

INTRODUCTION

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The latter quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a whole generation of incredibly innovative, versatile, and challenging writers firmly advance the recognition of Portuguese literature. Their work registered, represented, and addressed the profound changes Portugal underwent with the overthrow of the dictatorship in 1974, the subsequent process of decolonisation, and the country's reimagination of itself as a regular European nation. Lídia Jorge, António Lobo Antunes, and José Saramago, to name only a few of that constellation, made their mark on the national as well as the international market, as their novels found immediate and great acclaim on the part of both reading public and academic critics. Of these, none more so than José Saramago, who saw his work distinguished with the Nobel Prize in 1998.

Immediately after that, there was a surge in critical writing on his work, which then subsided, with some critics even expressing some disappointment – unfounded in my view – at his latter work. As 2022 marked the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, there was a revival of critical interest everywhere, with conferences, lectures, and newly published articles and books. José N. Ornelas and I also tried to contribute and our co-edited volume on *Saramago After the Nobel: Contemporary Readings of Saramago's Late Works* was duly in print that same year (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022). Even if there is no scarcity of scholarly and critical interpretation of Saramago's works, and in spite of most, if not all, of them being available in translation in English, French, or German, there is still a relative lack of published criticism in English when compared to that available in Portuguese. Although certainly understandable, this is something which both José and I feel needs attention. That was the initial motivation behind our call for papers for a special issue of PCS on José Saramago, which I am happy to see appearing now with a good spread of articles, covering a variety of Saramago's works, and in three languages: English, Portuguese, and French.

The issue opens with an article by Hania A. M. Nashef on "Deontology and Consequentialism: Ethical Dilemmas in José Saramago's *All The Names*". Nashef examines

Saramago's novel from the perspective of Kantian ethics. As she notes the questions Saramago raises are complex as in order to do good, and this would directly apply to Senhor José's actions, sometimes one must risk altering the truth. She ends on a decisively positive tone – even somewhat utopian in these dark times – claiming that “[t]he moral virtue resulting from Senhor José's endeavours is manifested through his actions, and not through the method with which he conducts himself. His ethical dilemma is not only resolved but has also elicited a more humane morality”.

Following, we have Patrícia Martinho Ferreira's “a lança em África” ou da questão colonial em José Saramago, a sober and rigorous look at a vexed question concerning Saramago's involvement, or lack of involvement in the crucial debate around Portugal's imperial and colonial past. This is a topic until now largely avoided by the majority of critics, whether simply silenced or, at most, pointed at without much development. As such, the essay not only advances Saramago's criticism but works towards rectifying a problematic gap. Far from constituting some sort of indictment from the safe point of a present in which postcolonial studies have been expanding, the essay is above all a balanced and sympathetic attempt to understand how Saramago did and did not engage with the colonial question without simply falling back into a simplified view of his ideological commitments. After all, many of the pioneers of colonial critique, from Amílcar Cabral to C. L. R. James, or Frantz Fanon, were themselves Marxist thinkers. Consequently, she concludes that even though Saramago missed the opportunity to engage in that certainly key discussion for the understanding of Portugal, this does not detract from the greatness of his literary achievements.

Sílvia Amorim's “*Les Intermittences de la mort et Le Voyage de l'éléphant: La vie, la mort et l'immortalité selon José Saramago*” is a generous and wide-ranging examination of some of Saramago's deeper concerns with life, death, and the human condition. She calls attention in special to finding a meaning to existence in what one brings to the world, especially in terms of creativity, which she considers marking in Saramago's late fiction, and which, as she suggests might be Saramago's lasting legacy beyond the formal innovations of his writing.

The next two articles, “Surrounded by the Specters of Marx – Saramago in Central Europe” and Vera Lopes da Silva's “*In Nomine Dei – O artigo ‘O Fator Deus’ marxianamente encenado*” while approaching Saramago from a Marxist perspective, differ significantly from each other. As Balint clearly states, his article “seeks to describe and interpret the dynamics of the reception of José Saramago's works and his public figure in Central Europe and analyzes the political and cultural discourses that have been playing a decisive role in his

reception over the past three decades.” As he notes, this reception has not been homogeneous. Besides variations in the level of recognition of Saramago’s work and placement in the literary universe, Balint also focuses on how reception of Saramago’s later works has tended much more towards an inclusion in a version of anodyne, canonical, world literature. As an alternative, Balint suggests the need to look at a form of world literature as resistance and how Saramago’s works fit such a model. Vera Lopes da Silva’s article focuses on Saramago’s play and how it relates to his article, originally published in the *Folha de S. Paulo* in 2001. Behind both, she argues, is a reading of a passage from Karl Marx’s *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852): “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”

The concluding two articles focus on some less studied Saramago texts and bring fresh perspectives to bear on our understanding of him. Mariana Gonçalves in “Saramago em correspondência: vestígios de uma vida antes do Nobel” not only reads some of Saramago’s earlier correspondence but does so with a focus on Saramago’s practice as a translator and how it might have helped shape his own writing. Ana Isabel Correia Martins’s “Uma leitura d’*A Maior Flor do Mundo*: um exercício progymnástico na esteira das ressonâncias clássicas” focuses on a usually much less analyzed text and takes a still incipient perspective by reflecting on Saramago’s use of the classical tradition. Although certainly different, both point to the urgent need to keep on reading Saramago, to do so with fresh eyes and to not shy away from those texts which, unlike the major novels, usually attract less attention. And that, I would hope, is also what this special issue on José Saramago invites us all to do.