of the "common" people to govern themselves, to make rational political decisions. As Simões

writes:

E se é verdade que a mística patriótica implícita no "nacionalismo" em que se fundamenta a opinião pública que Fernando Pessoa considera o ponto de apoio de uma intuição capaz de dar a Portugal a sua razão histórica tem grandes pontos de contacto com a mística "nacionalista" do "fascismo", o certo é que mais de uma vez, expressamente, o poeta . . . afirmou . . . que os regimes de força e a política datorial não eram senão meios de encontrar o verdadeiro sentido de uma sólida e sã instituição nacional (629).

Perhaps concerned with, or disillusioned by, an intertwining of the thematics of his own utopian/spiritual discourse with the increasingly repressive Salazarist ideological discourse, Pessoa would later publish in 1935 a long poem, "Elegia na Sombra", which José Blanco describes as "uma espécie de anti-Mensagem" (qtd. in Bréchon 557). In this poem, Pessoa reveals his resignation, his loss of hope in Sebastianist redemption, a fissure in his peculiar foundation of mystic patriotism:

Dorme, mãe Pátria, nula e postergada,  
E, se um sonho de esperança te surgir,  
Não creias nele, porque tudo é nada,  
E nunca vem aquilo que há-de vir  
(qtd. in Bréchon 558).

It is this Pessoa, increasingly wearied, cynical, and disillusioned which inhabits Saramago's novel. It is perhaps from this Pessoa that the mantra of his politically escapist heteronym Reis emerges: "sábio é o que se contenta com o espectáculo do mundo, hei-de dizê-lo mil vezes, que importa àquele a quem já nada importa que um perca e outra vença" (Saramago 403). Throughout the novel, in fact, the respective subjectivities of Pessoa and Reis are dialogically contrasted as well as confused, with Reis ulti-

mately rejoining Pessoa in death. Saramago constructs, explores and then breaks down the distinct identities of his two primary protagonists. As Maria Alzira Seixo writes:

[S]e o intuito de devassar é inerente a quase todo o propósito ficcional, ele é aqui da maior pertinência para a formulação temática desta identidade vazia que é a de Reis, confundindo-se com a da pátria, com a do património cultural que é a do poeta . . . (49).

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Saramago has a profound faith, in contrast to the Salazarist and Pessoaan discourses, in the rational, critical, creative capabilities of the people. Thus, he consciously opens a space in his fiction for ideological challenges to both the Salazarist and Pessoaan discourses from traditionally marginalized voices. As Helen Kaufman writes:

Sublinhando a energia criativa do povo, retratando-o como força transformadora, esse discurso romanescos confronta o conceito da "irracionalidade" das massas, que constituía o ponto de partida para os mecanismos da demagogia fascista. O passado desmitologizado deixa de funcionar como uma força que paralisa ou que, por razões de grandeza e importância mundial, concede direitos especiais a uma nação (135).

Saramago's faith is perhaps best embodied in the novel by Lídia, Reis' chambermaid and lover, who constantly frustrates and surprises him with her articulate challenges to his naïve readings and re-articulations of the official discourses:

Fica sabendo Lídia, que o povo nunca está de um lado só, além disso, faz-me o favor de me dizer o que é o povo, O povo é isto que eu sou, uma criada de servir que tem um irmão revolucionário e se deita com um senhor doutor contrário às revoluções, Quem é que te ensinou a dizer essas coisas, Quando abro a boca para falar, as palavras já estão

formadas, é só deixá-las sair (Saramago 367).

Without necessarily pretending to speak for a plurality of voices, Saramago brings to life characters, such as Lídia, whose active presence and critical reflection effectively question and relativize reified conceptions of History and Identity. Lídia; a poor, single, working woman whose brother is ultimately killed in a strategically futile but symbolically powerful naval uprising against the Salazar regime; offers us a more intelligent and critical reading of the slide of Iberian social and political life towards fascism and violence than that of Reis:

O senhor doutor é uma pessoa instruída, eu sou quase uma analfabeta, mas uma coisa que eu aprendi, é que as verdades são muitas e estão umas contra as outras, enquanto não lutarem não se saberá onde está a mentira (388).

It is this characteristic of Saramago's novel, and his literary/historiographic project in general, that is perhaps most attractive to a growing number of loyal readers: the concern for constructing a literary space for the voices traditionally marginalized from and by the dominant discourses on national identity and destinies. Saramago's work, rather than an embittered negation of still prevalent orthodoxies (to be replaced, say, with one of his own design), is an impassioned and optimistic demand for more fluid, pluralistic and inclusive understandings of what it has meant, what it means, and what it will mean to be Portuguese. And as Saramago's more recent work has shifted from "national" concerns to more overtly "post-national" thematics, he offers an increasingly international audience more pluralistic and inclusive understandings of what it has meant, what it means, and what it will mean to be human.

António de Oliveira Salazar rose from the

position of Finance minister; granted to him by the military dictatorship which ended a rather chaotic sixteen year experiment with republicanism; to the position of Premier by 1932. Salazar, a civilian, transformed the military dictatorship into the corporatist Estado Novo, whose political philosophy is perhaps best summed up by Salazar's own statements: "Portuguese nationalism is the indestructible bedrock of the New State. . . . We are anti-parliamentarians, anti-democrats, anti-liberals. . . . We are opposed to all forms of internationalism, communism, socialism, syndicalism. . . . We are against class warfare, irreligion and disloyalty to one's country. . . . To govern is to protect people from themselves" (as cited in Robinson, 52).

The young King Sebastian was killed (or disappeared) in 1578 in a quixotic campaign to forcefully conquer or christianize what is now Morocco. His death (or disappearance) ushered in a period of Spanish domination of Portugal, lasting until 1612, and also marked the beginning of a relative decline in Portuguese geo-political stature.

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