

## “Aqueles Que por Obras Valerosas/ Se Vão da Lei da Morte Libertando”: Names, Knowledge and Power in Portuguese Literature from the Renaissance to Saramago

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field.<sup>1</sup>

With these words the book of Genesis describes in allegorical terms the early attempts of human beings to control the world in which they lived, summing up the reality that the world as an undivided whole is too much for the human mind to cope with, and that, even if the Tower of Babel later in Genesis indicates the limitations and confused nature of human language, at the same time we undoubtedly need names: without them we cannot measure, we cannot conquer, we cannot develop. Language is as essential to human life as the air we breathe, for without it we would not be humans in the fullest sense of the word.

My intention in the present paper is to trace some examples of the exploration of this question of the relation amongst names, knowledge and power in Portuguese literature from the Renaissance to the present day. In order to do so I will make reference to texts spanning a period of approximately four hundred years, with my principal focus being on the nineteenth-century dramatist Almeida Garrett and the three Portuguese writers best known to English-speaking audiences: the sixteenth-century epic poet Luís de Camões, the early twentieth-century modernist poet Fernando Pessoa; and the contemporary novelist, José Saramago, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998, whose novel *Todos os Nomes* will, I suggest, help us to cast a new light on this traditional association of concepts.

The basic idea outlined above, that of the association of knowledge of others with the exercise of power over them, is a recurrent one throughout the Western tradition: in Book IX of Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus outwits the Cyclops who impedes his progress by

telling him that his name is Noman. When he then blinds the one-eyed monster and leads his men out of the cave where Polyphemus has kept them prisoner, the Cyclops calls in vain for assistance from his fellows, declaring that Noman has blinded him, a statement which, of course, allows Odysseus to continue unimpeded on his way, having conquered his more powerful enemy by cunning, and specifically by the exercise of language.<sup>2</sup> In this way humans can overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and it is language which thus distinguishes us from the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air mentioned in Genesis.

Elsewhere, in Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* the heroine Elsa destroys her own happiness by breaking her promise never to seek to discover the identity of her white knight (Lohengrin himself), whose power as a Knight of the Holy Grail depends on his anonymity. She then loses him forever, in an opera which gives (admittedly somewhat unconvincing) expression to the notion that true virtue lies in performing saintly acts for their own sake and not for any gratitude or favours received in return (an idea given expression in a Portuguese context by the eighteenth-century preacher Padre Antônio Vieira).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in the fairytale by the Brothers Grimm, the sinister Rumpelstiltskin loses his magical power over the miller's daughter when she discovers his name.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Rumpelstiltskin story bears clear structural relations to the Faustian tale of humans entering into foolish pacts with the Devil,<sup>5</sup> so that what unites all of these texts is the sense of the unknown as a mysterious and threatening power which needs to be conquered if we are to live in anything more than the type of state of permanent fear which is apparent in Saramago's dystopian fiction *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* (a text which will be discussed later in this paper).

Since Portugal is a country with a proud history of overseas exploration, it is no surprise that both the encounter with the unfamiliar and the power of naming should be recurrent themes in its literature. The epic poem *Os Lusíadas*, by Portugal's national poet Camões, is a celebration of the discovery of the sea route to India carried out by the explorer Vasco da Gama in 1497-98, and this work (in common with many other texts of the period) reveals the Portuguese navigators in constant search of new life and new civilizations, reflected in a narration which combines a high degree of historical accuracy with some degree of fantasy and dramatic effect.<sup>6</sup> In view of the poet's conscious imitation of classical models such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, it should come as no surprise to discover an episode in this poem which parallels Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops mentioned

above: this is the famous episode of Adamastor, who blocks the path of the travellers to the fulfillment of their destiny in Canto V of the poem. At first this giant rock – for Adamastor is, in reality, a monstrous anthropomorphization of the Cape of Good Hope – strikes fear into the heart of da Gama and his men:

Tão temerosa vinha e carregada,  
 Que pôs nos corações um grande medo;  
 Bramindo, o negro mar, de longe brada  
 Como se desse em vão nalgum rochedo.  
 "Ó Potestade (disse) sublimada:  
 Que ameaço divino, ou que segredo  
 Este clima e este mar nos apresenta,  
 Que mor cousa parece que tormenta?"

Não acabava, quando hũa figura  
 Se nos mostra no ar, robusta e válida,  
 De disforme e grandíssima estatura;  
 O rosto carregado, a barba esquálida,  
 Os olhos encovados, e a postura  
 Medonha e má e a cor terrena e pálida;  
 Cheios de terra e crespos os cabelos,  
 A boca negra, os dentes amarelos.

Tão grande era de membros, que bem posso  
 Certificar-te, que este era o segundo  
 De Rodes estranhíssimo Colosso,  
 Que um dos sete milagres foi do mundo:  
 Cum tom de voz nos fala, horrendo e grosso,  
 Que pareceu sair do mar profundo:  
 Arrepiam-se as carnes e o cabelo  
 A mi e a todos, só de ouvi-lo e vê-lo. (V, 38-40)

Within the terms of Camões' fictional presentation of the incident, this giant possesses a mysterious knowledge of the sailors who have taken up the challenge of the oceans and then goes on for another seven stanzas (V, 42-48) to foretell the sad fate which awaits future Portuguese sailors of these waters, clearly attempting to dissuade da Gama from his enterprise. In his presentation of this episode Camões combines two separate motifs of the classical epic: the challenge pre-

sented to the hero to prove his valour and worth by overcoming a seemingly invincible foe, and the prophecy of his nation's future. However it should be noted that this latter motif is presented here in a negative tone which contrasts with the later revelation of Portuguese achievements in India and beyond, as given to da Gama by Venus on the Island of Love in the final Canto of the poem. More particularly, however, it should also be noted that this passage recalls the dire remarks made by the Velho do Restelo, who attempts to dissuade the Portuguese from even setting forth from Lisbon in Canto IV of the poem. The following are Adamastor's opening remarks to Vasco da Gama:

E disse: "Ó gente ousada, mais que quantas  
No mundo cometeram grandes cousas,  
Tu, que por guerras cruas, tais e tantas,  
E por trabalhos vãos nunca repousas,  
Pois os vedados términos quebrantas,  
E navegar meus longos mares ousas,  
Que eu tanto tempo há já que guardo e tenho,  
Nunca arados d'estranho ou próprio lenho:

Pois vens ver os segredos escondidos  
Da natureza e do húmido elemento,  
A nenhum grande humano concedidos  
De nobre ou de imortal merecimento,  
Ouve os danos de mi, que apercebidos  
Estão a teu sobejo atrevimento,  
Por todo o largo mar e pola terra,  
Que ainda hás de sojugar com dura guerra.

Sabe que quantas naus esta viagem  
Que tu fazes, fizerem, de atrevidas,  
Inimiga terão esta paragem,  
Com ventos e tormentas desmedidas!  
E da primeira armada, que passagem  
Fizer por estas ondas insofridas,  
Eu farei de improvisado tal castigo,  
Que seja mor o dano que o perigo! (V, 41-43)

The following are the comments of the Velho do Restelo:  
Oh! Maldito o primeiro que no mundo,

Nas ondas velas pôs em seco lenho!  
 Dino da eterna pena do Profundo,  
 Se é justa a justa lei que sigo e tenho!  
 Nunca juízo algum, alto e profundo,  
 Nem cítara sonora, ou vivo engenho,  
 Te dê por isso fama nem memória,  
 Mas contigo se acabe o nome e glória!

Trouxe o filho de Jápeto do Céu  
 O fogo que ajuntou ao peito humano,  
 Fogo que o mundo em armas acendeu,  
 Em mortes, em desonras (grande engano!).  
 Quanto melhor nos fora, Prometeu,  
 E quanto pera o mundo menos dano,  
 Que a tua estátua ilustre não tivera  
 Fogo de altos desejos, que a movera!

Não cometera o moço miserando  
 O carro alto do pai, nem o ar vazio  
 O grande arquiteto co filho, dando,  
 Um, nome ao mar, e o outro, fama ao rio.  
 Nenhum cometimento alto e nefando,  
 Por fogo, ferro, água, calma e frio,  
 Deixa intentado a humana geração.  
 Miserá sorte! Estranha condição! (IV, 102-04)

One notes in particular here that the allusion to desecration made by Adamastor in V, 42 recalls the Old Man's references to such noted classical figures as Prometheus and Daedalus who were punished for trying to reach above their allotted station in life. Adamastor's prophecy, then, essentially amounts to a warning to the Portuguese that a similar fate lies in store for them if they continue in their bold attempts to achieve what has been beyond the reach of previous travellers.

Yet it is precisely this quality of ambition – even with its attendant risk of *hybris* – which is the defining quality of the Portuguese in the poem, and significantly it is this same quality which allows da Gama and his men to continue their journey, as the captain makes a direct challenge to the giant to identify himself:

Mais ia por diante o monstro horrendo

Dizendo nossos Fados, quando, alçado  
 Lhe disse eu: "Quem és tu? Que esse estupendo  
 Corpo, certo, me tem maravilhado!"  
 A boca e os olhos negros retorcendo  
 E, dando um espantoso e grande brado,  
 Me respondeu, com voz pesada e amara,  
 Como quem da pergunta lhe pesara:... (V, 49)

It is particularly important to notice that da Gama interrupts Adamastor in the middle of his litany, effectively telling the giant that the Portuguese intend to sail on, undaunted by the prospect of future losses. When the giant then "...com voz pesada e amara,/ Como quem da pergunta lhe pesara" has to tell his own story to da Gama, he effectively no longer has the advantage of the Portuguese, and the sailors continue on their way, with the only concession to the giant's tirade being a vain plea to God "que removeesse os duros/ Casos, que Adamastor contou futuros" (V, 60), a phrasing reminiscent of Christ's request in the Garden of Gethsemane "If it be thy will, let this cup pass from me";<sup>7</sup> made in the full knowledge that it must be so and that the gains to be had will outweigh the terrible price to be paid.

As Quint points out,<sup>8</sup> the Adamastor episode does not stand alone in the text, but in fact echoes two passages which immediately precede it: one, the description of a natural phenomenon unknown to European science in the early Renaissance, the water spout which (quite understandably) terrifies and amazes the Portuguese sailors (V, 17-23); and, secondly, the semi-comic incident involving the sailor Veloso (V, 27-36). It is episodes such as this latter one (along with the derogatory language used to refer to Muslims in the poem) which can undoubtedly cause difficulties for the contemporary reader in an era of multiculturalism and political correctness.

Quint goes on to observe that all three of these episodes in Canto V are united by a vision of the colour black in people or things which constitute a certain degree of threat to the Portuguese (here in that Veloso nearly loses his life to the natives whom he encounters).<sup>9</sup> The same critic also points out that this episode is further associated with the encounter with Adamastor by the scathing comparison of the first black man to Polyphemus, the name of Homer's Cyclops, ("Selvagem mais que o bruto Polifemo"; V, 28). One of the striking features of *Os Lusíadas*, as has been pointed out by the poem's most recent English translator, is its reproduction of the excitement and newness of discov-

ery,<sup>10</sup> and the repeated emphasis on the blackness of the Africans (“Vejo um estranho vir, de pele preta,” and “Todos nus e da cor da escura treva”; V, 27 and 30 respectively) should therefore perhaps be accounted for in those terms rather than in the more cynical way in which such a description might be viewed in a contemporary work.

Yet this fact cannot in itself account for the apparent Eurocentrism of the passage as a whole, with its expression of superiority over a “selvagem” who is unable to appreciate the precious stones set in front of him by da Gama (V, 28). Before we leap to any condemnation of the ethos of the poem, however, it is worth noting the continuation of this incident, where the captain somewhat recklessly allows Veloso to venture into the unknown and make the acquaintance of the Africans on his own, with consequences that nearly result in his death and the threat of an ambush to be mounted on the Portuguese. What we see here, in fact, is the tables being turned on the Portuguese, who throughout the rest of the poem are the discoverers, but who here – through the figure of Veloso in his solitary expedition – effectively become the discovered.

The inability of either party in this encounter to communicate with the other (“Nem ele entende a nós, nem nós a ele”; V, 28) results inevitably in the use of force in a way which leaves several of the Africans dead and wounded (V, 33) but, more ominously, it also prefigures later conflict and European exploitation of the continent. Veloso’s attempt here to act the superior scholar without a proper introduction fails dismally, and the moral for a Renaissance scholar such as Camões seems to be not only the need for measuring and describing but also the need to be able to identify the other and set up a true dialogue with him/her (even if this is within the context of giving primacy to European Christian ideals over all others). Without this ability literally to comprehend Africa, Portuguese dominion over the continent will, indeed, be doomed to be exclusively the type of dire fate foretold by Adamastor in the subsequent episode explored above, and the African will remain on the outside of the new trading order, forever perceived as a “selvagem” with no understanding of Western values (a term which can be understood both literally and metaphorically here). The proto-capitalist order conceived of by Camões requires there to be someone with whom business can be done, and when the Portuguese do not find this market in Africa, they move on instead towards India.<sup>11</sup> However, where neither the European nor the non-European can name one another and address one another the only language left to make con-

tact with is that of warfare, a theme taken up in our own time by writers such as the contemporary novelist Lúcia Jorge, to whom I shall make brief reference at the end of the present paper.

Moving on to the drama *Frei Luís de Sousa* by the nineteenth-century Romantic Almeida Garrett, the question of names becomes prominent once again in the figure of the mysterious Romeiro, whose unexpected return to Portugal disrupts the apparently settled marital life of Manuel de Sousa and his wife Madalena. While the play reaches its thematic climax with the death of Maria in Act Three, its dramatic climax is surely located rather at the end of Act Two, when the pilgrim is asked who he is, and his reply is a melodramatic exclamation of the one word "Ninguém", accompanied by the gesture of pointing at the portrait on the wall of Madalena's first husband, D. João de Portugal, believed killed at the battle of Alcácer-Quibir some twenty years earlier (Garrett 99). The remainder of the play then documents the tragic collapse of a family whose comfortable life has been based on an unwitting lie, the belief that Madalena was free to marry Manuel and have children by him, when in fact she was not.

It may appear at first that this scene depends on a simple repetition of Odysseus' exploitation of the word "Noman" to outwit the Cyclops, but here with a negative outcome rather than a positive one. Such an interpretation would, however, underestimate the subtlety of what is at stake here. For in reality none of the characters on stage is in any real doubt as to who Romeiro is, and his use of the word "ninguém" is, in fact, an ironic reproach to Madalena for her lack of faith in her husband who has returned to his native land - like a latter-day Ulysses, in an allusion to another section of the *Odyssey* - expecting to find a welcome in what once was his own home. In fact his act of pointing to the portrait makes his identity abundantly clear, and any lingering doubts that the audience might still have are removed in Act Three, Scene Seven, when D. João, falsely believing that Madalena's cries for her husband and her love refer to him, is all set to go to her until, like Orpheus looking over his shoulder to see Euridice, he sees her snatched away from him forever as she adds the name "Manuel" to her pleas, thus indicating that, regardless of the legalities of her situation, it is her second husband who lives in her heart (Garrett 127).

The power which Romeiro's adoption of the name "Ninguém" suggests here is therefore entirely illusory. A closer analysis of the play reveals that, in fact, even after Romeiro's intrusion all is not lost, for the final outcome of the play is really determined by the cold-hearted

rejection of Madalena by Manuel and by the refusal of the couple to place the needs of their daughter Maria above their own urge towards penitence for what surely was an understandable sin. Maria's death-scene is perhaps the most powerful expression of resentment at injustice in Portuguese literature since Camões' depiction of Inês de Castro before her execution in Canto III of *Os Lusíadas*, as the dying daughter rails at a family and a country more interested in observing religious practices than in aiding the living:

Quero-me esconder aqui, antes que venha esse homem do outro mundo dizer-me na minha cara e na tua – aqui diante de toda esta gente: 'Essa filha é a filha do crime e do pecado!' Não sou; dize, meu pai, não sou... dize a essa gente toda, dize que não sou... (*Vai para Madalena*) Pobre mãe! Tu não podes... coitada!... não tens ânimo... Nunca mentiste?... Pois mente agora para salvar a honra de tua filha, para que lhe não tirem o nome de seu pai... Não queres? Tu também não, pai? Não queres. E eu hei-de morrer assim... e ele vem aí... (Garrett 136-37)

The "he" referred to at the end of this speech is, of course, Romeiro, who, on realising the havoc caused by his return, has asked his former man-servant Telmo to lie and tell the others that he was an impostor, in a vain attempt to return things to the way they once were. The reality, however, is that, even if he were not who he claimed to be, the damage has already been done by the response of others to the situation, and it is they who have effectively condemned Maria to her death, a truth hinted at in Act Two, Scenes Four and Five by Manuel's foolish decision to take his daughter to the plague-ridden city of Lisbon in spite of Madalena's forebodings to the contrary (Garrett 71-79).

Nonetheless there remains a truth in the name which Romeiro adopts, in that the sense of the word "Ninguém" changes in Act Three, as he realizes that the real anonymity lies not in the face which he presents to others (as it did in Odysseus' deception of the Cyclops) but instead inside himself. In Act Three, Scene Four Telmo repeats the question which he had asked Romeiro at the end of Act Two, asking him once more to identify himself, and he receives the reply "Ninguém, Telmo; ninguém se nem já tu me conheces!" (Garrett 120). It is after this that he first asks Telmo to deny him, which constitutes an ironic reversal of Peter's denial of Christ after his crucifixion, as in this context it would be an entirely justifiable action.<sup>12</sup> For Romeiro now effec-

tively recognises that he cannot return to Portugal as if nothing had happened in the twenty years of his absence, and he must accept that he no longer is who he once was, and that this 'Don Juan of Portugal' cannot return to conquer and control at will, as he had naïvely expected to do. In essence, for Garrett, undoubtedly preoccupied by the Sebastianic overtones surrounding D. Miguel's claim to the Portuguese throne in the constitutional and dynastic upheavals of Portugal in the mid-nineteenth century,<sup>13</sup> any claims by the past to control the present must be banished by a country which should be strong enough to move forward and willingly acknowledge affairs as they actually are, and not as one might wish them to be. It is the past which is Garrett's Adamastor, and on this occasion da Gama's descendents do not have the courage to face up to its challenge: it is striking that in the whole of Act Three, even after Romeiro's confirmation of their fears as to his identity, not one of the major characters has the courage to mention his name. Until they do so, and until they acknowledge, as Romeiro himself has the courage to do, that he died "no dia em que sua mulher disse que ele morrerá" (Garrett 125), Portugal will remain haunted by the ghosts of a past which holds the country captive in the present.

Of course, no discussion of names in Portuguese literature would be complete without at least some acknowledgement of that poet of many names, Fernando Pessoa, who not only wrote his work under a variety of guises, but who attempted to actually become a different poet with each new name adopted. However his concern with names also extends to the actual content of his poetry itself. Written under the poet's real name, the sonnet "Emissário de um rei desconhecido" (poem XIII in the poet's *Passos da Cruz*) expresses the poet's awareness of his alternating points of view regarding his own identity and the purpose of his own existence, to the point where he seems to desire the absorption of his own self into a greater being such as God (although not necessarily to be identified with Him), in order to remove the pain of an existence which is separated from the wider world by the consciousness of the intellect: "Minha missão será a esquecer".<sup>14</sup> In saying this, Pessoa is effectively expressing the desire to become something more like the etymological meaning of his surname, that of a mere mask, which covers up the anonymous and entirely adaptable actor within.

Perhaps more tellingly in the current context, however, the poetry written by Pessoa under the name Caeiro proclaims the poetic persona's strong resemblance to the role allocated to Adam in the passage quoted from Genesis at the start of this paper, as is illustrated by

reference to Poem 5 from *O Guardador de Rebanhos* (“Há metafísica bastante em não pensar em nada”):

Mas se Deus é as árvores e as flores  
 E os montes e o luar e o sol,  
 Para que lhe chamo eu Deus?  
 Chamo-lhe flores e árvores e montes e sol e luar.<sup>15</sup>

However this poem also goes beyond Genesis in suggesting that the poetic persona’s mastery over “flores e árvores e montes e sol e luar” becomes an alternative way of communing with the divine as an equal rather than merely as a means of serving it. It is this type of apparent total mastery over his environment which allows Caeiro symbolically to make a definitive return to Eden and thus to become the “mestre” of the other major heteronyms Reis and Campos, who would willingly trade places with him, for Caeiro knows exactly who he is and is fully content with that identity.

But it is surely this very mastery which is ultimately problematic in Caeiro. For not only does the implicit allusion to Genesis referred to above - along with many other apparent references in his work to problematic issues in philosophy, epistemology and linguistics - give the lie to Pessoa’s projection of this heteronym as a simple, natural, unschooled dweller in the bosom of Mother Nature, but his whole philosophy rests ultimately on a premise espoused by another of the heteronyms, Ricardo Reis, in one of his less pessimistic moments, namely that there is no gap between human perception and reality:

Não sei se é amor que tens, ou amor que finges,  
 O que me dás. Dás-mo. Tanto me basta.  
 Já que o não sou por tempo,  
 Seja eu jovem por erro.  
 Pouco os deuses nos dão, e o pouco é falso.  
 Porém, se o dão, falso que seja, a dádiva  
 É verdadeira. Aceito,  
 Cerro olhos: é bastante.  
 Que mais quero?<sup>16</sup>

Caeiro’s form is false: the logical conclusion to his total acceptance of the lot given to him by Reis’ gods would ultimately render him a mere object of perception along with the unconscious flowers

and trees and hills and sun and moon, and no more able to name himself than to name them. In other words, he would cease to exist as a separate being in any meaningful way.<sup>17</sup>

Much more convincing, in spite of his extreme pessimism and his ultimately depressing outlook, is the other major heteronym, Álvaro de Campos, described by one of his translators, Richard Zenith, as the “jaded sensationalist”<sup>18</sup>, who is reluctant to identify himself on the grounds that there is no “me” to be labelled, as is suggested by the poem “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, where the poet ends up dividing the world (and himself) into separate chunks, so many, in fact, that he no longer has enough names for each different self imagined:

Outra vez te revejo,  
 Cidade da minha infância pavorosamente perdida...  
 Cidade triste e alegre, outra vez sonho aqui...  
 Eu? Mas sou eu o mesmo que aqui vivi, e aqui voltei,  
 E aqui tornei a voltar, e a voltar  
 E aqui de novo tornei a voltar?  
 Ou somos, todos os Eu que estive aqui ou estiveram,  
 Uma série de contas-entes ligadas por um fio-memória,  
 Uma série de sonhos de mim de alguém de fora de mim?<sup>19</sup>

By contrast with Caeiro, whose philosophy is based on the essential unity of the universe, then, Campos’ world is one divided to the point of disintegration.

In the case of the novel *Memorial do Convento* by the Nobel Laureate José Saramago, one can see once again the repetition of the motif familiar from Homer and the story of Rumpelstiltskin, for Blimunda’s bold opening line when she first meets Baltasar constitutes a symbolic possession of him:

... depois, voltando-se para o homem alto que lhe estava perto, perguntou, Que nome é o seu, e o homem disse, naturalmente, assim reconhecendo o direito de esta mulher lhe fazer perguntas, Baltasar Mateus, também me chamam Sete-Sóis. (Saramago, *Memorial* 53)

This questioning prefigures a life together in which the two will become as one and which culminates with the female character seeing her long-term lover at the moment of his execution by the Inquisition

and taking possession of his will unto herself, “se à terra pertencia e a Blimunda” (Saramago, *Memorial* 357). In *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*, part of the problem for the main female character, Lídia, lies in that, in her growing relationship with Saramago’s fictional recreation of Pessoa’s neo-classical heteronym, it is never clear whether the man with whom she sleeps is the rigidly hierarchical Reis or someone more like the spontaneous Caeiro, for there are moments in the text when he behaves towards her more as an equal<sup>20</sup> and less in the role of social and intellectual superior which he chooses to adopt towards her in his moments of self-awareness. In the end, while she refuses to conform to the passive stereotype prepared for her in the famous poem “Vem sentar-te comigo, Lídia, à beira do rio”<sup>21</sup>, he proves an elusive and frustrating partner to her, and her final abandonment of him to bring up their child on her own represents his failure to find an identity for himself as much as any neglect of her.

It is in Saramago’s more recent novels, however, that the related issues of names, knowledge and power become particularly prominent, as in *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* and *Todos os Nomes* the characters are mostly referred to by their functions or by reference to their personal appearance rather than by personal names. In *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, in fact, I would suggest that this anonymity of the characters is more than simply an allegorical aspect of the narratorial technique adopted and that it actually forms a vital component of the author’s basic conception of the work. For it is striking that the protagonists are struck down by a white blindness and not the traditional blackness associated with this incapacity, thus suggesting - since white is the visual impression created by the combination of all colours together - that it is not that the characters do not see enough but that they actually see too much. The basic problem in this work is that the whole population loses sight of one another as meaningful and worthy individuals, and therefore not only does the narrator describe them as nothing more than “a mulher do médico”, “a rapariga dos óculos escuros”, etc., but even notable artists, such as Picasso and Van Gogh, and some of the most prominent icons of Christianity are reduced to physical descriptions, having apparently been erased from general consciousness in terms of their significance (Saramago, *Ensaio* 130-31 and 301 respectively). In common with Pessoa’s Álvaro de Campos in “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, then, there is a danger here of excessive vision, which can no longer recognize essentials.<sup>22</sup>

However, even if the characters in the novel - including the nar-

rator himself - are having to operate with limited control or understanding of the events taking place around them, it is important to notice in these two scenes the human content of the images described, particularly those in the Church, many of which stress suffering. The name of God (which is exploited in critical terms in Saramago's 1993 drama *In Nomine Dei*, where different Christian factions in sixteenth-century Germany commit horrendous atrocities against one another, each in the name of its own version of revealed religious truth) no longer matters: what matters instead is the expression which these images give to the situation in which the characters find themselves. The figures of Jesus and the saints may have been blinded in recognition of their short-term failure to save the city from its ever-deepening, self-inflicted cycle of despair, but the combination of the very human emotions of love, hope and empathy which they are capable of expressing takes on new significance when they are observed at the height of this nightmarish plague. In this moment, and in the ever more enlightening discussions amongst the principal characters which recur throughout the latter chapters of the novel, it is a sense of shared humanity which is rediscovered, and, while the characters remain unnamed up until the very end of the narrative, the novel ends with a tentative sense that a deeper rediscovery of the other may yet take place, as represented most prominently by the unlikely but prospering love-relationship between the old man with the black eyepatch and the girl with dark glasses.

Similarly to *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, in *Todos os Nomes* - a title which explicitly invites consideration of the issues at the heart of the present paper - it is ironic that only one character is actually given a name at all, and that that name is a simple and unremarkable given name, Senhor José.<sup>23</sup> Yet there is no shortage of names in reality here (as opposed to their paucity in the voice of the narrator), for Senhor José works in the Central Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths, a labyrinthine archive packed from floor to ceiling with papers outlining the biographical data relating to every citizen that there is or ever has been in this unnamed contemporary society. Over this immense mass of information there presides the apparently godlike figure of the Registrar, who is said to know by heart "todos os nomes que existem ou existiram, todos os nomes e todos os apelidos" (Saramago, *Todos os Nomes* 62), a concept which reminds us of both Borges' Funes, el memorioso and George Orwell's Big Brother. Set against this figure, the modest Senhor José and all other ordinary citizens seem minor play-

ers in the game of life.

Yet, as so often happen in Saramago's fiction, the dark clouds which appear to threaten in the early part of this novel turn out to be a blessing in disguise, for, when Senhor José sets about his search in earnest for the woman whose file he accidentally removed from the archives, his failure to find her leads him to a realization of much greater truths than those which he would have discovered by simply finding out a few more biographical facts concerning her. He does discover something of her family's history from her former downstairs neighbour; he speaks briefly to the parents of the woman whom he seeks after he discovers that she is now dead; he manages to pay a brief visit to her home; and, eerily, he even hears her voice, when her answering machine responds to a call during his visit. But the key moment in awakening Senhor José from the alienated, semi-anonymous existence which he has been living is his visit to the cemetery, where a mysterious and unsettling shepherd informs him that the woman whom he has sought does not, in fact, lie beneath the gravestone which he has just identified as hers, for this shepherd regularly and willfully swaps around the markers which have been placed on the graves by the cemetery employees (Saramago, *Todos os Nomes* 240).

Senhor José's orderly spirit is shocked by this misdeed (Saramago, *Todos os Nomes* 240), which constitutes a mischievous appropriation and adaptation of the motif of Penelope's continual deconstruction of her own tapestry in Homer's *Odyssey*, but he eventually has to accept the truth of the shepherd's reminder to him that it is the living who matter and not the dead (Saramago, *Todos os Nomes* 240). Yet this does not constitute an abandonment of those who have passed on, merely a recognition that whatever worth they continue to possess must be measured in terms of how their memory can contribute to the living. Senhor José's strange experiences in this novel lead the apparently omnipotent and omniscient figure of the Registrar to step down from his quasi-divine pedestal and to change the practices of his office by accepting that the files of the dead should no longer be separated from those of the living (Saramago, *Todos os Nomes* 209-10): even if it no longer matters which of all the names we apply to any given corpse, what matters is who these people were, what they learnt, and what they in turn can teach us.

After the terrible Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which killed thousands and caused profound shockwaves to spread throughout European culture, the Portuguese statesman the Marquês de Pombal - who

was put in charge of the city's recovery from tragedy and trauma - is believed to have declared that the task facing the capital was to "enterrar or mortos e cuidar dos vivos". In practical terms, this was surely sound advice (which is given ironic echoes by Saramago in both *A Jangada de Pedra* and *Memorial do Convento*<sup>24</sup>). In terms of what we can learn from the past, however, Senhor José's imitation of Orpheus at the end of *Todos os Nomes*, when he symbolically descends into the underworld of the back room of the Registry to retrieve from the archive of the dead the documents relating to the unknown woman who has given new meaning to his life reminds us that the obscure reaches of our past still have much to teach us.<sup>25</sup> This anonymous woman in this unnamed city thus joins the ranks of other ordinary citizens in Saramago's novels who emerge from the anonymity of history to remind us of our need and our obligation to be all that we can be in our own time: the Alentejan peasant João Mau-Tempo, who fights doggedly for his rights in *Levantado do Chão* but who - like Moses in Exodus - dies just before Portugal enters the Promised Land of the 1974 Revolution; the forced labourers hauling a giant stone from Pêro Pinheiro to Mafra in *Memorial do Convento*, who address the reader in a series of direct, quase-Brechtian monologues to tell us the individual life-stories hiding behind the names obscured by historical accounts which tells us merely that the great convent at Mafra was built by King João V (Saramago, *Memorial* 233-37); the Lídia of *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*, who questions the rise of Fascism in the face of the indifference of her more cultured and educated lover; and the Mogueime of *História do Cerco de Lisboa*, who insists that the foundation of the twelfth-century kingdom of Portugal must be carried out in terms of a very modern conception of social justice rather than in a way which will favour the rich and subjugate the poor, even as their country is apparently being "liberated" from the Moors (Saramago, *História* 342).

Under the name of Ricardo Reis, Fernando Pessoa wrote that "Vivem em nós inúmeros".<sup>26</sup> However, even as the heteronym Reis effectively seeks within this poem to establish an unchanging persona as a writer, unaffected by the vicissitudes of everyday life ("Nada ditam/ A Quem me sei: eu 'screvo"<sup>27</sup>), what Pessoa implicitly recognises at the same time is that, regardless of whichever of all the names he uses to describe his poetic voice - Reis, Campos, Caeiro, Soares, Search or Pessoa himself -, we are all inexhaustible, ever-changing, indefinable beings, in a dynamic and not in a static sense. None of us can therefore simply be known once and once only in the sense in which the Raimundo

Silva of *História do Cerco de Lisboa* suddenly realizes that he knows virtually nothing about the personal life of his long-term housekeeper (Saramago, *História* 90-91). It is this same realisation which becomes Senhor José's real discovery in *Todos os Nomes*, that any name (even one's own) masks an ever-changing self which must be continually rediscovered, and that, even if knowledge of a name grants a certain degree of authority over others, that can only be a beginning and not an end, as he is reminded by the old woman whose apartment he visits twice in the course of his quest:

E pensou que, nesse momento, quando a tivesse, enfim, na sua frente, saberia dela tanto como no dia em que tomou a decisão de a procurar, isto é, nada, que se pretendesse saber quem ela realmente era teria de começar a procurá-la outra vez e que a partir daí poderia ser muito mais difícil... (Saramago, *Todos os Nomes* 198).

Returning to Camões, therefore, while da Gama's bold challenge to Adamastor allows him to overcome the threat posed by the giant on his own voyage, the dire prophecies made to the Portuguese indicate that each succeeding generation must reacquaint itself anew with the seas and the lands and the risks described in *Os Lusíadas*. Equally, Veloso's amateurish attempt to dip casually into the lives of the black people whom he meets on the African strand is the genuine downside of Portuguese imperial tradition. This incident might, in fact, be profitably viewed in the context of Lídia Jorge's novel about the Portuguese colonial war in Africa, *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, where black servants of privileged Portuguese military officers are named after Portuguese wines such as 'Dão' and 'Mateus Rosé' (Jorge 122), thus dehumanising them as part of a process which eventually leads to the Portuguese massacre of thousands of innocent Africans. This is an Empire which imposes its own definition of 'civilisation' on Africa but which never entered into significant dialogue with the other whom it encountered during the course of five centuries on that continent. The boldness of da Gama in facing Adamastor head-on was betrayed by subsequent generations who gave euphemistic names such as "províncias de ultramar" to colonial possessions whose inexhaustible depths they never really explored.<sup>28</sup> In the end, then, the power to give names is not as great or as arbitrary as we may have thought, for, if we use linguistic terminology to account for the names given to the servants

in Lídia Jorge's novel, without a real reflection of the signified, the signifier itself is merely sound and nothing more, part of the murmurs of history which give this novel its title and which its protagonist Eva Lopo seems to suggest we cannot afford to forget even as these memories recede into the mists of time (Jorge 259). After all, as the fairy tale reminds us, the miller's daughter would not have been able to save her baby if she had not given the correct name to Rumpelstiltskin.

David G. Frier  
University of Leeds

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2.19-20. I have used the King James (Authorized) version of the Bible.

<sup>2</sup> Rieu discusses this point in linguistic terms: "The Greek for 'no one' is *me tis*, but run together as *metis* it means 'wily scheme, resourcefulness'. Odysseus laughs to himself because *metis* (no one/resourcefulness) has foiled the Cyclops" (Rieu 136, footnote). The episode of the Cyclops is recounted at Rieu 135-40.

<sup>3</sup> See Courteau 11.

<sup>4</sup> This story is, in fact, one of many which follow a common pattern in Northern and Central European folktales; many of these tales have been collected (under the heading of "The Tale of the Helper") by D.L. Ashliman at the following website: <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0500.html#rumpelstiltskin>. Ashliman attributes his version of the Rumpelstiltskin story to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* of 1812.

<sup>5</sup> In some of the alternative versions of the story of Rumpelstiltskin, the mysterious "helper" is directly identified with the Devil himself (see, for example, the German tale "Mistress Beautiful", or the Scottish variant on the theme, "Whuppity Stoorie", which are also reproduced at Ashliman's website).

<sup>6</sup> For details of Camões' reliance on documented sources for details of Vasco da Gama's voyages, see Ramos' edition of *Os Lusíadas*, which lists likely historical sources for the episodes described at the start of the notes on each Canto of the text. All quotations from the text of the poem will also be based on this edition; references to the text will be made by the number of the relevant Canto followed by the

stanza number, both in parenthesis: thus (V, 38-40) means Canto V, stanzas 38-40.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 14.36.

<sup>8</sup> Quint 115-16.

<sup>9</sup> Quint 115 and 117.

<sup>10</sup> "Nothing quite like this happened again until December 1968, when the Apollo spacecraft showed us the first pictures of Earth taken from space." White xi.

<sup>11</sup> For discussion of the importance of commerce in the time of the Discoveries and in *Os Lusíadas*, see Láfer 75-79.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 14.67-72.

<sup>13</sup> Although D. Miguel's claims to the throne were effectively dashed by the settlement of Évora-Monte in 1834, support for his cause continued for some time afterwards, especially in rural northern Portugal. In particular, the short-lived and unsuccessful 'Maria da Fonte' uprising in the Minho in the mid-1840s was closely associated with Miguelism, while rumours of the return to Portugal of the Pretender to the throne himself (which clearly depended for their power on the deep entrenchment of Sebastianism in the popular mind) also continued during this period (as documented by Camilo Castelo Branco in his novel *A Brasileira de Prazins*, of 1882). For a fuller discussion of this period, see Livermore 263-78 and 285-86, and Oliveira Marques 2:1-27. Oliveira Marques sees this brand of Messianism as surviving into the twentieth century in the figure of Sidónio Pais (3:242), while Salazar indisputably also benefitted from this phenomenon.

<sup>14</sup> Reproduced in Pessoa 67.

<sup>15</sup> Galhoz 175.

<sup>16</sup> Galhoz 220.

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion of some of the complex philosophical issues relating to Caeiro, see Krabbenhoft, Pedroso de Lima, and Carvalho.

<sup>18</sup> Zenith 139.

<sup>19</sup> Galhoz 238.

<sup>20</sup> As well as Reis' belated concern for Lídia's brother Daniel, I would cite in this context the scene where the hotel guest and the chambermaid are seen looking out of the window together at the rising floodwaters at the Cais do Sodré (Saramago, *O Ano da Morte* 58-59).

<sup>21</sup> Reproduced in Pessoa 147.

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Frier 99-102.

<sup>23</sup> José is, of course, the author's own given name, and Saramago

has gone out of his way to point out that the idea for this novel arose in part from his own attempts to track down information about the brother whom he lost in early childhood (see Saramago, *Cadernos* 11; entry for 6<sup>th</sup> January 1997). However, the choice of this name also reminds the reader of the "Everyman"-type figure addressed in the famous poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade "E agora, José?" (a title which was subsequently also adopted in Portugal for a collection of essays by José Cardoso Pires, published in 1977).

<sup>24</sup> For the allusions to the Lisbon earthquake, see Saramago, *Jangada* 223, and *Memorial* 221, respectively.

<sup>25</sup> For further discussion of the exploitation of the motif of the descent into the underworld in this novel, see Huici.

<sup>26</sup> Galhoz 223.

<sup>27</sup> Galhoz 223.

<sup>28</sup> "In the 1950s... following the old hypocritical tradition of 'pleasing the British', and incidentally adopting a former French tropical practice, the African territories were cosmetically renamed 'overseas provinces' and were deemed to be integral parts of Portugal and not colonies subject to international supervision. The settlers, however, behaved like colonizers, reformed nothing, and triggered off the African rebellion of 1961 in Angola" (Birmingham 169). For satirical treatment of the Portuguese reclassification of the colonies, see Jorge 213.

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