



A Responsibility to the World: Saramago, Politics, Philosophy

Burghard Baltrusch/Carlo Salzani/
Kristof K. P. Vanhoutte (eds.)

Burghard Baltrusch/Carlo Salzani/Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte (eds.)
A Responsibility to the World: Saramago, Politics, Philosophy

Ibero-Romance Studies in Literature and Translatology –
Studies in Contemporary Literature, vol. 9
Series editor: Burghard Baltrusch

iBroLiT

Estudos Iberorromânicos de Literatura e Tradutoloxía
Ibero-Romance Studies in Literature and Translatology

Series edited by:

Burghard Baltrusch
Teresa Bermúdez Montes (2012–2017)
Gabriel Pérez Durán (2012–2017)

Honorary Editor:

Camiño Noia Campos

Advisory Board:

Silvia Bermúdez	(University of California, Santa Barbara)
Ana Paula Ferreira	(University of Minnesota)
Susana Kampff Lages	(Universidade Federal Fluminense)
Ria Lemaire Mertens	(Université de Poitiers)
Inocência Mata	(Universidade de Lisboa)
Lênia Márcia Mongelli	(Universidade de São Paulo)
Cláudia Pazos Alonso	(University of Oxford)
John Rutherford	(University of Oxford)
Kathrin Saringen	(Universität Wien)
Fernando Venâncio	(Universiteit van Amsterdam)
Yara Frateschi Vieira	(Universidade Estadual de Campinas)
Michaela Wolf	(Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz)

Editorial Contacts:

I Cátedra Internacional José Saramago | BiFeGa Research Group
Universidade de Vigo, Facultade de Filoloxía e Tradución, 36310 Vigo, Galiza / España
burg@uvigo.gal | catedrasaramago.webs.uvigo.gal | bifega.webs.uvigo.gal

Burghard Baltrusch/Carlo Salzani/
Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte (eds.)

A Responsibility to the World: Saramago, Politics, Philosophy

F Frank & Timme
Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur

Umschlagabbildung: Graça Morais: *Porträt von José Saramago*, o. D., Acryl auf Leinwand, 61 × 73 cm. Sammlung der Künstlerin.

I Cátedra Internacional
José Saramago

BiFeGa: Grupo de Investigación
en Estudos Literarios e Culturais,
Tradución e Interpretación

Universidade de Vigo

Universidade de Vigo

This edition has been elaborated under the auspice of the research project “BiFeGA: Grupo de Investigación en Estudos Literarios e Culturais, Tradución e Interpretación” (ED431C 2020/04, funded by the Xunta de Galicia), and the International José Saramago Chair of the University of Vigo (funded by the Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, the Camões I.P. and the Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias).



CC-BY-ND

ISBN 978-3-7329-0958-2

ISBN E-Book 978-3-7329-8985-0

ISSN 2194-752X

DOI 10.26530/20.500.12657/85309

© Frank & Timme GmbH Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur
Berlin 2023. Alle Rechte vorbehalten.

Das Werk einschließlich aller Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt.
Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechts-
gesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlags unzulässig und strafbar.
Das gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen,
Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in
elektronischen Systemen.

Herstellung durch Frank & Timme GmbH,
Wittelsbacherstraße 27a, 10707 Berlin.

Printed in Germany.

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier.

www.frank-timme.de

Contents

INTRODUCTION

BURGHARD BALTRUSCH, CARLO SALZANI AND KRISTOF K. P. VANHOUTTE

**Observing, Acting, Intervening:
Saramago's Responsibility to the World** 9

A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE WORLD

MARCIA TIBURI

Utopia/Dystopia: José Saramago and the Regency Apocalypse 23

KRISTOF K. P. VANHOUTTE

**Islands and Boats: (Lucid?) Meditations on a Stone Utopia
and a Naval Heterotopia in the Work of José Saramago** 41

RAQUEL VARELA AND ROBERTO DELLA SANTA

***Raised from the Ground* and the Spectre of Revolution** 63

DAVID JENKINS

Seeing Populism in *Seeing* 93

MARCO MAZZOCCA

The Color of Democracy 109

CARLO SABBATINI

Saramago, Agamben, and the 'Invention of an Epidemic' 123

GUSTAVO RACY

**Debord and Saramago: Allegories of the Society of Spectacle in
Blindness and *The Cave* 147**

BURGHARD BALTRUSCH

**Approaching Death and Ethics in José Saramago through
Blimunda's Memorial 161**

EGÍDIA SOUTO AND PHILIPPE CHARLIER

**A Literary Autopsy: An Anthropological and Medical Approach
to Saramago's Oeuvre 189**

HANIA A. M. NASHEF

**Canines: Unlikely Protagonists in the Novels of Coetzee,
Saramago and Shibli 203**

CARLO SALZANI

**The Temptations of Anthropomorphism, or,
How an Elephant Can Help Us Become Human 223**

MILOŠ ĆIPRANIĆ

What is a Book? 243

WORKS CITED 261

CONTRIBUTORS 281

INDEX 287

What is a Book?

MILOŠ ĆIPRANIĆ¹

The book is such a common thing that there seems to be no reason to contemplate or search for its essence. It is something primarily intended for reading, a well-known thing that is used without the need to define it, and hence any reflection *on* the book is actually secondary to the reflection *with* it. The book is a true companion in the act of reading. The relationship between literary works and their authors has a circular form. Books are the children of writers, just as writers are the children of books. In fact, it is hard to say who is the parent to whom in that relationship. Books and writers mutually bring each other into being within that revolving circle, and this circling movement significantly contributes to the life of literature. In other words, individuals decide to become writers, that is, they discover their true vocation, having read books that left a strong impression on them. Reading various books, they develop their own style and poetics, and write books that are also capable of turning their readers into writers.

Position Synthesis

Anyone who has devoted their life to letters and writing books must have asked themselves at least once what the product of their work actually is. José Saramago did not just write books, he also talked and wrote about what a book is, what that object or 'object' is. Now it is not possible to ask Saramago in person for his opinion about what is a book and a work of literature. The answer to that question can be found in his writings, as traces left behind him.

One word or category is the basis of Saramago's variations on the essence of the book and, more specifically, the work of literature. It is an unavoidable

.....

1 Translated from Serbian by Vuk Šećerović.

starting point for understanding his experience of what he was writing and reading. That word is 'person' (*pessoa*). In relation to this term and what it signifies, Saramago described the book from three different perspectives: from the point of view of the work itself, from that of the reader, and from that of the writer. In other words, starting from the three conditions or factors that constitute the life of literature as an institution. The category of person has central importance in Saramago's ontology of the book. When defining or understanding the book as such, he expressed consistency, but not rigidity.

To begin with, it is appropriate here to point out some of Saramago's exemplary statements that support this thesis. The first statement is related to the teleology of books and literature as such. What is the purpose, or at least one of the purposes, of writing a work of literature? "What I want, in the books I write, is for every reader to get an idea about the person who writes them" (qtd. in Arias 1998: 34). In order to get to know the author of a book, the one who reads it has to "extend their hands" to its writer, by turning its pages. Namely, the reader "can understand the text only when he is 'within' it, when he acts as someone who takes part in the finalization that the book requires, which means reading it" (qtd. in Reis 1998: 102). Thus, a literary work, written and published, is not completed in the strong sense of the word. It will actually become completed once it is read, that is, when one person gets to know the other in such a way. The literary work waits for someone to fulfill its purposes.

There is no need to emphasize that each writer and each reader are persons, individuals with particular characteristics, yet it is debatable if the same thing can be said for books. Saramago's own words provide us with an indication for clarifying this dilemma: "My books are born and they walk, and walk, until they say it is enough, and that can mean three hundred, four hundred or any which number of pages" (qtd. in Arias 1998: 63). The writer follows them on their walking, or rather directs them, and listens to them when, just like human beings, they tell him that they have reached their end. These novels seem to know what their measure is.

All these statements were made by Saramago in a series of conversations that were published, in which, among other things, he explained what his understanding was of what he created: *José Saramago: el amor posible* and *Diálogos com José Saramago* speak about the writer, and he speaks through

them. However, Saramago did not elaborate on his view of the book only in his conversations with Julian Arias and Carlos Reis. He expounded on this topic, implicitly or explicitly, in other places as well. Hence, his opinion about the book is not some insignificant question. After all, it would probably be incongruous had he not tackled or at least raised this question, bearing in mind what his profession was.

Instead of asking what a book is, it is perhaps better to tackle this problem by asking what a book can be. Such cautiousness in thinking about the ontological status of the book results from the variety of its possible definitions, the multiplicity of perspectives involved when dealing with this question. Saramago does not pretend to offer an outlook which is absolute and universally valid, nor he aspire to do so. Considering the work as an element of the system of literature, Saramago sees books as living creatures. Within the framework of discourse, books behave as human beings. A work of literature is understood as a trace of an individual person. The writer is not absent from the pages of the book he wrote, that is, his pages. Ultimately, the act of reading is the act by which one person reaches out to the other. The reader of the literary work actually encounters its author.

The Book as a Person

Humans live with things, they are dependent on them and cannot survive without them. Both in literature and in reality, things can be perceived and experienced in different ways. In Saramago's prose, inanimate objects behave like living creatures and human beings, or resemble them. It is one of the motifs that are characteristic of his work. Let us focus on his novel *Seeing* for a moment. In this novel, which is actually entitled *Essay on Lucidity (Ensaio sobre a Lucidez)*, there is, among other things, an elevator capable of hearing people riding it, a sofa that is friendly to a person who sits on it, while papers thrown into the air resemble birds in flight (Saramago 2006: 271, 288, 295). Attributing life to things is an act that demonstrates the dialectic existing between the human beings and the inanimate objects surrounding them.

In a similar vein, significant insights can be found in the writings of Fernando Pessoa. *The Book of Disquiet*, in which the world itself is perceived as a great novel, is a collection of fragments in which the strict opposition between the animate and the inanimate is questioned. People make things that are designed to perform some function and these objects have an external purpose. In that sense, things express themselves and come into being through our relationship with them: “I consider it neither a human nor a literary error to attribute a soul to the things we call inanimate. To be a thing is to be the object of an attribution” (Pessoa 2016: 311–312). The author points to the table on which he is writing those sentences as an example which sheds light on his statement.

In addition to the vivification of non-living things, personification is another feature fundamental for understanding Saramago’s relationship to the book. The writer does not use only phrases which often, without closer reflection, personify inanimate objects, common places that are not specific to his work. On the contrary, the personification of things is a conscious decision. The sentence quoted above about a book walking towards its end and speaking to its writer is an example of this attitude. In Saramago’s works of fiction, a thing can be very eloquent. It is precisely in this sense that personification is synonymous with anthropomorphization. A thing that cannot speak becomes capable of speech. Speech ceases to be the exclusive characteristic of humans.

It is not only physical objects that are perceived as persons. Even something that has no body can be personified. Such is the case with language itself. In *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* we read: “Perhaps it is the language that chooses the writers it needs, making use of them so that each might express a tiny part of what it is. Once language has said all it has to say and falls silent, I wonder how we will go on living” (Saramago 1992: 47). This human creation is playing with its creators. Although thingness is not its fundamental feature, a book is also a physical thing, or at least it was exclusively something physical until recently. It is an artificial creation and an object that complements and gives meaning to the human world. By stating that the book is something that ‘complements’ and ‘gives meaning,’ the previous sentence has been formulated in such a way that the book has the status of the subject, even though it is also referred to as an ‘object’ in the same sentence. This is not contradictory.

The statement that the book does something is in accordance with Saramago's position, that is, the trope he used when referring to it.

Actions that a work of literature is capable of performing stem from its capacity to reason, which it possesses or is attributed to it. In this sense, the novel is like a living thing capable of thinking. More precisely, "the book *knows* more than I do," we are told in the *Lanzarote Notebooks* (Saramago 1994: 141). A literary work, thus, transcends its author. As a result of all that is sedimented in such work of literature, it becomes a person that stands above the subject that created it. It can surprise even its writer. It is very difficult to be in control of all that is written. It is perhaps worth pointing out that such intention can never be fulfilled in its entirety.

The question of speech is particularly significant in view of the issue which is being examined. Being inanimate objects, can books speak? The book is at the same time something that is reflected on and something that reflects. One way to express thoughts and emotions is through words. Literary works are destined to consist of this kind of signs, even if their discourse is vivid or pictorial, if they tend to create verbal images, streams of descriptions, and a narration without an apparent need to give an interpretation of what is happening in the fictional world. Something that is primarily made of words also uses them as a means to communicate, cogitate and act. In *Nuestro libro de cada día* (*Our Daily Book*), we read: "The other, namely, the book, is saying to me: 'Get to know me! I have so much to offer you.' And if one book does not give you anything, there will be another that will. That's for sure" (Saramago 2001: 30).

These sentences are very concise and illustrative, and they are worth dwelling on. Any book that a reader comes across for the first time is a stranger to them, just as the prospective reader is a person unfamiliar to that book. Like any stranger, the book that is in the hands of the person who wants to read it speaks in a language that this reader either knows or does not know. In any case, the book invites the reader, in a seductive imperative. It actually talks to the person with whom it had eye contact. When the capacity of speech is attributed to a book, it is seen as a human being. A literary work such as a novel develops by itself, like a living organism. The events unfold resulting from previous events, literary characters act according to their personalities and circumstances. Saramago is the one who decides, but he lets the text show

him the way to a certain point in the narrative. Namely, “my novel is a novel continuously under construction, it is a novel that keeps creating itself” (qtd. in Reis 1998: 133). The writer is the one who has control and gives direction—as much as possible—shaping the plot, the course of action and the development of his narration, in line with the internal logic and dynamics of the novel.

The idea behind the title of Saramago’s collection of short stories can be referred to and reaffirmed in the context of this chapter. That book is entitled *Objecto Quase* (*The Lives of Things*). Can we say that a book is also *almost an object*? Something that is neither subject nor object. As agents with the capacity to act, books are persons, more precisely, non-human and non-living persons, which does not mean that they are dead. Thus, in the hands of its reader whom it acts on, *Objecto Quase* is also an *objecto quase*.

There is a story in this book entitled “Things,” which tells the tale of a disappearing or erasing distinction between things and human beings. In this work of fiction, we do not know exactly who is the one that acts and who is acted on. The dialectic of being active and passive in a political system, together with a symptomatic reification of human beings, results in a collective catastrophe, a nightmare from which humans, it seems, cannot wake up. Who is really in control over whom? At the end of the story, an unnamed woman says: “Never again will men be treated as things” (Saramago 2012: 114). This story shows what happens when the ‘proper’ relationship between individuals as subjects is lost, when we lose the ‘appropriate’ relationship with the objects around us, when we are out of touch with ourselves.

The question arises whether seeing books as persons is actually a sign of alienation. Treating these objects in such way can be characterized as a perturbation of values. Namely, when books are given the status of persons, they are equated with human beings, that is, they are put on the same level in terms of their value. Of course, ‘human being,’ ‘subject’ and ‘person’ are not synonymous, although their denotations overlap considerably, so in some contexts these terms are interchangeable and, with due caution, they can replace one another. The answer to the above question is negative. In this case, personification or anthropomorphization is quite the opposite to alienation.

Seeing a person as a thing is not the same as seeing a thing as a person. Alienation is a process that reduces the human being to a physical object and

thus renders the person dehumanized, whereas personification aims to give human qualities to such an object. It is reasonable to anthropomorphize a book, bearing in mind that it is a human product that can, among other things, help humanize and, in a certain way, elevate its reader—who is supposed to be a non-thing—and discover or nurture in the reader something which is believed to be worth having.

There is no doubt that literary works have the power to impact on social reality. Needless to say, there are books which are tiresome and make their readers feel like they are climbing the long stairs of a tall building, books which are “like a staircase without an elevator” (Pessoa 2016: 359). However, the same goes even for the books describable with this comparison from *The Book of Disquiet*. Once published, the work of literature takes on a life of its own and its course cannot be predicted. In fact, such a work thus becomes a subject that enters into the sphere of reality and is given an opportunity to be active, even politically. It is true that Saramago did not believe that literature and art can radically change humanity and the world. Although he was skeptical about this idea, which he deemed overly optimistic and perhaps even naive, he did not stop writing. It is a telling decision.

The power of a book or a work of art should not be overestimated, but it should also not be underestimated either. Every so often, a book is under attack by a government or a dominant institution because of its ideas, which can shake up or challenge the system that is being guarded, just as individuals who stand up against the power structures have to pay a price for their deeds. There are many examples in history when books were banned, while there were others that were at the same time promoted for certain reasons.

Saramago bestowed life to books not only in his non-fictional writings. In addition to passages from his diaries and speeches, he described the book as a living being in his novels too. In *The Double*, Saramago wrote that books are “waiting, as all things always are, it’s something they can’t avoid, it is their ruling destiny, part, it seems, of their invincible nature as things” (Saramago 2004b: 11). The book he is talking about is here a book on historiography. This book about the Mesopotamian civilization keeps appearing in several places throughout the novel, silently watching what is happening. A book can invite its reader or just wait in silence. *The Double* deals with the issue of at least two persons who

are physically identical. Who is the original and who is the duplicate? Such a question can be posed in the world of books. Identical twins are essentially more different from each other than two copies of the same book, including *The Double*. One of the doppelgangers from this novel asks himself which one of them was born first, which would mean that he is not a copy of the other. Of course, the first edition of a novel is older than all its subsequent editions, but this does not mean that it has ontological priority over those that come later.

The idea of a book as a person existed before Saramago. It is not his invention. An example of this personification can be found on the pages of Michel de Montaigne, who was one of Saramago's main sources of inspiration. In his *Essays* we find that a book can be a bore, it can smile, make company, and so on. He cites Horace's lines from his *Satires* in which the Roman poet compares books or notebooks (*libri*) with friends (*sodales*) (Montaigne 1958: 479). The origin of this personification can be traced back to the Antiquity. In one of the essays, entitled "Of Books," Montaigne wrote that in books that he read only once he made comments about those books. In fact, "for whatever language my books speak to me, I speak to them in mine" (*ibid.*: 305). Just like different people, each book has its own native language in which it communicates.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking passage in which Montaigne describes his experience of the book as such is not encountered in the essay "Of Books," as one would expect from its title, but elsewhere. That text is entitled "Of Three Kinds of Association." In this essay, special attention is paid to books, which are eulogized and paid tribute to: "For I cannot tell you what ease and repose I find when I reflect that they are at my side to give me pleasure at my own time, and when I recognize how much assistance they bring to my life" (*ibid.*: 628). Montaigne expounds about what he seeks to find in a work he takes to read, together with his critical remarks and opinion about some of the books of his selection, ranging from poetry to historiography. Montaigne also gives a description of his library, located on one floor of the tower on his property. Moreover, in these pages, books are seen as animated objects, if not wholly anthropomorphized, which are pleasant to spend time with. The French essayist writes:

To be diverted from a troublesome idea, I only need to have recourse to books: they easily turn my thoughts to themselves and steal away the

others. And yet they do not rebel at seeing that I seek them out only for want of those other pleasures, that are more real, lively, and natural; they always receive me with the same expression. (*ibid.*)

In addition to the motif of a particular book that repeatedly appears in the narrative unfolding of a novel, such as *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, there are also other Saramago's works in which a book, either published or unpublished, plays an important role by influencing the plot of the story. For example, the theater play *What Will I Do with This Book?*, in which an epic poem waits to see the light of day and faces various obstacles along the way, or *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, a work that contains other two works with the same title as that intricate novel, all interacting with each other. Hence, Saramago's prose includes elements that can be described as work-about-work and book-within-book. Without them, these literary works would lose their point, because the function of these *almost objects* is not to play a secondary role within the main plot.

In the literary world created by Saramago there are also fictional books. Those are not the ones that appear in his books, but rather 'books' of which only sections and titles are mentioned. Namely, the sentences and thoughts taken from such books, like the *Book of Exhortations* and the *Book of Voices*, serve as the epigraphs in novels. A number of titles of works of literature have been mentioned so far in this chapter. Nowadays, every book has or must have a title, just as people have the names that are given to them. Saramago really attached great importance to the titles of his novels. He said that he used to start from the title, even when he did not know exactly what he was going to write about. Saramago acknowledged: "As strange as it may seem, my novels are usually born from the title" (qtd. in Arias 1998: 66). This is another example of a bio-metaphorical discourse, since the verb 'to be born' is predicated to the book, as if it were a living being. In any case, it is the title that largely determines and delineates the contents of a literary work such as a novel.

Someone might say that the proper name given to a person is something arbitrary, that the name does not say anything about the person who has it. Two people can have the same name and have nothing else in common. Just like every work of literature, every human being is unique. An individual can

change their name and still be the same person. If this is true, does the same go for the works of literature and their titles? It might be worth examining to find out whether the identity and the meaning of, say, a novel change when its title is changed.

Giving a different title to a literary work is not necessarily a decision of the author only, but also of a translator or someone else. Some of the original titles of Saramago's books have been changed not only in English translations. So, sometimes it happens that a book appears under more than one title in its lifetime, just as a person can be called by different names at the same time. However, in such cases there is a tendency to make book titles shorter and simpler. For instance, the original title of the novel *Blindness* is *Essay on Blindness: A Novel*, that is, *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira: Romance*, in Portuguese, while the novel *Seeing* is actually entitled *Essay on Lucidity*, as already pointed out above. These are not the only Saramago's works whose titles have been changed in that way, but these examples are given here for one specific reason. In the titles of the translations of these novels, the term 'essay' has been omitted, which strips these works of an important dimension that their author wanted to emphasize. Saramago's novels are not only literary fiction, but also intellectual reflections and meditations on the human condition.

While preparing and writing a book, its author may suggest several titles for it, both to themselves and others, before making a final decision about it. A writer can also start with one title, believing it to be definitive, and end up with another. Thinking about the book on his early life, Saramago planned to give it the title *The Book of Temptations*, as testified by an entry from the *Lanzarote Notebooks*, before that book was written: "The patient *Book of Temptations* must wait" (Saramago 1997: 241). However, this autobiographical book was eventually published under the title *Small Memories*. It may be reasonable to argue that a work of literature remains the same, despite its title having changed, even though a different title may cast a whole new light on that work.

The Book as a Trace of the Author

Autobiography is a literary genre that deals with the existence of an individual, or at least a part of that existence, in such manner that the subject and the object coincide in it. Therefore, it can be argued that the author is present in the most explicit way in works that belong to that genre. However, the idea that a book is a trace of one's life cannot be reduced to a book that has the life of a person as its subject matter. It is important to underline this difference. This idea covers a much wider range than the prose in which individuals write about themselves. It applies to each and every work of literature. In their books, writers are always physically absent, they are actually not in it, even when they take themselves as the subject matter of their writing. This fact, however, does not mean that the authors are not present, in some sense, in the pages they wrote.

The absence of the writer from their work is not absolute, because the book is indeed their product, but not entirely theirs. A certain author can be recognized by the characteristic style of writing, atmosphere, themes, and motifs, without them explicitly writing about themselves or something that happened to them. Saramago said that his books are “the sign of a person” (qtd. in Reis 1998: 98). In that sense, a literary work is a trace that points to the one who created it, apart from it being a sign of something else. This idea refers not to any specific contents of a given work, but rather to the fact that a book is a personal creation. With regard to their book, the author is a person-within-a-person. They are hidden in the book which speaks on their behalf.

When we look at the novel as a literary genre, a literary character can resemble the one who created him or her. To do that, it is sufficient to add something autobiographical to that character. However, even writing about one's own life in the form of fiction is not a necessary condition for a work of literature to be considered *o sinal de uma pessoa* (the sign of a person). In the world of Saramago's novels, there are literary characters who read a lot and spend their days immersed in papers and letters. Raimundo Silva is surrounded by books on the shelves in his room, he lives with them and they live with him. Senhor José, the chronicler of those who come into this world and those who leave this world behind in *All the Names*, has the same name as the writer who

created him. Such coincidences are indicative, but it is debatable to what extent Saramago did portray himself in such fictional characters.

As an object, the book usually outlives its author, because the latter's life span is biologically limited. The writer's products are not limited in the same way, they cannot die, because they are not living things. Of course, throughout history it happened that some scroll, codex or incunabula vanished from the face of the earth, together with whatever was written in them, just as there were cases in the era of printed books when the entire print run of a book was confiscated and destroyed. It is possible for a book to disappear, but for every man death is inevitable. People have a hard time coming to terms with this fact. Each page in our life can be turned only once, unlike the pages of a book. Making a work of literature is an attempt to resist the law of transience. In this sense, the books of an author who is no longer alive are a form of their post-existence. Needless to say, the books' primary function need not be to rebel against finitude.

Another perspective on the meaning of the written work is correlative with the point of view according to which it is intrinsically related to the concrete person. A work of literature, and others alike, can also be imagined and seen as a monument. From that perspective, the work, as well as the book itself, would function as objects that preserve a certain memory and thus resist the implacable passage of time. That quality or character that works of literature can have does not depend on the literary genre to which they belong.

It is yet another question which is embodied in such a monument, that is, who is the subject of memorization. The work of literature as a monument can preserve and evoke the memory of something, but also of the person who made or 'built' that work. In other words, both the subject of the work and its author can be worthy of it. It should be added here that those two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, because one work can encompass both of them, so that a given work can be a dual monument, so to say. The first of these includes, for instance, historiographical writings, while the latter includes works of poetry. Horace, who has already been mentioned, described his *Odes* as a *monumentum* that he erected to himself: "I have built a monument more lasting than bronze, and loftier than the royal pile of the pyramids" (Horace 1998: 150). The poem expresses the belief that the verses shall serve as a path for the poet to reach a state somewhere between partial death and immortality.

A monument is not just a non-discursive object, a thing made of hard materials that stands upright, a permanent structure built to last. Novels are also forms of commemoration in their own right. In Saramago's oeuvre they also serve that purpose. One such novel is *Baltasar and Blimunda*, or more precisely, *Memorial of the Monastery (Memorial do Convento)*. This book with such a suggestive title tells the story of the construction of a monumental architectural object, accompanied by everything that such a huge endeavor entails and everything that goes on around it. Viewed in historical terms, this story about an event from the 18th century is neither true nor false.

There is a chapter in the novel that vividly describes how a giant stone was transported—the hard work required to build that edifice—the writer's effort made to show that remarkable achievement in a memorable way. If it were only possible, it would be worthwhile to see that feat. By taking part and joining in that effort, the majesty of that action or the suffering of a multitude of laborers who transported that stone, would become much more manifest, but the readers fail to achieve that, “from the place and the time of this page” (Saramago 1982: 260). This entire architectural endeavor is reminiscent of the story about the erection of the pyramids in ancient Egypt. The idea of constructing this building, and its realization, can be associated with the topos of ruler's madness, long present in European tradition.

Structurally, as the novel unfolds and its monumentality keeps growing, so does the construction of the edifice, equally monumental. They are intertwining, one following the other, moving in parallel towards the end and the purpose which they were made to serve. It is a dance between architecture and literature. *Memorial do Convento* is a monument-to-a-monument, that is, the monastery is a monument-within-a-monument. It is, among other things, a linguistic construction erected in memory of the people who toiled building that edifice and thus left their trace—those who remain anonymous and those whose names are known—and at the same time it is also one of the monuments in the history of literature and a testimony to Saramago's creativity.

In this book, the monastery is one of the literary characters. Despite the fact that it is mute, that it cannot speak—surely the writer could have given it that ability—this object, incomplete as it is, significantly influences the plot, demanding the effort of the people and observing all that is happening around it.

Indeed, in Saramago's other novels, elements of buildings are compared to parts of the human body and those elements behave like persons. An example of this can be found in *The Lives of Things*, more precisely in the story "Embargo": "The gray eye of the window-pane gradually turned blue, staring all the while at the two heads resting on the pillow" (Saramago 2012: 27). In *Blindness*, we are told: "The door handle is like the outstretched hand of a house" (Saramago 1999a: 304). The personification of the elevator in the novel *Seeing* has already been mentioned. In keeping with that trope, a part of a building or an apartment speaks to the person who lives in it. The main character of the novel *All the Names* talks to the ceiling in his home on more than one occasion. Senhor José engages in an "imaginary and metaphysical dialogue" with it (Saramago 1999c: 136). In the world of fiction, such things are possible.

The notion that the distinctive character of the author manifests itself in what he writes and the idea of literary creation as an effort of an individual to leave something behind after their death, or the will to immortality, can be characterized as a manifestation of egotism and vanity. However, the multi-perspective definition of the book as such prevents any attempt to see works of literature solely as a manifestation of the person who wrote them. In that matter, the point is not the person *per se*, but it is what they felt, thought, and created, their personal experience of the world, a perspective that complements, expands, and enhances that world with words in contact with other people. When a writer speaks about their work, it is quite understandable that they see it as something that belongs to them, as a product to which they applied themselves. Based on everything elaborated so far, and on what is about to be expounded, we can say that a work of literature, taken in its totality, is more than that.

The Book as a Meeting Place

The writer and the reader live in reciprocal relation and mutual exchange and thus they enrich the life of literature. The writing act and the reading act are directed towards a book, or a literary work which mediates between two persons. The book is simultaneously a mediator and a place of communication. "Reading is an encounter" (Saramago 2001: 43). With regard to what has been

said so far, the question is whether it is someone or something that the reader encounters, and what is actually meant by ‘someone.’ It is really difficult to determine whether the reader is headed towards the writer or towards the work. The reading act gradually blurs the difference between the author and the book they wrote. As if the boundary between two persons starts to disappear.

Reading a literary work requires the reader to be physically present in front of the text. This practice makes it possible for the reader to actualize the life of the writer, his person. When the writer is dead and absent in the strict sense, it is the person reading who revives him through the signs the writer left behind. What is the nature of those signs? In reality, the words printed on paper have yet to be given life. This can be done through the act of seeing, but also through other senses, such as listening. It is then that the procession of sentences that make up a book starts to move towards its destination.

Once again, it is important to look back and remind ourselves of Montaigne’s stance regarding the relationship between the book and the person as a category, only this time the person are both the writer and the reader. At the end of the preface to the *Essays*, entitled “To the Reader,” speaking directly to anyone who wishes to read his book, the author makes himself clear: “Thus, reader, I am myself the matter of my book” (Montaigne 1958: 2). This statement, in which the author says something about himself through his work—by erecting a magnificent monument to what he is or what he used to be, that is, what he used to do—can be correlated with Saramago’s position. Of course, a book that is written and published is usually intended for someone else, because ‘I’ does not exist without ‘you.’ Montaigne adds: “For I have a singular curiosity, as I have said elsewhere, to know the soul and the natural judgments of my authors” (1958: 302). Montaigne and Saramago did not hesitate to mention the names of authors who left a lasting impression on them, but gladly did so.

When we read literary works such as novels, they tell us something, even though they are voiceless. While there are myriads of words on their many pages, these works keep silent at the outset. Readers are faced with that muteness while bringing to life what lies behind the written letters. The language of defectology—this term is to be understood in its original meaning, in the sense of its constituent words—can also be applied to the body and the soul of the book. On the other side, facing the book, the reader appears to be somewhat blind.

In literature, the world of fiction is the realm of the invisible. Looking at the sentences and gliding across them, together with them, the reader really does not see with their own eyes what is happening and developing before them.

Bearing this in mind, it is possible to imagine a hypothetical situation. What would happen to books if all the people lost their sight? In *Blindness*, following the outbreak of epidemic, a writer says: “Now nobody can read them, it is as if they did not exist” (Saramago 1999a: 290). This remark is perhaps an eccentric acknowledgment of the importance of readers in the life of literature. In the light of Saramago’s social ophthalmology, it seems that this comment from the novel is actually a dark diagnosis of a society that gave up on reading.

The writer was wrong, because one person did not lose sight. At bedtime, she reads aloud to her blind friends. Listening to the reading is one of the ways to postpone and avoid the death of the book at that moment. It is clear which act is the precondition for it. The reader is not completely blind. While the ophthalmologist’s wife is looking at the letters, others are listening to her words, all of them eager for what lies behind those sentences. With their musicality, the words psychagogically allure those who witness the act. It is a point of connection. There is a place in the novel that reads:

Now there is no music other than that of words, and these, especially those in books, are discreet, and even if curiosity should bring someone from the building to listen at the door, they would hear only a solitary murmur, that long thread of sound that can last into infinity, because the books of this world, all together, are, as they say the universe is, infinite. (1999a: 304–305)

Saramago’s poetics is characterized by the motifs of indescribability and sensory deficiency. These two motifs are highlighted here because they also apply to the book as a thing and to its content. Indescribability and sensory deficiency are characteristics that have one thing in common, namely, they both imply an absence of something. In the first case there is a lack of appropriate words to present something in a satisfactory way, while in the second case there is a lack of sensorial capacity through which one can experience and perceive different dimensions of reality.

Sensory deficiencies are observed in things and non-things alike. Deafness, muteness, and blindness are conditions that indicate the limits of what is shown and described. In the case of blindness, it can be both a metaphor and an actual physical disability. The human being is allegorically portrayed by Saramago, that moral and political ophthalmologist, as an imperfect creature who either lost or lacks the sense of sight. On the other hand, it is true that books cannot actually hear anyone, because, being inanimate objects, they are deaf, although in a certain way they hear their readers who engage in a kind of dialogue with them.

The motif of indescribability is also present in *Blindness*. No words and “no imagination, however fertile and creative in making comparisons, images and metaphors” can ever depict everything that is seen in one particular place (Saramago 1999a: 131). It may seem unusual that Saramago uses this motif in other novels too, given his great literary talent and writing skill. In this sense, one could say that for such a writer, there is nothing that cannot be described in an exceptional, even unforgettable way.

A later example of this motif can be found in *Death at Intervals*. In this novel, death, among other things, sits on a chair, writes letters, and sends them to people, and at one point also takes the shape of a woman. In the last chapter of this book, death attracts the attention because she looks “pretty in a very particular, indefinable way that couldn’t be put into words, like a line of poetry whose ultimate meaning, if such thing exists in a line of poetry, continually escapes the translator” (Saramago 2008: 294). It is quite pertinent to refer to this passage here because it is an instance of something which appears anthropomorphized and indescribable at the same time.

In addition to the view that not everything in life can be expressed in language, it seems that Saramago wants to stir the reader’s imagination with short descriptions or the statement about something being indescribable, so that the reader would creatively engage in what they are reading, by filling the gaps that were left for them. At the same time, describing something completely is not achievable, because there is always something else that can be said or observed. Since a description that aims to achieve this goal is unattainable, a book that would attempt to accomplish it would never be completed.

Awareness of the inadequacy of words implies that something must be seen and experienced personally. When something that belongs to the invisible

world of literature is said to be indescribable, it should be kept in mind that the experiences of real life and literary fiction are so intertwined that they are apparently impossible to disentangle. Indescribability is a state that occurs not only in case of something visually perceptible and knowable, such as a physical thing, but also in case of sounds, as well as feelings and emotions. Literary works need not be read only. There is something called a ‘talking book.’ Nowadays, a book is no longer only a physical object, a thing subject primarily to the sense of sight. Talking books are intended for blind people, but also for those who prefer not to savor a book with their eyes, but rather with their ears. The audiobook breaks the silence of its counterpart, the book as a thing to be read. In its presence, the listener, say, sitting in an armchair, feels like they are in front of a person who is describing and telling them something.

Standing between the writer and the one who listens or reads their writings, there is the book, which is a thing neither entirely transparent nor opaque. Therefore, the communication of one person with another is mediated by an object, which can be viewed both as something—a thing or a place—and as someone. The book makes that encounter possible without the precondition of those two participants coexisting at the same time, nor requiring them to be simultaneously in the same place. Given that the book serves as an intermediary, the writer lays themselves bare through it, but also hides themselves in it. They do not give anything that is not right there in their writings and their fiction: “I do not want my readers to know what I know about myself. What stands between me and them are my books” (qtd. in Arias 1998: 34).

Saramago’s attitude towards the book as such and the literary work is characterized by a rather distinct idea. Namely, the book refuses to be just a physical object and transcends its own boundaries. If the focus is on the book itself, it is seen as a person, not something that is incapable of thinking and acting on its own. As regarding the writer, the book is not so much a physical thing as a sign that goes beyond its material bedrock and points to the author and the problems they have dealt with. When a book is being read, it ceases to be an object made of paper and letters and becomes a place that makes a specific event possible. When a book speaks, it disappears as a thing in front of the one who wrote it and the one who reads it.