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## HISTORY, THE TRAMP, AND THE TRAP OF FICTION\*

To be at the end of fact is not to be at the  
beginning of imagination but it is to be at  
the end of both.

Wallace Stevens

Não caio na armadilha da ficção [...] Faria  
do diário um romance

*Em liberdade: uma ficção de  
Sérvio Santiago*, p. 127.

In the beginning was the world — and myth. And myth was coincident with the world. Not the description, but the actual coherent form and meaning of the world. Then came history and with it the need to go beyond myth and the need to distinguish. That is to say, the need to distinguish between the description of the world, the world without description, and the description without the world. From this all too human eagerness to discriminate and categorize, which reaches its peak at the height of modernity in the nineteenth century, came the celebrated dichotomies of Western thought, which have proved to be both useful and cumbersome. In order to go beyond them without falling back into the coincidences of myth, we must take them into due account. I mean such distinctions as myth and truth: science and fantasy; mind and body; life and art; male and female; nature and culture; black and white; history and literature; fact and fiction. Poets, it is true, have always been wary of the modern compulsion to distinguish too much (remember Blake's denunciations of Urizenic demarcations or, closer to us, Rilke's impatience with those who «zu stark unterscheiden»). We have always learned with the poets (frequently, some argue, without their knowing) that the attempt to understand the world implies the difficulty of dealing with fuzzy in-distinction, as well as the risk of crossing boundaries and the pain of experiencing the indeterminacy of the borderline.

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\* I would like to thank Martin Earl for his beautiful translations of the poems by Santiago and Ramos Rosa quoted on pp. 7 and 11.

I am using the concept of borderline not so much in the sense of «neither nor» but in the sense of «both and»: both myth and truth, both science and fantasy, both mind and body, both life and art, both male and female, both nature and culture, both black and white, both history and literature, both fact and fiction. As the flux of being-human, including both life and death, in the borderline between the beginning and the end, as it were, such the possibility of knowledge-making and understanding. Understanding requires the strict demarcation of fields and the definite fixation of meanings; but also, as is beginning to be realized within «hard» science itself, what I would call the productive, if not passionate, creativity of exchange. My formulations here echo changing conceptions of science in our time, which have come to be associated with the notion of «postmodernity». The work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos is relevant for this issue (Santos, 1987; 1989; 1992). By enunciating the concept of the double epistemological break, Santos has demonstrated that the most important dichotomy of the paradigm of modern science, the distinction between science (as «objective» progress and progressivism) and common sense (as «subjective» conservation and conservatism), no longer holds as the foundation of knowledge. By urging a new hermeneutics of the production of knowledge, he invites us to acknowledge the borderline condition of our existing and to privilege the pragmatics of a creative dialogue, or exchange, between knowledge and wisdom, progress and prudence. The problematics of this distinction between science and common sense keeps manifesting itself in different ways, under different names, and in different fields, as my dichotomies above would tend to indicate. In literary theory and criticism in the United States since the late sixties, for example, the fact-and-fiction dichotomy has been at the origin of new selfconscious forms of creative and interpretative writing, such as the new journalism, for which the designations of documentary literature, literature of fact, literary nonfiction, sometimes even non-fictional fiction have frequently been used (Weber, 1980). If, for the sake of argument, we were to compare the science/common sense dichotomy with the fact/fiction dichotomy, we could then think of the double epistemological break as *the productive, and passionate, creativity of exchange that characterizes the fictionalizing activity.*

The latter phrase I borrow from Wolfgang Iser (who understands it also, though differently from myself, as boundary-crossing), so as to suspend for a moment the distinction between fact and fiction. «If borderlines of knowledge give rise to fictionalizing activity», Iser surmises, «(...) what can be known need not be invented.» (Iser, 1990: 951). Iser's argument (which takes the distinction between fact and fiction for granted and aims at further distinguishing «literary fictions» from «the fictions of the ordinary world») seems to me to be fallacious on three accounts: firstly, there is the question of *what* can be known; secondly, the question of what it means *to know*; thirdly, and far more important, since I share Stevens' distrust of inventing without discovering, there is the inadequacy of the notion of «invention» (Stevens, 1966: 177). Inventing, again, implies the problematic dichotomy of fact

and fiction, and requires a final choice between the two; discovering (and once more I invoke Stevens to redeem the much maligned concept of «discovery» in our time as *discovering without imposing*) implies «not a choice/Between, but of» (Stevens, 1968: 403, 404). In any case, Iser is good at pointing to the dilemmatic inevitability of knowledge-making as fictionalizing activity: «If fictionalizing transgresses those boundaries beyond which unrecognizable realities exist», he argues, «then, the very possibilities concocted for the repair of this deficiency, caught between our unknowable beginning and ending, become indicative of how we conceive of what is withheld, inaccessible, and unavailable» (Iser, 1990: 951). Many years ago, in a very influential book on the theory of fiction that is also crucial for Iser, Frank Kermode had already suggested that the sense of human life lies in *the ways in which we try to make sense of it*, and that such ways (or *forms*) are precisely that which we call *fictions* (Kermode, 1967). Who would then want to escape the trap of fiction, that selfconsciously critical fictionalizing activity without which human understanding, as a precarious knowledge-making process, is not possible? The form of the tramp — not as marginal, but as the quintessential borderline figure that is represented as being always in and out of everything, may very well be the best metaphor for the condition of human understanding and sense-making I here postulate.

To strike at the paradox of meaning as both inside and outside, or ungraspable totality, I am, of course, playing with another crucial Western distinction: that between center and margin. The «center» is that which is identical to itself, therefore it is not problematic; it requires no «understanding». The «margin» is that which, being «different», allows the center to be the «center»; from the point of view of centrality, this is precisely how «the margin» must be «understood». For no other reason are the poets frequently banned from the polis. Not because they «lie», as Plato denounced, but because, as Sir Philip Sidney pointed out, they «nothing affirm». To affirm nothing does not mean to be socially irrelevant or politically irresponsible (as some, under Sidney's tutelage, may have half-wanted it in a self-defensive gesture), but to put everything into question, including the act of putting into question itself. This is clearly a political stance, rather than a philosophic one, in that its dramatization of solitary uniqueness of perspective calls for the solidarity of vision. Why else, if not for political reasons, would the centrality of a given culture eventually (or periodically) claim as its own the previously decreed marginality of its greatest poets? Once the distinction between center and margin is made problematic, the existential nomadism of the figure of the tramp, who circulates all over, looks into everything with a seemingly detached eye, and stays fixed nowhere, remains as the best analogy for the one possibility of critical inquiry that is fully aware of its own entrapment in fiction. As a form of human understanding, the fictionalizing activity is never detached; whatever the end results may be, it is always politically committed to itself as a meaning-producing process («productive/passionate creativity of exchange»).

These concepts — the «tramp», the «trap of fiction» — I borrow from Silviano Santiago. In 1981 this Brazilian author (poet, novelist, essayist, scholar, teacher) published a striking piece of writing. Its title: *Em liberdade*; its sub-title: *Uma ficção de Silviano Santiago* (Santiago, 1985). As you leaf the book through for a preliminary acquaintance, you are immediately reminded that the reading of certain books of fiction or poetry — *Leaves of Grass* is a classic example — requires a full awareness of their material presentation of themselves as well. Santiago's fiction presents itself as the factual edition of an invention which, in my terms, we would have to call *discovery*. In a gesture that, in itself, is not particularly original, *Em liberdade* claims to be the diary that the Brazilian modernist author Graciliano Ramos might have kept during his first few weeks in freedom in Rio de Janeiro, after having been released, in January 13, 1937, from his then months and ten days in prison for political reasons. But is the book's claim really meant to hold? If we pay closer attention to its presentation we realize that the title is never fixed. We find one formula on the cover (*Em liberdade: um ficção de Silviano Santiago*); then the half-title page bears, predictably, the first half of the title (*Em liberdade*), but the title page drops the title's indefinite article (*Em liberdade: ficção de Silviano Santiago*), while finally the table of contents presents Santiago's fiction as a *factual* introduction to the *discovered* diary of Graciliano Ramos, titled *Em liberdade*. Shifting back and forth between fact and fiction, history and literature, truth and myth, Santiago's title evidently aspires to the condition of tramphood.

So does the actual writing itself. The alleged «diary» has been preserved against the will of its presumed author, who, like Kafka, had supposedly ordered its destruction by fire. We might then say that the existence of the diary as Graciliano Ramos' real diary is a double fiction. Not only was it never written by Graciliano Ramos, but the very act of fictionalizing that gives it «reality» includes the decision of its presumed author to have it destroyed, once «written». The literary construction of the historical setting of Santiago's fiction thus presents itself not only as a commentary on itself as fiction, but also as an individual's act of freedom (indeed, as fictionalizing activity), which is nonetheless conditioned by the historical characters and facts themselves. By writing historical Graciliano's «facts» against his will, so to speak, Silviano's metafiction becomes a commentary on the very concept of individual freedom as well. The book's title keeps pounding in the readers' minds: who or what is really «em liberdade»? The fact (that is to say, Graciliano out of prison)? or the fiction (that is to say, Silviano's «discovery»? Or perhaps the question should rather be, how «free» is freedom?

In order to look into the facts of Silviano Santiago's fiction we have to go back to history. The history of Santiago's fiction is ostensibly Graciliano Ramos, the novelist and writer of memoirs, the committed intellectual and educator, who in March 1936 was sent to prison on charges of subversive (communist) activities, to be released only ten months later, the charges not proven. The harrowing experience of his imprisonment is magnificently related in his *Memórias do cárcere* (1953).

The plausibility of Graciliano's soul searching diary writing (that is to say, the fact that Graciliano had already turned himself autobiographically into a fictional character of sorts) thus becomes part and parcel of the fact of Santiago's fiction also. But the history of Santiago's fiction is, above all, the history of Brazil, its emergence as a peripheral country in the world system, from European invasion and colonialism to imperial ambition and dependency, on to a grotesquely unjust distribution of wealth and privilege, subsequent political repression and totalitarian regimes, and predictable, though problematic, *Abertura*. In *Em liberdade* the history of Brazil is retold by Santiago in the late seventies (following the *Abertura*) as lived by Graciliano Ramos in the mid thirties (following the latter's release). This double perspective (or authority) Santiago had already used with great success, though in a different way, in his book of poetry *Crescendo durante a guerra numa província ultramarina* (1978). A good example is the poem «signed» precisely by Graciliano Ramos and titled «Estoicismo estético»:

Queria endurecer o coração,  
eliminar o passado,  
fazer com ele o que faço  
quando emendo um período  
— riscar, engrossar os riscos  
e transformá-los em borrões,  
suprimir todas as letras,  
não deixar vestígio de idéias  
obliteradas.  
Graciliano Ramos

[I'd like to harden the heart  
eliminate the past,  
revise it  
like a sentence —  
cross out, thicken lines,  
turn them into blotches,  
suppress all letters  
leave no vestige  
of obliterated ideas.  
Graciliano Ramos  
(Tr. Martin Earl)]

The poem implies the distinction between fact and fiction (here properly represented as life and art), which Santiago's theory and practice actually suspend, as the poem's structure of desire itself indicates («queria», «I'd like», as «I wish I could»). It is as difficult (or rather undesirable) to obliterate personal feeling in the poem as to harden the heart by eliminating the past. In his fabrication of Graciliano Ramos'

diary for 1937 (Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship about to be consolidated), Santiago in the seventies (Brazil then under a totalitarian military regime allegedly in the process of opening up) is a very selfconscious «editor», as his footnotes suggest, specially as regards the different historical times invoked. A more ambitious reading of Silviano Santiago's *ficção* would have to look into his footnotes in some detail, but a couple of very simple and obvious ones will do for my purpose here. On p. 57, the entry for «Segunda-feira, pela manhã» gets a footnote identifying that particular monday as «January 18». On p. 69, a phrase between brackets in the text («cago e danço [I shit and dance]») earns the following footnote: «A expressão encontra-se entre parênteses. Quis indicar que, eventualmente, deveria ser substituída?» [The phrase is between brackets. Perhaps to indicate that it would have to be replaced?] Now, if the editor were a real editor, his note would be a discrete editorial surmise towards establishing the text; as it is, besides performing its function concerning the verisimilitude effect, in venturing assessment of Graciliano's decorum in the thirties, the little note amounts to the creation of cultural factuality by Santiago's deliberate fictionalizing activity.

The most interesting aspect of the structure of *Em liberdade* is, then, that it self-consciously plays with some of the epistemological distinctions I outlined at the beginning of my paper: fact and fiction, history and literature, life and art, to be sure; but also subject and object. All these distinctions are, of course, closely related. The presumed editor's objective historical stance is upset by his fictional presumption, but the reverse is also true. So, though Silviano's «discovery» of Graciliano's diary is an implied fiction (thus running the risk of objectifying the subject), its plausibility (achieved by means of rigorous historical and literary research) is a constructed fact that sanctions the importance of the subject's explanatory and understanding power. The Adorno quote on individual agency in history, which serves as a kind of epigraph for the book, leaves no doubts about this. Adorno is invoked by the «editor», who hastens to legitimize his choice by offering Graciliano an epigraph of his own. After the title page for the journal (*Em liberdade: diário de Graciliano Ramos*) comes a kind of flyleaf with just the epigraph («Não sou um rato. Não quero ser um rato» [I am not a mouse. I do not want to be a mouse]) and a footnote: «No centro da primeira folha dos originais, em tinta vermelha, estão escritas estas duas frases de *Angústia*. Foram lançadas no papel, possivelmente, quando numerava as páginas (coincidência na cor da tinta). Deveriam servir de epígrafe para todo o Diário» [In the middle of the first page of the manuscript, written in red ink, are these two sentences from *Angústia*. Possibly, they were scribbled when he was paginating the original (the color of the ink coincides). Perhaps they were to serve as epigraph for the entire Diary). In fact, the epigraph is literally Graciliano's own (having been taken from his novel *Angústia*); but the footnote's surmise, however anchored in objective factual speculation, returns it, in fiction, to Silviano, while its wishful content («I am no mouse; I do not want to be a mouse») goes on underscoring the Adornian tragic faith in the freedom and responsibility of the individual subject.

The book's play with the capacity of neat distinctions to obfuscate meanings is further complicated by Graciliano's decision (in the diary «edited» by Silviano, of course, the «editor» ever making himself quietly conspicuous by means of his footnotes) to write a fictional biography of the Brazilian Arcadian author, Cláudio Manuel da Costa, himself accused of treason during the *Inconfidência Mineira* in the late eighteenth century, and who committed suicide in prison. In Silviano's narrative of Graciliano's alleged diary, a dream coaxes Graciliano into impersonating Cláudio Manuel da Costa so as to recreate his death, not by suicide, but by execution at the hands of the Portuguese administration. All historical times explicitly evoked in the book are thus made present through the individual lenses of particular intellectuals who concern themselves with the identity of the Brazilian nation at that particular moment: Cláudio Manuel da Costa, the Portuguese colonial rule, and the struggle for Brazilian independence; Graciliano Ramos and Getúlio Vargas' suppression of all political opposition; Silviano Santiago and the crumbling reality of the coronels' dictatorship. But if each of the individual lenses could never be quite transparently objective in itself to start with, their various subjectivities can be made to contaminate one another for one more act of freedom to *make sense* (provisional sense, that is).

The structure of *Em liberdade*, however, makes of the prison the closure of the fiction. Not making sense, the prison is then, literally, the trap of fiction. Cláudio is dead in his cell; Graciliano, once again about to be faced, «in freedom», with the limitations of bourgeois life, is wretchedly confined in a tiny hotel room (the laconic form of the last entry is clearly emblematic of his situation). But Silviano, who in the early eighties is in fact witness to the very exhaustion of the military dictatorship thus forced to «open up» (however problematically), does «discover» the freedom to be alive (as he has Graciliano feel after «rewriting» Cláudio) and to allow himself to cross the boundaries of his own fiction at his own pleasure (for example, by turning the «diary» into a «novel», and vice versa), so as to upset apparently fixed meanings (just like Graciliano's dream points to black holes in a given interpretation of historical facts). Like the tramp *his* Graciliano speculates about on p. 74 of *his novel*, or like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Silviano Santiago makes of the fact of his own living and experiencing body the very site of fiction as a *compelling* form of understanding.

The diary entry in question is indicated as having no date («[Sem data]»). Lest this datelessness suggests the traditional timelessness of art, the indication gets a matter-of-fact footnote also: «Estas páginas, dactilografadas em papel diferente, encontram-se sem informação quanto à data em que foram escritas. Pela numeração no ângulo superior direito da página, este é o lugar que devem ocupar» [These pages, typed on a different kind of paper, have no indication as to their date of writing. By the numbers on their upper right hand corner, this must be their place]. From the point of view of the fiction — a journal edited by a specialist, a well known Brazilian researcher once funded by CAPES to work on Gide manuscripts

(the «editor» manages to inform his readers in his introductory «Note») — all these pseudo-factual details, as I have already suggested, have a function: to create verisimilitude. After all, all theories of fiction are really theories of reality, that is to say, theories of the facts of life. The «facts of life» are indeed what this diary entry is all about: love, passion, desire, pleasure, sex. In a word, the human body. Graciliano's broodings on the body, the tramp, and the tramp's body trace Silviano's theory of literature for us: in order for the body to be enough (or what will suffice, as Stevens might have phrased it), we need a fiction of the body. «Descalço na chuva, abraçado a um outro corpo — teria necessidade de escrever?» [Barefoot, in the rain, holding another body — would I then have the need to write?] (p. 190), Graciliano is made to ask in another of his theoretical moments. The answer is supposed to be «no», just as in one of Ramos Rosa's poems (Ramos Rosa, 1987: 136):

Se soubesse desenhar as linhas negras  
que abrem a brancura completa  
do corpo  
que deixam entrever a espuma nos cabelos  
no sulco que divide as amorosas pernas  
onde o murmúrio permanece do sangue sob as mãos  
escreveria as linhas intensas do poema?

[If I knew how to draw the black lines  
that open the complete whiteness  
of the body  
that let us glimpse the foam in the hair  
the furrow that parts the loving legs  
where — under hands — blood's murmur remains,  
would I then write the intense lines of the poem?  
(Tr. Martin Earl)]

The deeper implication, however, is, of course, that the body which the poet speaks of in his poem does not exist outside the poem, even if the poem itself owes its own existence to the body outside. But the body «outside» does not exist outside its own history. The body «in the rain», «holding another body» is but a chapter of the history of the body: like the scar on Odysseus' thigh (Auerbach, 1953: 3ff). Or like the tramp in Santiago's fiction. In both cases, they are the «body» that brings understanding. The tramp in the undated piece of Graciliano's diary is thus the subtlest of traps in Silviano's fiction, which, in order to enlighten us about the way we live our lives, must also be understood as verisimilar — or as fact (truth being, as Santiago's essay on the «rhetoric of verisimilitude» teaches us, of quite a different order of aesthetic thinking [Santiago, 1978: 29]). Making good the critic's theoretical aversion to another dichotomy of our time, that between formalism and historicism in literary approaches (Santiago, 1988), Santiago's creative writing would,

tramp-like, make once again problematic not only the distinction between fiction and non fiction (diaries, letters, etc.), but that between poetry and prose as well. Silviano Santiago's most recent fiction, *Uma história de família*, is presided over by several tramp figures. We could even say that some of the most important structural categories of the novel, according to acclaimed masters of narratology, such as Gérard Genette or Gerald Prince, are here to be discerned in the metaphor of the tramp: the narrator is terminally ill, the narratee is the family idiot, the diegesis is death. The narrative itself is constructed like a sentimental story, ostensibly in the autobiographical mode, only to conclude with its own marvelously effective objective correlative: the detailed factual description of the expert sorting out of materials for the confectioning of a very common recipe — indeed, a folksy mush (Santiago, 1992). In fiction, as much as in history, though certainly in a different way, there are no irrelevant details for our understanding of the world.

I am forcefully reminded of this in Saramago's history inspired novels, where fact and fiction engage in passionate exchange to achieve the desired effect: namely, that, theoretically, the historical novel has become a contradiction in terms. Like Santiago an interested reader of the new historical research, which privileges imaginative interpretation of «irrelevant details» over the positive verification and explanation of «major facts» (another recently upset distinction), Saramago would be readier to call both history and the novel «fictionalizing activity». Hayden White's notion of metahistory, which was actually stolen from literary theorist and critic Northrop Frye, would no doubt be most congenial to Saramago (White, 1973a; 1973b). Following Frye, White argues that the best historians (properly, «metahistorians») are those who, like poets (as defined by Coleridge), bring the power of their imagination to give a synthetic and magical form to their collecting, selecting, rejecting, interpreting, and writing of facts. In his novels, most notably in *Memorial do Convento*, Saramago uses history to thematize the relation between history and the necessarily *selective writing* of history (Saramago, 1982). The memorial of the convent is provocatively recorded from the admittedly vulnerable point of view of the tramps of history, as it were: maimed soldiers, heretic women, marginal friars, and pregnant queens, rather than powerful kings, generals, and church dignitaries. In later works, this purpose becomes complicated by an explicit parodic impulse, perhaps nowhere more overtly conveyed than in *A história do cerco de Lisboa* (Saramago, 1989). By wilfully miscorrecting proof in a book of «proper history», thus parodying the minimizing of positive facts in «metahistory» (to use Hayden White's terms), an obscure press corrector, who somewhat partakes of the quality of tramphood and thus somehow projects the condition of borderline, grotesquely plays at changing recorded history. His writing of an alternative history as his own fiction, which takes form as his emotional life is recreated in a meaningful way as well, becomes in its turn a commentary on the passionate creative exchange of fact and fiction, life and art, history and literature that human life is all about. Even before that, in *O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis*, history gets rewritten from the point

of view of a truly magnificent tramp. Saramago's most daring fictional gesture in this novel is to have Ricardo Reis return from his voluntary exile in Brazil right after the fact of Pessoa's death in November 1935 — and (co)incidentally bring with him echoes of the political situation that is the source of Santiago's discovery of Graciliano Ramos' «diary». The Pessoa heteronym thus becomes the character that originates the production of meaning (personal, historical, and political meaning), from the point of view of the fiction of human identity — a fiction that is *in fact* a multiple fiction (Saramago, 1984).

But the most daring example of this kind of creative writing is *O evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo* (Saramago, 1991). Saramago's latest novel has proved to be, if nothing else, quite disturbing, both ideologically, as regards the facts of its referentiality, and aesthetically, as regards the theory of its fiction. Firstly, the novel makes the distinction between history and history writing even more problematic, by adding another dichotomy, that of sacred and profane. Some of us would readily subsume the latter discrimination under that of fantasy and science, or myth and truth, or fiction and fact. But given the subject matter and given the catholic background of the great majority of its readers, as well as the master narrative of the history of Christianity they are instructed by, the consequences of the distinction between the sacred and the profane are not easily evaded. The controversial reception of the novel, particularly among practicing catholic readers, must be understood in the light of its author's refusal to abide by clear-cut distinctions.

Catholics have had no problems in dismissing, as profane, humanizing lives of Jesus, of which Renan's is perhaps the most distinguished one before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the post-Qumrân age, an interesting attempt at once again establishing the facts in a fictionalized historical narrative is *L'homme qui devint Dieu* (1988), which it is tempting to surmise Saramago may have at some point been interested in (Messadié, 1991). But even if they have no problems accepting as true facts seemingly mythical events, as long as they are legitimized as supernatural by the narratives of their sacred texts (such as miracles and corporeal manifestations of the divinity or of demons), they are evidently totally unprepared to see their most sacred supernatural beliefs profanely treated, *as facts*, by an unbelieving novelist. What to my mind would seem to be, for believers, the most disturbing passage in *O evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo* is the next to the last chapter, the one beginning «Manhã de nevoeiro» [«Foggy Morning»]. For there, if you are a believer, this novel's fiction cannot but refer not just to facts (as regards divine identity, manifestation, and self-justification), but to sacred fact as well: the existence of almighty, ubiquitous, trinitarian god. By offering a fact of fiction (the Pessoa heteronymic romance [p. 389]) as a foil to the fact of faith (the trinity dogma), Saramago's daring boundary-crossing may intimate mere parody of both faith and fiction as valid forms of human understanding; but it also recreates the all too human disquietude (my use of the Pessoa term is, of course, deliberate) that gives rise to one and the other. Considering that the sacred facts of divine omnipresence and omnipotence are in

this chapter mainly the goriest details of divine retribution in the history of Christianity, the devil's fictional definition of divinity as bloodthirstiness («É preciso ser-se Deus para gostar tanto de sangue» [p. 391] [You would have to be God to love blood so much]) turns out to have, quite shatteringly, an uncanny ring of truthfulness. The plausible image of god as «a wealthy jew», rather than the mythical (or biblical) cloud of a previous passage (p. 262), in suggesting religion's associations with mundane interests in its institutionalized forms, is surely disturbing in that it thus fictionally performs verisimilitude.

Secondly, in theoretical terms, the novel fails the expectations it raises in the imaginations of many of its readers as they progress with their reading. On the one hand, with its wealth of accurate description of factual details and objective concern for the «elementary facts of life» (as the narrator slyly puts it right at the start [p. 14]), Saramago's book presents itself as a «realist» novel. On the other hand, it is quite clear from the very beginning (the first chapter being a minute description of a Dürer engraving representing the crucifixion) that the «real» the novel purports to represent has already been fixed in fiction. Beyond that, however, by its very title, the novel aspires to become one more piece of «good news» (whether gospel or novel) for a better understanding of its subject: Jesus Christ and the history (or is it fiction?) of Christianity. The epigraph, taken from the opening verses of Luke (generally considered the least «objective» of the synoptics), further underlines the novel's vocation: «Já que muitos empreenderam compor uma narração dos factos que entre nós se consumaram, como no-os transmitiram os que desde o princípio foram testemunhas oculares e se tornaram servidores da Palavra, resolvi eu também, depois de tudo ter investigado cuidadosamente desde a origem, expor-tos por escrito e pela sua ordem, illustre Teófilo, a fim de que reconheças a solidez da doutrina em que foste instruído» [For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word, It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things where in thou hast been instructed]. In the phrasing of the Authorized Version I here also give, it becomes even more evident that, for the author of this novel, the theory of fiction is really a theory of life, life indeed remaining incomprehensible without the many successive *orderings* of the facts of both history and fiction, *sacred history and fiction* not excluded.

This, precisely, is the problem for some of the readers of this novel. What about verisimilitude, they are prone to ask, as they are shocked by the unexpected factual performance of both god and the devil in the above mentioned chapter. But Saramago is no innocent novelist either, and delights in rambling about «The coincidences that life [not the novel] is made of» (p. 221) and about «the ever desired verisimilitude effect» (p. 222), which is not called for in «real life». I am quoting

from the chapter which starts with «Muito se tem falado das coincidências de que a vida é feita» [There has been a lot of talk about the coincidences that life is made of], in which Saramago's facetious commentary on the rules of «good story telling» vis-a-vis the «facts of life» becomes a commentary on the very fragility of the production of human knowledge and understanding. The Aristotelian question, for Saramago, is not that poetry is more philosophical than history; but that one is not conceivable without the other. Pushing boundary-crossing to its utmost in a novel structured on the very borderline of fact and fiction by including both profane history and sacred history, both truth and myth, Saramago creates, passionately and indeed very often comically as well, the inevitability of exchange, which alone may yield any possibility of meaning at all. This he accomplishes, ultimately, by his genial discovery, in Jesus Christ, of the most sublime of tramp figures in Western culture.

Let me conclude by going back briefly to Silviano Santiago, to Santiago's Graciliano, and to what Graciliano says of the body of the tramp in an attempt to understand the fictions of his own histories: «o corpo é o lugar que escolheu para resolver as suas desavenças para com a sociedade» [the body is the place he chose to come to terms with his discord with society] (p. 76). In *O evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo* Saramago sets forth in order a declaration of those things in Western history that are unintelligible without some understanding of the *body* of Christ. In Saramago's understanding, it turns out (the reception of the novel actually confirming its author's understanding), the body of Christ, its socio-political history trapped in its own fiction-as-the-passion, is the place chosen by Western society to come to terms with its own discord with itself.

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