

Rhetoric and Context in Saramago's *Levantado do Chão*

David Frier
University of Leeds

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

Recommended Citation

Frier, David. "Rhetoric and Context in Saramago's *Levantado do Chão*." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 11.3 (2009): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1491>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1491)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 11 Issue 3 (September 2009) Article 6
David Frier, "Rhetoric and Context in Saramago's *Levantado do Chão*"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol11/iss3/6>>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 11.3 (2009)
Thematic Issue, *Politics and Identity in Lusophone Literature and Film*
Ed. Patrícia I. Vieira
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol11/iss3/>>

Abstract: In his article "Rhetoric and Context in Saramago's *Levantado do Chão*" David Frier analyses the 1980 novel by Nobel in Literature 1998 José Saramago. The novel, as-of-yet not translated to English, *Risen from the Ground*, achieves its success as a key text of the Portuguese post-Revolutionary period in part through its resourceful rhetorical development of textual conventions and echoes derived from a wide range of high- and popular cultural contexts, ranging from the epic poetry of Camões's *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusiads*) of 1578, through glamorized medieval battle-scenes to popular stories and beliefs and to the *Fado* music of Amália Rodrigues. In each case, the material cited or alluded to is adapted and revisited from new angles, satirized, or re-appropriated from the traditionally hegemonic culture of the privileged (with what are presented here as their false claims to be representing the real interests of the Portuguese nation), to suit instead the interests and perspectives of the peasant workers of the Alentejo region who form the principal focus of the core narrative of the novel. By exploiting these wide-ranging cultural resources, Saramago's novel widens its frame of reference to effectively claim the April Revolution as a natural continuation of centuries-old Portuguese cultural traditions, while also enriching the substance of the text with a variety of voices, as opposed to the traditionally monologic practice of those Marxist-inspired texts of the classical neo-realist period under the dictatorship.

David FRIER**Rhetoric and Context in Saramago's *Levantado do Chão***

When exploring the rhetorical power of José Saramago's novels, it is important to recognize that his art of allusion and citation is based on a far more complex understanding of literary and cultural tradition and text than many studies make explicit: as Adriana Alves de Paula Martins recognizes, citing Umberto Eco, real independence of thought in the postmodern age can no longer equate to originality, consisting instead merely in acknowledging the inevitable act of quotation (68). Or, as Saramago himself has indicated in response to a question regarding possible influence over his own work from James Joyce, the reading of any text leaves the reader a different person at the end of it from who he or she was at its beginning (comments made by José Saramago at University College Dublin, 15 June 2006). To this end, scholars and critics such as Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva have recognized the importance of this aspect of the novelist's work as far back as his first successful novel *Levantado do Chão* (1980) (*Risen from the Ground*; as of yet not translated to English). Silva's suggestion of Saramago's reference to Luís de Camões and neo-realist Alves Redol in the framing of an epic for the age of the ordinary person recognizes that the extraordinary new qualities Saramago brought to the Portuguese literary scene lay at least in part in his ability to build on the work of his predecessors (see "Saramago e Redol"; "No Paraíso da memória"). And in this sense, Maria Lúcia Lepecki is correct to declare that "In its composition, in its use of language, in its imaginary power, *Levantado do Chão* is profoundly innovative and even revolutionary, within the context of contemporary Portuguese fiction." (unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Portuguese are mine) ("Na escrita, na linguagem, no modo do imaginário, *Levantado do Chão* é profundamente inovador, revolucionário mesmo, no quadro da narrativa portuguesa dos nossos dias" [84]). These remarks are prompted not only by the powerful discourse used against the abuse of political and economic power throughout Saramago's text, but also by the inventiveness with which the value-hierarchies of Portuguese cultural tradition are overturned by it and employed against the very classes which have exercised hegemony in the past. Indeed, Lepecki goes out of her way to stress that the power of this novel lies essentially in its mastery of stimulating an overall effect through the relations created amongst its constituent elements, so that this work may be seen as revolutionary in politics and revolutionary in aesthetic terms too.

In the present article I examine how an effective and well thought-out strategy based on the exploitation of Bakhtinian *heteroglossia* -- a polyphony of voices and echoes of a variety of cultural clichés -- renders what could easily have been merely another depiction of rural squalor and oppression into a genuinely revolutionary work and that aims to coerce the reader (whatever his/her political sympathies outside the context of reading may be) into a sympathetic response to the class struggle depicted. To do this, I engage in a close reading of three key passages within the novel, all marked by an inventive sense of strategy and anticipation of reader-response: the brutal suppression of a workers' strike by the police, who are effectively demonstrated to be the militia of the privileged landowners; the framing of the chapter which depicts the torture and death of Germano Santos Vidigal in police custody; and the requirement of the state that the workers be prepared to sacrifice their very lives for it at the outbreak of World War I.

Scenes of police brutality are frequent in *Levantado*, and the tone of conflict is set early on in a passage which owes its powerful effect as much to literary and other cultural resonances as it does to the actual portrayal of violence. The initial tension depicted in the fifth chapter of the novel sets out to depict striking workers coming into direct confrontation with the police:

Behold the Portuguese Republican Guard flying across these fields. They trot, they gallop, the sun glistens on their armor, the saddlecloths hang down to the knees of the animals, oh bold knights, oh Roland, Olivier and Ferragus, such a blessed land which gave birth to offspring such as these. The estate to which they are riding is within sight, and Lieutenant Contente orders his contingent to deploy itself in a line for charging, and, at the cornet's signal, the troops advance in a lyrical, warlike manner, with their swords drawn, while the nation has come out to its verandas to observe the contest, and when the peasants leave their houses, their haystacks, and their cattle-stalls they are struck in the chest by the chests of the horses, while receiving on their backs the blows from the backs of the

swords, until Ferragus, goaded like an ox stung by an insect, twists the handle of his sword, and cuts close up, hacks, in a blind fury, he knows not why. The peasants were left stretched out there on the ground, groaning in their pain, and even when they returned to their hovels they found no respite, but simply tended the wounds to the best of their ability, with great use being made of salt, water and spiders' webs. It would have been better to die, says one. Only when our time comes, said another.

Eis que voa a guarda nacional republicana por esses campos fora. Vão a trote, a galope, bate-lhes o sol nas armaduras, fraldejam as gualdrapas nos Joelhos das bestas, ó cavalaria, ó Roldão, Oliveiros e Ferrabrás, ditosa pátria que tais filhos pariu. À vista está a herdade escolhida, e o tenente Contente manda desdobrar o esquadrão em linha de carga, e à ordem do cornetim, a tropa avança lírica e guerreira, de sabre desembainhado, a pátria veio à varanda apreciar o lance, e quando os camponeses saem das casas, dos palheiros, dos lugares de gado, recebem no peito o peitoral dos cavalos e nas costas por enquanto as pranchadas, até que Ferrabrás, excitado como boi picado de mosca, roda o punho do sabre e cerce corta, talha, pica, cego de raiva, porquê não sabe. Ficaram os camponeses estendidos naquele chão, gemendo suas dores, e recolhidos aos casebres não folgaram, antes cuidaram das feridas o melhor que puderam, com grande gasto de água, sal e teias de aranha. Mais valia morrer, disse um. Só quando a hora chegar, disse outro. (35)

This extraordinarily rich excerpt from the text is notable for an irony which (through the specific name checking of the particular police force concerned) evokes simultaneously memories of Federico García Lorca's "Romance de la guardia civil española" concerning the harsh treatment of the Roma (Gypsies) by the Spanish state (277-83), and yet also portrays the police in the ironic guise of latter-day knights errant, partly through the exploitation of medieval vocabulary such as *lance* and *folgar* and partly through the invocation of legendary figures from that tradition such as Roland, Olivier, and Ferragus (the latter a knight in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and the former two noble knights from the *Chanson de Roland*). However, this evocation of bravery from a supposedly golden era of European civilization sits ill at ease with the lack of self-awareness shown by Ferragus in practice ("porquê não sabe") and the targets of the modern-day successors of these three heroes are precisely the groups whom the rules of chivalry would have commanded such literary figures to protect: the downtrodden and the defenseless (and the gradual shift in narrative focus from the police to the protesters ironizes the earlier, almost cinematic, focus on the heroic colors of their armor and horses). Meanwhile, the rich (given the right of exclusive identification with *pátria* ["homeland"]) look on from their verandas in approval of this suppression of protest, like medieval ladies waiting to give their favors to their chosen fighter for his valor in what is really a one-sided battle, where the aggressors, far from seeking spiritual elevation through a deed performed with the noblest of intentions and in a total rejection of personal romantic fulfillment (as required in the tradition of Courtly Love), come to feel the excitement of battle as an almost sexual stimulation (reflected in the rapid succession of verbs), as Ferragus strikes out blindly without being fully aware why ("cego de raiva, porquê não sabe"). This reference to the blindness of these actions, of course, points to the general atmosphere of brutality and inhumanity evoked in the later *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, while the ironic treatment of Ferragus's stimulation during this scene creates an implicit parallel with the penitential procession early in *Memorial do Convento*, where observation of Christian rituals merely becomes a thin disguise for illicit sexual liaisons (see *Baltasar and Blimunda* 21-23; *Memorial* 28-30).

The overall effect of the passage is further enhanced by the line "ditosa pátria que tais filhos pariu," which conflates a patriotic sentiment from Camões with the vulgar curse "a puta que te pariu" ("son of a bitch"). The specific reference here is to Canto III, Stanza 21 of *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusíads*), where Vasco da Gama describes his native land to the King of Melinde: "This is my blessed home, my earliest love, / Where, if Heaven allows my safe return / With this task at last accomplished, I will be content to breath my last" (52) ("Esta é a ditosa pátria minha amada, / À qual se o Céu me dá que eu sem perigo / Torne, com esta empresa já acabada, / Acabe-se esta luz ali comigo" [132]). Vasco da Gama's intense patriotic sentiment in this stanza is transformed by Saramago into an implicit rejection of modern Portugal, through the marked omission of the words "minha amada" ("my beloved") after "ditosa patria" ("blessed home"). In this way the narrator creates an ironic echo of the status traditionally enjoyed in Portugal by the forces of authority, who did not hesitate to appropriate Camões for their own ends under the Salazar dictatorship while meting out insulting treatment to the very Portuguese people implicitly exalted as a collective by the title of his poem. As the insult is thus returned to

the powerful in the vernacular, the narrator recommends forcefully to the reader an alternative interpretation of the actions of the representatives of the state, which thus becomes much more striking in its effect than any purely mimetic account of this atrocity would have permitted. The impact of the passage is then completed by the brief introspection into the minds of two of the wounded peasants, who, in spite of remaining technically anonymous, thus become fully-fledged persons and representatives of the mass of the people (in György Lukács's terms), as opposed to the anonymous figures in the police force, whose given names are either totally inappropriate (those of the medieval chivalric heroes) or, in the case of Lieutenant Contente, a mere marker of an unchanging function within a continuing repressive apparatus (for further discussion of this point, see Sabine, "*Levantado do Chão*" 45).

The chapter of the text which deals with the massacre of strikers in the bullring (a place normally associated with the culture of the masses rather than their suppression) and the death of Germano Santos Vidigal in captivity, rather than being a simple account of atrocities, once again shows clear signs of artistic shaping, with a refreshing originality of narratorial technique and perspective which does not distract attention from the content, but rather serves to focus the reader's attention on it all the more clearly. While the most prominent feature of this chapter is the lengthy depiction of the torture and death of one prisoner (seen from the standpoint of the ants in his cell, in the absence of human witnesses; 169-76), its formal circularity also shocks the reader through its depiction of the callousness of the torturers, deliberately pitched at the beginning of the chapter at the level of general treatment of the workers by the authorities, presumably to avoid any suspicion that the individual mistreatment handed out to Germano Santos Vidigal later is attributable merely to the kind of exceptional bad cases cited in more contemporary scandals. This chapter of the text opens and closes with imagery derived from bullfighting: this form of imagery has also been used earlier in the text, when João is summoned to the anti-communist rally in Évora by means of an "invitation" delivered by an anonymous agent of power, who is described as having "two legs and a man's name, but this is actually a beast that will bite" ("*duas pernas e nome de homem, mas é bicho de morder*" [91]) and who therefore functions as a reincarnation of the Cretan Minotaur, being half-man and half-bull. The passage under consideration here begins with strikers being dragged into the bullring in Montemor, but the language used deliberately does not make it clear from the start that the cattle referred to are human beings; in fact, the initial impression created by the use of the word *Olé* is something like that of a television commentator enthusing the viewers for the spectacle (for a summary of the symbolic associations of bulls with human death in the origins of the Iberian bullfight, see Josephs and Caballero in Lorca 30-34):

Olé. The apprentice went down to the bullring on the orders of the supervisor, he inspected the bolts on the stalls, he counts the bulls, decides that they can be brought in, he goes around the arena to have a good look at the whole scene, the stands, the boxes, the stall for the musical band, the sunny side and the shaded side, in his nostrils he can smell fresh dung, and he declares, They can come in. And then the doors are opened and the herd is brought in, these animals which will be fought today in accordance with all the rules of the spectacle, the sweep of the cape, the puncturing with *banderillas*, the beating with sticks, and then finally the crowning of the nape of the neck with the sword, whose blade and sharp point are piercing my heart, olé.

Olé. Desceu o neto à praça por ordem do inteligente, inspeccionou os fechos dos curros, conta os cabrestos e considera que devem chegar, dá uma volta à arena para ter uma boa vista de conjunto, as bancadas, os camarotes, o lugar da banda de música, a sombra e o sol, dá-lhe no nariz o cheiro da bosta fresca, e diz, Podem vir. Abrem-se então as portas e a manada entra, esta que será toureada hoje consoante os preceitos inteiros da arte, passada à capa, espetada de bandarilhas, castigada de varas e enfim coroado o morrilho com o punho da espada, que ponta e lâmina tenho-as aqui atravessadas no coração, olé. (165)

In fact, this passage not only succeeds in disguising the real identity of the bulls up to this point, but it deliberately exploits the language designed to entice contemporary tourists and other consumers to attend this event for their entertainment ("esta que será toureada hoje consoante os preceitos inteiros da arte"), as well as imposing a shallowly moralistic interpretation on the punishment to be meted out ("castigada de varas e enfim coroado o morrilho com o punho da espada"), which is slowly

transformed through an implicit allusion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to a notion of martyrdom instead of one of mere spectacle: "que ponta e lâmina tenho-as aqui atravessadas no coração." It is only after this that the unusual circumstances of this bullfight are revealed, as the only spectators are policemen, and the spectacle continues, being described in the tone, once again, of a heroic service dedicated to a feudal master, which in reality disguises a spiteful act of victimization: "The bullring fills up with dark cattle, assembled from miles around in heroic confrontations by the police, on the attack, charging, there they go, letting the animals from the strike have it, proud kings when they have the sickle in their hands, but victims as mere men, These are the prisoners from the arduous battle, at your feet, our Lord, we lay down the flags and cannons captured from the enemy, see how red they are, even if less so than they were at the start, because since then we have dragged them along in the dust and spat on them." ("Vai-se enchendo a praça de gado escuro, arrebanhado em léguas e léguas de heróicos combates da guarda, ao assalto, à carga, e eles aí vão, carregando sobre os animais da greve, os leões da foice, os homens do padecer, Estes são os cativos da dura batalha, aos vossos pés, senhor, depomos as bandeiras e os canhões tomados ao inimigo, vede como elas são vermelhas, menos do que foram no princípio porque entretanto as rojámos no pó, sobre elas escarrámos" [165-66]). One notes here not only the deliberate use of the archaic second-person plural form of the verb *vede* to reinforce the memory of an era when everyone knew their place in society, but also the allusions to national pride expressed through an essentially feudal vision of inter-class relations ("aos vossos pés, senhor, depomos as bandeiras e os canhões tomados ao inimigo") and the shift at the end of this excerpt to a direct address from the police to the landowners ("aos vossos pés, senhor, depomos," "rojámos," and "escarrámos"). This use of the direct form of address creates a sense of what might be termed exclusive complicity between the two parties concerned, with the reader effectively overhearing these remarks which leave no doubt as to the assent of the powerful to the actions of their servants; this thus contrasts with the inclusive complicity identified by Mark J. Sabine in a passage later in the same chapter, where the reader is sucked into identity with the narrator, who looks on in horror at the treatment meted out to Germano (168) (see Sabine, "Form and Ideology" 47). Finally, one wonders whether the ambivalent reference to the captured banners as being "vermelhas" ("red") is an allusion to them being covered in the blood of the captives or an insulting reference to the political allegiances of the prisoners. The point is surely that the very existence of this ambiguity ironizes the assumption that the workers' subversive ideology justifies their slaughter.

The contemptuous use of the verb *escarrar* ("to spit") is then taken up again later in the chapter in the names of two of Germano's torturers, Escarro and Escarrilho, as the focus shifts to their individual act of barbarism. Their evil nature is clarified by two narratorial comments about them: firstly, the comment that "they are not related although they belong to the same family." ("não são parentes embora pertençam à mesma família" [171]) indicates a metaphorically moral interpretation of their nature, similar to the comment addressed to the ringleader of the blind rapists by the doctor's wife in a later novel, when she tells him that "that voice can only have one face" (*Blindness* 172) ("essa voz só pode ter essa cara" [*Cegueira* 177]); and, in another nod in the direction of imagery used in that text, the narrator further describes Escarro as a "blind man who can see, the worst kind of blind person." ("cego com os olhos abertos, que não há cego pior" [172]). At the end of the chapter, these two characters, having avoided blame for Germano's death, display a more human side to their nature by going to watch bland populist films with their wives at the cinema (180), a manifestation of culture which not only does not trouble their own consciences but also fails to awaken those of the rest of the audience in the way that Saramago's own fiction sets out to do here. In fact, even the choice of films indicated is significant: for the first one mentioned, *Mariquilla Terremoto*, a 1938 Spanish-German co-production, was a light-hearted entertainment (based on a drama by the Quintero brothers) depicting the rise to stardom of a popular singer in a folkloric Spanish idiom, thus perpetuating a comforting fable of progress open to all, when, in reality, such doors would ordinarily have been closed to the vast majority of the people in Portugal (for a fuller discussion of the film, see Triana-Toribio 35, 94).

The fact that the chapter closes with a repetition of what was also its opening word *Olé*, this time in a context which bears no apparent connection to bullfighting, serves to remind the reader of the brutalities which these men commit in one part of their lives while still behaving like upstanding citi-

zens the rest of the time: "What a good idea to bring along our wives, they'll enjoy it, the poor dears, that way things will remain nice and calm, it's got to be worth it, but the one that was good, that was really good, was the film on the Thursday, Estelita Castro, the singing and dancing diva, backed up by Antonio Vico, Ricardo Merino and Rafaela Satorres, in that marvellous musical, *Mariquilla Terremoto*, olé." ("Boa ideia trazer as mulheres, elas gostam coitadas, assim as coisas estejam mais calmas, deve valer a pena, mas bom, o que se chama bom, foi o de quinta-feira, Estelita Castro, a deusa da canção e do bailado, secundada por Antonio Vico, Ricardo Merino e Rafaela Satorres, no maravilhoso filme musical, *Mariquilla Terremoto*, olé" [180]). The essential inhumanity of these characters is thus reflected in their similar names which effectively designate them as performers of a function rather than human beings in the fullest sense, while their participation in an everyday popular entertainment surreptitiously invites us to consider whether also their supposedly innocent wives and we too, by our passivity, are merely conniving in the performance of unsavoury spectacles which (unlike the ants in Germano's cell) we never actually come to see in person.

If political protest sees the state act in the stern role of the unforgiving father in a manner reminiscent of the persona adopted by Salazar during the dictatorship, then at times Portugal is invoked as motherland, most notably in terms of a debt owed to the workers' place of birth. This becomes most evident in the sections of the text which cover the period of World War I. There are two particularly striking passages in this context. In the first, the narrator leaves no doubt as to the potential cost to António Mau-Tempo of enlistment, as he debunks the type of romanticised vision of war often used to make personal sacrifice seem more acceptable in terms of patriotic duty:

We would have to put up with losing our belief in those sweet fairy-tales ... like that one about the young soldier in the trenches pining for the mother who gave him his birth, since his celestial mother has already died, looking at her portrait until one day a stray bullet ... shattered the picture into smithereens and completely destroyed the image of the sweet old lady and his beloved mother, and then the young soldier, driven mad by grief, leaps over the top and runs with his weapon pointing out in front of him towards the enemy trenches, but he didn't get very far, as a hail of bullets hit him and struck him down ... this hail of bullets having been fired by a German soldier who also has in his pocket the photo of his sweet old mother.

haveríamos de sofrer o desgosto de deixar de acreditar nas maviotas histórias de carochinha ... por exemplo aquela do soldadinho que vivia na trincheira saudoso da sua mãe carnal, que a celeste já morreu, olhando enfim o retrato daquela que lhe deu o ser, até que certo dia uma bala perdida ... fez o retrato em estilhas, levou a efígie da doce anciã e senhora mãe para os quintos, e então o soldadinho, louco de dor, salta o parapeito e corre de arma em riste contra as trincheiras adversárias, mas não foi longe, caiu-lhe em cima uma rajada que o ceifou ... a qual rajada lhe foi atirada por um soldado alemão que também tem no bolso o retrato de sua mãe e suave anciã. (198)

This extract, once again, conceals clever artistic shaping beneath its apparently simple surface, presenting and simultaneously sending up the sentimental aspects of the narrative precisely by the conflation of two contrived clichés: the commonplace of the soldier protected from an otherwise fatal bullet in battle by an image (which could be of a lover, a mother, or of the Blessed Virgin) feminizes and thus implicitly weakens the brutal impact of the traditionally masculine pursuit of warfare, except that this comforting notion is destroyed completely by its conjunction with the image of an enemy soldier (susceptible, of course, to exactly the same emotions as the Portuguese one) who mows our hero down in his noble but futile symbolic defence of the same mother whose image was supposed to protect him, only for the falsity of this comforting metanarrative to be cruelly exposed by harsh reality. The additional irony is that the specific verb used to refer to the killing of the soldier ("ceifou," literally "harvested," associated, of course, with Pessoa's poem "Ela canta, pobre ceifeira," idealizing the eternal and unthinking labours of the peasant; see "She Sings, Poor Reaper" ["Ela canta, pobre ceifeira"] Pessoa 64-67) is derived from the very agricultural practices which the workers of the Alentejo ought to be practising for the real benefit of the nation, and which, presumably, would also be of greater benefit to Germany as well. Instead, however, another family is left to mourn the "menino de sua mãe," to quote the title of another poem by Pessoa, this time depicting the pathos of dead soldiers lying abandoned on the battlefield in order to create a rhetorical contrast between the

brutality of war and the tenderness of a mother's love (see "His Mother's Very Own" ["O Menino da Sua Mãe"] Pessoa 72-75), as Saramago transforms crass sentimentality into social critique.

In general, the relationship between the nation and its citizens remains an unequal one, for the sentimentality of this passage needs to be set alongside another one, where the nation is seen to be a mother inattentive to the needs of her children but demanding of them when military service is required: "Your name is António Mau-Tempo, and I have been waiting for you ever since you came into this world, my son, just so you know what a devoted mother I am, and even if I never paid you all that much attention all these years, you will have to forgive me since there are lots of you and I can't look after all of you, I have been going around preparing my officers who will rule over you ... and they tell me that you cannot read, I'm astonished, did I not set up primary schools in important places, not secondary ones, which you wouldn't need, since your life is not of that kind, and now you come and tell me that you can't do the three Rs, what a hard time you are giving me, António Mau-Tempo." ("Chamas-te António Mau-Tempo, desde que vieste a este mundo te espero, meu filho, para que saibas que mãe estremeosa sou, e se durante todos estes anos te não dei muita atenção, haverás de perdoar porque vocês são muitos e eu não posso olhar por todos, andei a preparar os meus oficiais que hão-de mandar em ti ... e dizem-me que não sabes ler, fico espantada, então não pus eu escolas primárias nos sítios estratégicos, liceus não, não precisarias, a tua vida é diferente, e vens dizer-me que não sabes ler, nem escrever, nem contar, trabalhos me dás, António Mau-Tempo" [197-98]).

As has been noted by Sabine, however, the initial presentation of the war in *Levantado* is at a distance, reflecting the experience of great historical events only as they might have seemed to the ordinary participant at the time ("*Levantado do Chão*" 151): "Rumors spread around Monte Lavre that there was a war in Europe, a place about which few people locally knew anything or could shed any light. There were other wars where they were, and no insignificant ones, working all day, if there was work, groaning with hunger all day, whether there was work or not. Just that there were not as many dead, and generally the corpses went to the grave in one piece." ("Correram vozes em Monte Lavre de que havia uma guerra na Europa, sítio de que pouca gente no lugar tinha notícias e luzes. Guerras também as havia ali, e não pequenas, todo o dia a trabalhar, se trabalho havia, todo o dia a ganhar de fome, houvesse ou não houvesse. Só as mortes não eram tantas, e no geral os corpos iam para a cova inteiros" [47]). In this passage (and making use of a line of thought which is repeated in *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*, where Reis mistakes the celebrations of the "Dia de Camões" for an attack on the city; see *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* 303 and *O Ano* 350), the normal lines of demarcation between war and peace are consciously blurred. Essentially, the reader is persuaded that the supposedly pressing matters of state which have led the nation to send its young men to their deaths in Flanders are of no concern to the people of the Alentejo, where what is referred to complacently as peace by those who write history is really an ongoing and undeclared war against the ordinary people of the region. The co-option of ordinary Portuguese men into the more obvious war thus requires of the authorities a public relations campaign which becomes an exercise in contrasting private grief with the predictable official rhetoric designed to keep the nation on the same track without distraction: "In some places round about people wore mourning clothes, since our relative has died in the war. The government sent its condolences, its heartfelt regrets, and said that the fatherland. They made the usual use of Afonso Anriques and Nuno Álvares Pereira, we discovered the sea-route to India, French women have a soft spot for our soldiers." ("Em alguns lugares ao redor houve gente que pôs luto, o nosso parente morreu na guerra. O governo mandava condolências, sentidos pêsames, e dizia que a pátria. Fez-se o uso habitual de Afonso Anriques e Nuno Álvares Pereira, nós é que descobrimos o caminho marítimo para a Índia, a mulher francesa tem um fraco pelos nossos soldados" [57]).

One notes that, by way of contrast with some other contexts in the novel, where the expression of human sexuality beyond traditional norms is generally seen to be a sign of rebellion against authority, here it is invoked by the state as father as a temptation to prospective soldiers ("a mulher francesa tem um fraco pelos nossos soldados") when this suits the interests of this supposedly loving progenitor, thus exposing the falsity of its own analogical claims to parenthood through its apparent lack of concern for the proper behavior of its children outside the parental home of Portugal. The reality, of course, is that the sexual morality (and, indeed, all other moral codes) espoused by those in positions of power in the normal routine ceases to be of any relevance to their interests when the requirement

is merely to enlist men into the armed forces: under those circumstances, sexual temptation therefore becomes a legitimate weapon in a propaganda offensive. The truncation of the clause intended to evoke the higher interests of the nation ("e dizia que a patria") merely highlights the repetitive and predictable nature of such rhetoric. In addition, the reference to Afonso Henriques here (even allowing for the Alentejan dialectal representation of the name of the founding father of the nation) prompts some ironic reflection on the past glories of the Portuguese tradition invoked in this context once placed alongside the rather less-than-glorious depiction of the same figure in *História do Cerco de Lisboa* as being indecisive at best and brutal at worst. In fact, the need for Portuguese society (and particularly for the disadvantaged within) to escape from the irrelevant categories of opposition with the non-Portuguese set up by those in power in order to keep the powerless in subjugation is encapsulated in two hints within the text at the unifying force of culture. Firstly, the illusory and traditional historical opposition between the ordinary peoples of the Iberian Peninsula (an issue touched on again, of course, in *A Jangada de Pedra* of 1986 and also alluded to directly by the author in more explicit reflections on current affairs; see Saramago, "Mi iberismo" 5) is addressed in terms of a paradox created by the very economic forces which would normally keep the ordinary people of both nations in opposition to one another but which, in fact, drive them to discover common ground, as both António Mau-Tempo and his Spanish counterpart Miguel Hernández discover in the hardships of their exile in France that there is more in common between them than divides them: "António Mau-Tempo and Miguel Hernandez know all about these things as they write to one another, Mau-Tempo from his home in Monte Lavre, Hernandez from his in Fuente Palmera, these are simple letters, with spelling mistakes in almost every word, so that what Hernandez is reading isn't really Portuguese, nor is what Mau-Tempo is reading proper Spanish, it is a language shared by the two of them, a language which does not know a lot but can express a lot, they make themselves understood, it is as if the two of them were making signals across the border." ("Destas coisas sabem António Mau-Tempo e Miguel Hernandez que no intervalo se escrevem, Mau-Tempo de seu Monte Lavre, Hernandez de sua Fuente Palmera, são cartas simples, com erros de ortografia quase em cada palavra, de modo que o que lê Hernandez não é bem português, nem é bem espanhol o que Mau-Tempo lê, é uma língua comum dos dois, a língua do pouco saber e muito exprimir, lá se entendem, é como se ambos estivessem a fazer sinais de um lado para o outro da fronteira" [289]).

By contrast with the elegant expression of Saramago's most famous appropriation of the poetry of others (the figure of Ricardo Reis, whose work is concentrated on form at the expense of content), these two uneducated men have no choice but to neglect form, but they still find that they have real opinions to exchange about their experiences of life. It is probably no coincidence that António's Spanish counterpart here bears the name of a poet who was well known both for his communist activism and for his intense roots in the soil of his native region (and who attempted in vain to escape into Portugal at the end of the Spanish Civil War), for this allusion to the name (if not directly to the work) of a well-known poet is matched by another within the text, to none other, in fact, than Ricardo Reis. The Reis depicted here, however, is nothing like the naïve and complacent loner depicted by Saramago in a later work, who is content to merely watch the spectacle of an increasingly unpleasant world. For the Ricardo Reis of this novel is a happily married man, who offers bed and board to João Mau-Tempo on his release from prison in Lisbon with a generosity and spontaneity unthinkable from his namesake in *O Ano*. The following is the description of the scene which greets João as he enters the home shared by Ricardo Reis with his wife, who here has the popular name Ermelinda: "Ermelinda is a stout woman who opens the door as if she were opening her arms, Come in, and João Mau-Tempo, please forgive him those who are fussy and those who only appreciate melodramatic scenes, the first sensation that he has is the smell of food, a vegetable and bean soup which has been bubbling away, and the man says, Make yourself at home." ("Ermelinda é uma gorda mulher que abre a porta como se estivesse abrindo os braços, Entre, e João Mau-Tempo, perdoem-lhe os melindrosos e os que só cuidam e estimam grandes lances dramáticos, a primeira sensação que tem é a do cheiro da comida, uma sopa de hortaliça e feijão que tem estado a aferventar, e o homem diz-lhe, Ponha-se à vontade" [264]).

The above referred to incident is important not only in literary terms, as regards the question of the relationship between Saramago's two fictional figures of Ricardo Reis, but also because it permits

the author to take an icon of Portuguese popular culture, the famous Fado song "Uma Casa Portuguesa," which in the eyes of many was tainted by its associations with passive acquiescence with the dominant regime, and to transform the "two arms open waiting for me" ("dois braços à minha espera") and the communal mealtimes and bowls of steaming soup of which Amália Rodrigues sings into a gesture of welcome which is no longer dominated by ideology but based on simple humanitarian concern, in line with the biblical injunction to take in strangers, a code blatantly ignored by the prison authorities in their calculated release of João late at night in an unfamiliar city (see 260-61).

This small incident is perhaps not of great note in the overall construction of the novel. It is, however, typical of a strategy consistently adopted in the writing of *Levantado*: that of emphasizing the popular over the self-important, of citing names and genres (romances of chivalry, or moral fables), or Portuguese cultural traditions closely associated with conceptions of national identity or Christian virtue (bullfighting or the veneration of the mother) and re-appropriating them in the name of the ordinary citizen from a complacent and powerful elite which has ceased to be able to see how they have become tainted over time by its own ideological bias. In doing so, Saramago not only makes a convincing case for the inevitability and necessity of the April 1974 Revolution depicted in the final chapter of the novel: he uses effectively the resourceful and inventive nature of his own narrative to remind his reader of the ideological nature of all reading and all retelling of history. And in doing so, even as he implicitly casts a question mark over any attempts (including left-wing ones) to create a definitive metanarrative of human history, he simultaneously reminds us of the importance of the words which close the opening chapter of the novel: "But all of this can be told in a different way" ("Mas tudo isto pode ser contado doutra maneira" [14]). If we do not react to the implications of that statement with mental flexibility, then we will not really be readers when we consume the discourse of others: we will be merely taking in the words of a dictator. And "dictation" in the most literal sense can all too easily lead to dictatorship in the political one if we simply follow the codes laid down for us by those in positions of power.

Works Cited

- Camões, Luís de. *Os Lusíadas*. Ed. Emanuel Paulo Ramos. Porto: Porto Editora, 1978.
- Camões, Luís de. *The Lusiads*. Trans. Landeg White. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Lorca, Federico García. *Poema del Cante Jondo y Romancero Gitano*. Ed. Allen Josephs and Juan Caballero. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1978.
- Lepecki, Maria Lúcia. "José Saramago: *Levantado do Chão*." *Sobreimpressões. Estudos de Literatura Portuguesa e Africana*. By Maria Lúcia Lepecki. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1988. 83-112.
- Mariquilla Terremoto*. Dir. Benito Perojo. Berlin: Hispano Film Produktion, 1938.
- Martins, Adriana Alves de Paula. *A Construção da memória da nação em José Saramago e Gore Vidal*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Pessoa, Fernando. *Fernando Pessoa: Selected Poems*. Ed. and trans. Peter Rickard. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1971.
- Sabine, Mark J. *Form and Ideology in the Novels of José Saramago*. Ph.D. Diss. Manchester: U of Manchester, 2001.
- Sabine, Mark J. "Levantado do Chão after *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." *In Dialogue with Saramago: Essays in Comparative Literature*. Ed. Adriana Alves de Paula Martins and Mark J. Sabine. Manchester: Manchester Spanish and Portuguese Studies, 2006. 141-61.
- Saramago, José. *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*. 1984. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1985.
- Saramago, José. *Baltasar and Blimunda*. Trans. Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1998.
- Saramago, José. *Blindness*. Trans. Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1997.
- Saramago, José. *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1995.
- Saramago, José. *História do Cerco de Lisboa*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1989.
- Saramago, José. *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*. Trans. Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1996.
- Saramago, José. *A Jangada de Pedra*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1986.
- Saramago, José. *Levantado do Chão*. 1980. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1988.
- Saramago, José. *Memorial do Convento*. 1982. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1989.
- Saramago, José. "Mi iberismo." *Sobre el Iberismo, y otros escritos de literatura Portuguesa*. Ed. César Antonio Molina. Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1990. 5-9.
- Saramago, José. *The Stone Raft*. Trans. Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1994.

Saramago, José. *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. Trans. Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1992.

Silva, Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da. "No Paraíso da memória, um outro valor da terra se levanta." *O Averso do Bordado*. By Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 2000. 260-69.

Silva, Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da. "Saramago e Redol. Referência e reverência." *José Saramago. Il Bagaglio dello Scrittore*. Ed. Giulia Lanciani. Roma: Bulzoni, 1996. 37-47.

Triana-Toribio, Núria. *Spanish National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Author's profile: David Frier teaches Portuguese language and literature at the University of Leeds. His book publications include *The Novels of José Saramago: Echoes from the Past, Pathways into the Future* (2007) and *As (Trans)figurações do eu nos romances de Camilo Castelo Branco (1850-1870)* (2005), as well as numerous articles on the works of José Saramago and Camilo Castelo Branco. Currently, he is working on a series of articles on the later novels of Eça de Queirós and a collected volume of studies on the contextualisation of Fernando Pessoa in Portuguese and European literature and culture. E-mail: <d.g.frier@leeds.ac.uk>