



TENTAÇÕES DE SAPATEIRO: A FRESH APPROACH TO HISTORY AND FICTION IN JOSÉ SARAMAGO (2023)

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Readers of José Saramago are familiar with the interplay between fiction and History that permeates practically his entire body of work, more or less evident depending on the central theme addressed by the writer. This fact also explains the numerous academic works, especially in the field of literary research, that choose the dialogue between these two spheres of perception and representation of the world as their research subject.

Generally, the language of these texts tends to conform to the objectivity demanded by their scientific approach. However, this is not the case with the book recently released by the writer Dércio Braúna, a result of his doctoral thesis in History from the Federal University of Ceará (Brazil). With the same rigor and sophistication with which he weaves his poems and tales, the author has imprinted upon the writing of this text—centered on the “mutual nourishment” that can exist “between fictional operation and historiographical operation” (Braúna, 2023, p. 14)—marks of poetic language that reveal his way of thinking about History and Literature. This relevant characteristic, however, does not diminish the careful merit of his research. On the contrary, it gives it a fluidity and even a lightness that makes the reading quite enjoyable, in addition to its informative and analytical richness.

An example of poetic language is already found in the ambiguity of the title. Taking the well-known maxim of Apeles (“Let the cobbler not rise above the shoe”), which admonishes those who dare to opine on something they do not know, *Tentações de Sapateiro* can refer both to the Portuguese writer’s approach in turning his literary work into a reinterpretation of History and to the proposal of the Brazilian historian to “make history of this revising fiction” (Braúna, 2023, p. 27), which is the novel *História do Cerco de Lisboa*, published by José Saramago in 1989.

The historian-poet divided his journey into twelve chapters, in addition to an introduction and an epilogue, whose titles also gesture toward the permeability of history through literature. They are: Landscape with flooding; “Like a great and convulsive sea”; *Opus me*: an essay in search of history; The time of permeability; The plot crossed with the warp; Socrates’s head, Marx’s lines; “And how will we understand each other?”; “The innocent victim”; The danger of “masterful authority”; “Perhaps if we lifted this paving stone”; The “fictional methods” of a new history; Books with a person inside; And if in 2047...: the “practical past” of history; And a shadow still breathes. As the author explains in the introduction, using the analogy of the various doors of the Moorish fence around medieval Lisbon, the chapters have a certain autonomy that allows the reader to choose which one to start with since all entries have the same purpose, which is to understand Saramago’s fictional operation in his siege of history.

In the paratextual composition of the book, we add the “Afterword with some complaints,” written by Prof. Dr. Francisco Régis Lopes Ramos, who supervised the thesis from which the book originates. Furthermore, the volume concludes with a section of comments on the footnotes of some pages, whose advantage is to expand the information provided by them without swelling the body of the text. Also noteworthy are dozens of photographs that illustrate the author’s argumentation and complement his writing very naturally.



Based on studies by Michel de Certeau, Georges Duby, Jacques Rancière, R. G. Collingwood, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White, among others, as well as fiction writers like Gonçalo M. Tavares, highly relevant to the proposed approach, the author examines the conception of the novel and history for Saramago, and from these two forms of writing the past, he highlights some methods—such as digressions and anachronisms—that, especially in *História do Cerco de Lisboa*, serve the novelist’s purpose of questioning the absolutism of the so-called “historical truth.”

Investigating the origin of this Saramagoan novel, Dércio Braúna engages the book that would have motivated the fiction featuring the reviser Raimundo Silva. It is *O cerco de Lisboa de 1447*: narrative of the glorious deed according to contemporary documents, published in 1938 by the Lisbon City Council, authored by the little-known historian José Augusto de Oliveira. He is the “innocent victim,” in Saramago’s words, of the “No” that the reviser intentionally includes in the sentence stating that the crusaders helped the Portuguese take Lisbon from the Moors. From this denial, made to a kind of official version, a new history must be told.

Therefore, Dércio Braúna’s siege starts from Saramago’s “No.” And just like the novelist, who liked his readers to think that his books “carry a person inside,” the self of the Brazilian historian is felt in his *Tentações de Sapateiro*, bringing the reader closer to both history and the one who writes it.

REFERÊNCIAS

Braúna, D. (2023). *Tentações de Sapateiro: o cerco da história na operação ficcional de José Saramago*.

DECLARAÇÃO ÉTICA

CONFLITO DE INTERESSE: Nada a declarar. **FINANCIAMENTO:** Nada a declarar.



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