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'The Double': An intervention in the mimesis of dominant masculinity

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ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on *The Double*, deliberately turning away from the literary motif that Saramago appropriates to denaturalize and expose the constructedness of dominant masculinity and its apparatuses of social and symbolic reproduction. The analysis sheds light on the functioning of several of such instruments, as dramatized in the novel: the name as original language; popular cinema; and common senses inherited from the oral tradition. The final section discusses the critical commentary that accompanies the narrative in dialog with contemporary critiques of masculine gender privilege.

Keywords: binary gender, ideological interpellation, normativity, symbolic reproduction, masculine domination.

O presente artigo enfoca-se em *O homem duplicado* desde uma perspetiva que de modo deliberado se afasta do motivo literário do duplo, de que Saramago se apropria para desnaturalizar e expor a construção da masculinidade dominante bem como os seus aparatos de reprodução social e simbólica. A análise ilumina o funcionamento dos mesmos, conforme a sua dramatização no romance: o nome como língua original; o cinema popular; e os sensos comuns herdados da tradição oral. A secção final aborda o comentário crítico que acompanha a narrativa em diálogo com críticas contemporâneas do privilégio masculino do género.

Palavras-chave: género binário, interpelação ideológica, normatividade, reprodução simbólica, dominação masculina.

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> And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Genesis I, 27-28

Most of Saramago's fiction features clearly identified male and female characters who conform to the gender binary at the basis of what Judith Butler describes as the "heterosexual matrix." The phrase refers to "the grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized" (Butler 1999, 151, n. 6). The dominant cognitive process connecting biological sex to gender identity and to sexual preference explains at least in part the broad appeal of a literary practice that decidedly embraced its philosophical and, hence, universalist inclination[1]. Saramago admitted it the same year he was recognized with the Nobel Prize: "probably I'm an essayist who needs to write novels because he does not know how to write essays" (Reis 1998, 46; my translation). Because most readers are immersed in the very gender ideology sanctioned by the texts, it may be difficult to notice, and much less question, received common senses that pass for natural, constant truths of human beings. That is the case even in most of the studies focused on the representation of "women" and/or femininity[2]. Yet, as *O homem duplicado* (*The Double*) ostensibly shows, the author did not remain indifferent to the mimetic logic of the gender ideology that subjects (or attempts to subject) everyone to the power structure of normative masculinity.

That logic is both laid out and questioned in the next to last chapter of *História do Cerco de Lisboa* (*History of the Siege of Lisbon*) in a brief but significant dialog between the editor, Maria Sara, and her proofreader, Raimundo. She blames male chauvinism for the power struggle that hinders the relations between men and women and asks rhetorically: "when will you men learn to be your natural selves[.]" "No human being is natural" – the interlocuter replies (Saramago 1996, 482). This is precisely what *The Double* would go on to dramatize, theorize, and hold up to ridicule. Before then, the contextual, social constructedness of gender can be perused in the author's works in connection with female characters (e.g.

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[1] Among the many instances in which Saramago (or one of its critics) distinguishes between the first and second phase of his work, the author pointed out that from *Blindness* on he was concerned with "the human being and the question of 'What is a human being?'") (Céu e Silva 2008, 123; my translation).

[2] It is symptomatic that two generations of critics have focused on the topic without pointing out, as Mark Sabine has done, that "Saramago seems unwilling, or unable, to accommodate within his allegories any fundamental challenge to the heteronormative matrix of gender identity and family relations (much less any non-heterosexual characters)" (2016, 248).

Ferreira 2018). But starting with *Blindness* the male as the traditional standard of the human being is denaturalized to the point of horror, despite the degree to which the novel suggests the propensity of all human beings for evil (Nogueira 2020). For it is not by chance that the evil characters in the novel are male, shedding light on what Miguel Vale de Almeida defined in an early essay as "hegemonic masculinity." Far from the exception, that is the dominant model of masculinity, "a lived commonsense" that encompasses subordinate masculinity as well as femininity (Almeida 1996, 162). In *Blindness*, Saramago's most internationally famous novel, the male attributes of reason, selfishness, and violence typical of dominant masculinity are as much an inherited and repeated construction as are the female characters' sentiment, generosity, and solidarity (Rohrig 2014, 55).

The structure of ideological identification with an ideal man is brought to light in *O homem duplicado*, whose translation in English as *The Double* (Saramago 2004) erases the gender identity that is central to the novel. Notably, in his important study, *The Doppelgänger: Literature's Philosophy*, Dimitri Vardoulakis does not engage with gender, although he does not fail to mention Saramago's novel as an example of the twentieth-first century "blood stained" doppelgänger narratives in which an act of murder is central (2010, 69). The tendency has been to approach the novel as a statement on the crisis of human identity in a postmodern, globalized world (e.g. Coelho 2002; Sabine 2016, 244; Silva and Dantas 2019; Fonseca e Sá 2019). From a comparative perspective, Heather Humann has remarked how the novel questions the very concept of identity at a time when it has been reduced to performance and technological reproducibility (2017, 35-42). Humann's insight is valuable because it considers identity a theatrical practice, a playing-out of a gender role. This role is passed down seamlessly across generations and from individual to individual owing to symbolic and technological processes of reproduction. The following aims to bring to light Saramago's representation of those processes by focusing on three interconnected instruments of gender ideology dramatized in novel: the name as original language; the media, in this case, popular cinema; and the common senses of oral tradition and the written record. Attention to the critical commentary by the narrator as well as the equivocal disembodied voice of common sense will follow to pinpoint how *The Double* resonates with contemporary critiques of masculine gender privilege that limit the free self-creation of individuals.

The 'wretched name'

One of the ways in which Saramago embarks decisively on a philosophical or essayistic style of (theoretically) universal appeal is by foregoing of specific

designators of place other than "city." In the case of *Blindness* and *Seeing*, even proper names are abolished, accentuating their allegorical character. The legal fiction of the name, one of the most important and yet equivocal indicators of identity, is exposed in *All the Names*, whose Epigraph dictates: "You know the names you were given, you do not know the name you have" (Saramago 1999, n.p.). The idea is related to that enunciated by the "girl with dark glasses," in *Blindness*: "Inside us there is something that has no name, that something is what we are" (Saramago 1999, 102). In *The Double*, Saramago would go on to lay out an experiment with the unknown and unamenable hardly dislocated by the legal name, which is another way of saying the other inhabiting the subject.

From the outset, the novel's conflict is presented in connection with the proper name of the protagonist, "Tertuliano," who feels embarrassed to identify himself to the attendant of the video store he visits. "Tertuliano weighs on him like a gravestone and has done ever since he first realized that the wretched name lent itself to being spoken in an ironic, potentially offensive tone" (Saramago 2004, 8). The noun, "gravestone," can suggest how the proper name relates to temporality and death, but the original Portuguese, *lousa*, a slate or blackboard, seems more agreeable to its creative potential – or challenge. A being of language living in language, it is up to Tertuliano to create himself by simultaneously reconstituting and inventing the indelible marks weighing on his name-slate-palimpsest. No stranger to biblical texts, Saramago arguably explores the implications of the Western Judeo-Christian common sense that man is God's creation as is language.

In "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," Walter Benjamin uses the first and second parts of Genesis to introduce what he calls "the theory of proper names." Man – he argues – was not named by God but was given the creative ability to name his own kind, that is, other human beings. When parents name their children, they are giving them "the word of God in human sounds" (Benjamin 1996, 69). The latter do not designate a specific person but guarantee that man is God's creation, "and in this sense [man] is himself creative, as is expressed by mythological wisdom in the idea (which doubtless not infrequently comes true) that a man's name is his fate" (69)[3]. It is not just the haunting of an unknown origin that weighs heavily on Tertuliano; it is the fact that he must discover it, so to speak, by creating himself on its image[4]. That act of self-creation

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[3] Selma Ferraz does not make any reference to Benjamin but seems to echo the popular idea he evokes: "Ter esse nome já é uma desgraça, portanto ele é vítima de seu nome e da vida" (Ferraz 2012, 301).

[4] The idea applies to other characters' names as well, as are the cases with Maria da Paz; António Claro; Helena (de Troia); Carolina, alias, Cassandra, as the protagonist jokingly calls his mother while dismissing her warnings (Saramago 2004, 369).

includes going beyond the known inherited names that are part of his official identity, "Máximo" from his mother's side and "Afonso" from his father's (Saramago 2004, 21). The protagonist's ancestry may recall the legendary heroic King Afonso Henriques, founder of Portugal, a model of masculinity he cannot live up to. But whatever the model, it haunts him. "Maybe it's just that I don't really like myself" (16). It probably does not help that he exercised his God-given right to name others by naming his dog "Tomarctus", the extinct pre-historic ancestor of dogs (325). The call of the unknown may lead to the obsession with knowing, naming and, hence, having the illusion of capturing or indeed embody an original Man, the authentic first of the series that supposedly emanated from the words of Genesis.

The paradox of having to create himself after an unknown origin or original may be said to hinge not just on the individual Freudian unconscious but on what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes as the "androcentric unconscious." This is the principle that orders society according to a naturalized, collectively accepted view of the world based on male domination. Because the latter operates first and foremost at the symbolic level, not by demonstrable physical or intellectual power, it is pre-reflexive and not perceived, which explains its constancy over the ages despite the better social conditions of women in the contemporary Western world (Bourdieu 2001). What readers may be unaware of or take for granted are the negative effects of the androcentric unconscious on some individuals regardless of their gender identity. That may explain the protagonist's loneliness and symptoms of depression (lack of energy and enthusiasm, the indecisiveness, oblivion, and apathy that characterize him), as if he were resisting what at bottom speaks through him and imperceptibly dictates his actions in the given masculine name "Tertuliano."

To emphasize the uniqueness of the problem about to be explored in *The Double*, the narrator contrasts the protagonist with several other similarly depressed protagonists of earlier Saramago's novels, who are left unnamed. "[E]ither by chance or coincidence, [they] were members of the male sex, but none of them had the misfortune to be called Tertuliano, and this was doubtless an inestimable advantage to them in their relations with other people" (Saramago 2004, 9-10). The passage may strike the author's seasoned readers as a humorous wink of eye to solicit their complicity in moving through the allegory being set up in that opening page around the protagonist's proper name. To ignore it is to dismiss Saramago's hermeneutic key, admitting to the "male sex" of his protagonists and to the social and personal implications of the name "Tertuliano".

In his study of the relation between name and history in the philosophy of Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben explains that independently of the divine ascription of the name it is "handed down from history" in a process of descent

synonyms with history itself, since history carries down the "shadow" of language's origin (Agamben 1988, 170-72). One could argue that such is the predicament or "fate" of the proper name that weighs so heavily on Tertuliano's existence for (like a magic slate) its origin as language is there but is not accessible. Hence, he must discover it, that is, create it through far or less deliberate acts that involve, unbeknownst to him, a dialectical operation.

"Tertuliano" is the namesake of one of Christianity's founding fathers, the prolific theologian Tertullian (b. 150 AD), from the North African city of Carthage, known for the concept of the trinity, his persecution of heresies, and his controversial defense of truth against custom. In the words of the scholar directing "The Tertullian Project," the theologian "is not easy reading for those who prefer compromise and ambiguity to truth, and of ecclesiasticism there is no trace in his works" (Pearse 1999). Such a precedent would confirm the kind of giant slate that Tertuliano feels he carries on his name, a surface yet to be filled out by a narrative that would make him worthy of the namesake. That operation involves a series of mirror-like duplications that (more than evoke the Christian dogma of the Trinity) reflect the ternary logic of dialectical materialism in the self-creation of the subject. It is through technology, specifically film in an era of mass reproduction and consumption of film through easily accessible videos that such self-creation is to take place, on the heels of and against an unknown origin indelibly inscribed with the masculine norm of humanity.

Cinema as 'distraction': becoming subject(ed) to the Subject

A high school teacher of history, admittedly not a fan of cinema, Tertuliano visits the video store following the advice of a colleague, who, in response to his consistently depressive mood, recommends that he watch popular films as a form of "distraction" (Saramago 2004, 14). His colleague, who teaches mathematics, seems to be well-versed in such films; he recommends a "light comedy" with a title evoking a well-known proverb in Portuguese, "Quem porfia mata caça," translated as "The Race Is to the Swift" (16). The phrase may keep the proverb-like enunciation of the original, "the race is not to the swift," in Ecclesiastes 9:11. But it unfortunately misses the meaning of the traditional Portuguese proverb, encouraging persistence when aiming for a goal, in this case hunting, to presumably kill an animal, a metaphor associated with a typically masculine activity. While the novel's opening pages offer up the "problem" of the name "Tertuliano," from the initial reference to the film's title, "Quem porfia mata caça," a complementary hermeneutical key is presented. "It sounds more like a proverb, Well, it is a proverb, The whole thing or just the title, Wait and see, What sort is it, What, the proverb, No, the film, A comedy" (16). Tertuliano's confusion is not to

be missed, since his viewing of the film prompts the metaphorical activity of hunting ("caçar") that is part and parcel of his becoming a dominant masculine subject with farcical but ultimately tragic consequences.

Likely to be familiar with the Marxist philosophy of Louis Althusser, Saramago illustrates in *The Double* the constitution of the law-abiding, docile subject through the mechanism of ideological interpellation[5]. As opposed to openly repressive forces, such as the police and the judicial system, such institutions as the family, education, church, the media socialize individuals or program them to accept and imitate the dominant socio-symbolic order. Indeed, before one is born, one is already subjected to and hence a subject of that order (Althusser 1971, 176). Althusser condenses it in the concept of a "Unique and Absolute Subject," on whose image and name individuals are made subjects. Ideological interpellation functions thus in a "duplicate mirror-structure" around that Absolute Subject "in which each subject can contemplate its own image" (180).

The unconscious and iterative character of such moments when individuals are "interpellated" and recognize themselves in that call is dramatized in the scene where Tertuliano recognizes himself in the image of the actor playing the hotel receptionist in the movie "Quem porfia mata caça." Before getting out of bed to return to the video, the protagonist already senses a strange presence in the room (i.e. the Absolute Subject who is to interpellate him into a subject). Once he does watch the hotel scene in the video again, he exclaims "it's me!" (Saramago 2004, 28). He goes on to confirm the resemblance after rationalizing the difference between the actor with a moustache and himself five years before when he, too, wore one: "he's just like me" (30). There is of course a world of difference between the first and second moment of recognition, the second admitting the possibility of two separate individuals who appear to be copies of each other.

The scene sheds light on the basic religiosity commanded by ideological interpellation of individuals into subjects. Saramago seems to draw inspiration from Althusser's example of Christian Religious Ideology to illustrate how interpellation functions by the different ideological apparatus (Althusser 1971, 178-181). In that regard, it is important to note how the author describes the position and movement of the protagonist's body in front of the screen whereupon the video is played. He kneels "down in front of the television, his face as close to the screen as he could get it and still be able to see, It's me, he said, and once more he felt the hairs on his body stand on end" (Saramago 2004, 28). The visceral reaction manifested in the goosebumps may suggest that interpellation, in this case via a popular film, is not entirely unconscious. And Saramago's text offers yet

[5] What Louis Althusser had to say about the Revolution of April 25, 1974, after he visited the country one year after and witnessed the beginning of revolutionary demise circulated in Portuguese newspapers at the height of the so-called "hot summer" of 1975 (Althusser 1975).

another important detail to further complicate the mirror structure that ensures – or is meant to ensure – subjection to and consequently duplication of a "Unique and Absolute Model" of subjectivity (Althusser 1971, 180), not by chance a specifically male model.

Tertuliano's recognition of himself in the image of the character playing the hotel receptionist is confirmed through the mediation of a female character named "Inês de Castro." Trying to focus on the image of the hotel receptionist to whom she announces her name, the protagonist repeatedly plays the scene before sitting himself in front of the television in the same position as Inês addressing the clerk. "[H]e too pretended to be a customer at the hotel, My name's Tertuliano Máximo Afonso, he announced, then, with a smile, What's yours?" (Saramago 2004, 30). Interestingly, in his solitary game of make-believe the protagonist does not hesitate to enunciate his full name, as if the experience of recognizing himself on the image of even a minor character in a B-movie gives him the confidence to own what previously he had considered an "unfortunate, antiquated name" (10). This may be related to his having noticed that the female character, Inês de Castro, is an "interesting historical coincidence" (28). The absence of any further explanation signals the naturalization in Portuguese cultural memory of the melodramatic love story of the eponymous lady in waiting of Queen Constança and lover of her husband, the future King Pedro I, whose father had her killed. The story was immortalized in Luís Vaz de Camões' epic poem, *The Lusiads* (Camões 1982, III, verses 118-135), subsequently reappearing in the arts and popular culture. From the moment the story is taken up by film, which for Walter Benjamin is the epitome of mechanical reproduction, the story's "unique existence" is lost. As a result, spectators can "reactivate" it, that is, interpret or criticize it in their own terms (Benjamin 2007b, 221). This explains Tertuliano's dislike of receptionist's risky comments to the "mighty Inês de Castro [. . .] as she walked off, swaying her hips [ ]," going on to blame the film's director for wanting to please the populace (30).

As noted, as Tertuliano watches the scene in question repeatedly he changes his seating and body position to align with that of Inês, so that he is directly facing the male character who looks like him. In this deliberate fantasy scenario, he is confronted with a message that reinforces his long-felt discomfort with himself: "One of us is a mistake, that was what the clerk at the reception desk actually said to Tertuliano Máximo Afonso when, addressing the actress playing Inês de Castro, he informed her that the room reserved for her was number twelve-eighteen" (Saramago 2004, 36). The confusion is once again productive, because it leads the protagonist to wonder if he is a "mistake" and "what consequences does it have for a human being to know that he's a mistake?" (35). As the plot develops, the reader is lead, or mislead, to assume that the "mistake" is related to the Tertuliano being merely a copy, a duplicate, of some kind of original Man, a "Unique and

Absolute [Male] Subject." But could the issue be related to something else, inside the person, perhaps that which remains unknown? Is Tertuliano a "mistake" because of an "other" that inhabits and divides the masculine subject from himself, the model of hegemonic masculinity represented by the actor?

In his 1936 critique of Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Theodor Adorno questions the romanticizing view of film as a form of 'distraction.' The philosopher argues that the culture industry in a capitalist society homogenizes human beings, who, not unlike the work of art that has lost its aura, become reproductions of each other, something that the 'naïve realism' of mass films appealing to bourgeois tastes further encourages. He rejects Benjamin's argument that film, as the most advanced form of technological mass reproduction (at the time), liberates spectators from the authority of tradition empowering them to be critics (Adorno 1973, 18). The reason the spectators of such films laugh is because they are already reproductions of each other *before* they see the film. His point is flushed out in *Minima moralia*, where he states that "The culture industry is geared to mimetic regression, to the manipulation of repressed impulses to copy. Its method is to anticipate the spectator's imitation of itself, so making it appear as if the agreement already exists which it intends to create" (Adorno 2005, 201). It is not otherwise with Tertuliano: even before watching the film and discovering himself in the actor, "It's me!", he is already an imitation – as flimsy as it may be – of the dominant masculinity passed on from generation to generation.

'An eye for an eye' or how custom becomes truth

Attention to the references throughout the novel to the history of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations that the protagonist is reading may shed light on the complex issue of the ideological reproduction of a human norm of gender and sexuality. From the perspective of character coherence, it makes sense that an old-fashioned high school history teacher, one who does not even own a computer, is interested in what is widely considered 'the cradle of civilization'. But, more importantly, the references to Tertuliano's book function as reminders of the presentness of the past, that past whose origins date back to Sumeria and Mesopotamia[6]. Saramago's fiction follows the lesson of Georges Duby's *nouvelle histoire,* which professes the freedom to "imagine" the past rather than aiming for the authority of some fixed truth (Saramago 2000, 13). Recalling Walter Benjamin's formula in the sixth thesis of his "The Philosophy of History," the act of imagining the past is motivated by or called upon by "a moment of danger" (Benjamin 2007a,

[6] It may be interesting to note the publication in 1985 of the novel, *Mesopotâmia,* by António Rebordão Navarro, whose narrator juxtaposes present and past in the remembrance of a family.

255). Considering the advanced, in some respects frightening, state of civilization at the turn of the millennium, it is certainly not gratuitous for Saramago to evoke, even if indirectly, a set of values and beliefs, knowledges, and artefacts that were foundational for the Western tradition and whose effects continue into the present.

Not unlike in Tertuliano's own time, the ancient Mesopotamians are credited with an impressive number of inventions. Among them are cuneiform writing, mathematics, concepts of measuring time, mass-produced ceramics and bricks, domestication of animals, agriculture and irrigation, common tools, the wheel and the sail, wine and beer, the concept of the city, imperialism, and legal codes (Mark 2018). The latter, specifically King Hammurabi's Code, merit several references in novel bearing metatextual relevance. Firstly, the idea of written laws originated with Hammurabi's Code. Tertuliano refers to it when, resisting the alleged fact that the actor, António Claro, is the original of the two suggests they part ways, leaving no written record of their encounter: "I suppose you will have heard the phrase custom is nine-tenths of the law, if that were not the case, I can assure you that the Hammurabi Code would never have been written" (Saramago 2004, 309-10). Saramago evokes a traditional, well-known proverb in Portuguese, "O costume faz a lei," to impart a cultural common sense relative to the myth of masculine domination at a point in the narrative when the two men are competing for originality, authenticity, in short, historical priority (310-311). Regardless of birth certificates, representing the written law, actual practices and rituals in society end up being culturally codified as "law."

A more indirect but nonetheless important reference to Hammurabi's code occurs when Tertuliano, after finding out that António Claro is dead, wonders if he should once again sleep with his wife, Helena, just like the actor had slept with Maria da Paz:

> [A]n eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, as demanded by the law of talion, never applied more appropriately than in this case, for our present-day word "identical" means the same as the Latin etymon talis, from which the term "talion" comes, for not only were the crimes committed identical, those who committed them were identical too. (425)

"The law of talion" refers to Hammurabi's code, the origin of the Biblical law of retaliation, "an eye for an eye," subsequently included in Roman law ("Lex Talionis"), and far or less naturalized into a violent, unfortunate commonsense that Tertuliano here evokes in a parodic legalistic style characteristically substantiated by a philological argument. One could say he is putting on the lawyer's act – or that of the self-righteous male, for, in addition to and independently of the professional actor, all the characters may be said to be

playing a role – that dictated to them by the mostly unwritten rules of what constitutes gender-defined socially and culturally accepted norms of behavior.

Comic relief? The novel's dialogism

The Double calls attention to how Tertuliano's insecurity is to blame for the cycle of deliberate, tragic-comic duplicity that constitutes the main plot of the novel. His behaviors are commented upon by the narrator's omnipresent, ironic, voice and by an equally disembodied voice that regularly visits him in the name of "common sense." The fact that that the latter's opinions are questioned both by Tertuliano and by the narrator suggests that there is no outside of the symbolic system, even the discourse, that makes all three voices audible and intelligible. The novel is as much about the literary motif of the double potentially coming to life in a world where cloning is possible ("what if?") as it is about the symbolic system of which literature, poetic language itself, is part (c.f. Baltrush 2022). Only by foregoing the temptation to read *The Double* as an anthropological case of postmodern "man" (i.e. supposedly the human being) can one take notice of metanarrative dimension that is properly a reflection on how literature can dangerously reproduce accepted gender norms that confine all human beings.

Returning to the reason adduced by Tertuliano for disliking his name, namely the irony with which it can be pronounced in a "potentially offensive tone" (Saramago 2004, 8), the novel presents from the start someone who does not live comfortably in or with language. First, there is the literary resonance of his name, whose outmoded adjectival form, "tertuliano," indicates someone who participates in a conversation normally about literature and the arts, *tertulia* in Spanish. That is something that the character himself is not prone to doing: his conversations with others are uneasy, always forced. Yet, the narrative certainly mimics conversation in its structural dialogism. Saramago's digressive, conversationalist style would seem to evoke a *tertulia* between several people discussing precisely Tertuliano's story.

That literary conversation is figured in the text by the narrator's comments about the various implications of the protagonist's words and actions which often call upon the appearance of the sui generis character, common sense. Specifically in line with his role as alter ego of the author, the narrator often intervenes to explain digressions, verisimilitude, and other writing protocols. Such critical interruptions, typical of Saramago's sententious style overall, may be said to constitute the philosophical (or theoretical) metatext prompted by, informing, and difficult to separate from the narration of Tertuliano's story itself. For the purposes of the argument being here pursued, two of the themes most recurrent in such interruptions merit special attention because they speak to the author's concern

with the social injustices propagated by spoken and written language in the form of unquestioned beliefs, banal common senses and, most seriously, by tacit dominant ideologies of gender.

The diatribe against traditional sayings passed on from generation to generation and enunciated as universal truths emerges early in the novel. The narrator disapproves of a proverb that he attributes to Tertuliano's fatalistic reasoning when he gets home from the video store and needs to decide what to do first:

> That's what people usually say, and because it is what people usually say, we accept it without further discussion when our duty as free people is to argue energetically with a despotic fate that has determined, with who knows what malicious intentions, that the green pear should be the film and not the homework or the book. (Saramago 2004, 19)

Obviously, the narrator himself partakes of the way of thinking that he criticizes, as is evident by his allegation regarding fate. An example of unconscious imitative behavior, it is also pointed out, among other instances, in relation to the conventional asking a person for their name, imagining that a person's name is "the door through which one enters" (31). More substantial and humorous is narrator's tirade against the "strange relation that we have with words," because we use them and are used by them without really knowing what they mean (18). This appears as a commentary on Tertuliano's "urgent" desire to read about monkfish in an encyclopedia, the fish he dislikes the most and with which he was confronted on the menu of the restaurant he had visited (118-19). The passage, which interrupts the narrative flow, may be read as a reminder of the ever-present threat of words one knows nothing or little about, a threat whose literary and ideological productivity is amply demonstrated.

A comic example of that semantic threat is when, at school on a Monday morning, the mathematics teacher uses the colloquialism, "*enxofrar-se*," to describe Tertuliano's angry reaction at his having announced in front of all the colleagues that Tertuliano is not a "great lover of cinema." Although the translation, "to get aerated" (199), works almost just as well for the long digression that follows featuring the different teachers evoking similarly colloquial terms, Saramago's use of "*enxofrar-se*" is not without specific inuendo in Portuguese. This is because that expression resonates with a former country boy, as is the case with the protagonist, who is surely aware of the various uses of sulfur (*enxofre*), for example, as an insecticide in vineyards. The protagonist's self-consciousness about being a kind of outsider in the big city is never directly voiced in the novel, it is implicitly there as the references to his mother living back in the village suggest, a visit to which

he delays as much as possible. Earlier in the novel, on account of Tertuliano's imputed thought that some things cannot be "explained in words," the narrator in fact calls attention to the importance of thinking about the origin and development of words as well as the uncontrollable consequences of their use (81). Other cases in point are the "threats" represented by commonly and universally used words, like "man" and "woman," that unbeknown to those of use them perpetuate social hierarchies and prejudices.

In several points of the narrative the narrator and common sense call out masculine dominance in a tongue and cheek way that appear to seek complicity with the contemporary reader. The latter is certainly not limited to academics, but the insistence with which the narrator admittedly analyses characters' actions suggests that Saramago is mimicking literary analysis of an arguably feminist kind. To start out with, the description of Tertuliano's efforts to find the name of the actor who looks like him in the phone book of a city of five million prompts a politically correct statement: "In calculations involving such large numbers, as in the present case, the tendency not to take women into account is irresistible" (Saramago 2004, 126). Gentleman that he is, the narrator goes on to always "take women into account." This is the case when criticizing Tertuliano for not paying due attention to Maria da Paz the morning after having slept with her due to his obsession of finding the actor who looks like him: "Being a man should never be an impediment of acting like a gentleman" (164-65). Further, collapsing his voice with that of common sense the narrator harshly denounces Tertuliano's male chauvinism: "We know about your reasons, my friend, they're known as the presumptuousness of the male, the vanity of the seducer, and the arrogance of the conqueror" (166-67). Perhaps expectedly, the protagonist admits that he is a male but that he is "always the conquered" one. It is curious that the narrator makes it a point to indicate that the women initiate sex, first Maria da Paz and then Helena; never Tertuliano himself. He is, however, rightly judged as "an unscrupulous exploiter" (175) for the cowardly and illicit way in which he uses Maria da Paz to find the actor's name.

With respect to the game of seduction, as in other activities, the actor is described as being exactly the opposite. If he still awaits the seducer's role on screen, is clearly described as a womanizer who scorns his wife and the institution of marriage while planning to sexually possess Maria da Paz just to get even with Tertuliano (356-57). Although many other examples can be adduced, a final observation of the narrator is noteworthy for the generous thought that men "never manage to separate themselves entirely from women," a thought prompted by the protagonist arriving home and finding his apartment meticulously clean (374). This would indeed be a gentlemanly discursive gesture if it did not

contradict the narrator's criticism of Tertuliano using Maria da Paz for his own personal benefit.

Driving back home after leaving the country house where he had met with António Claro, Tertuliano has a conversation with common sense about stereotypical gender behaviors that are as self-limiting as limiting of others. Common sense congratulates the protagonist for having behaved "admirably, like a man" in the meeting with the actor, overcoming the "weakness" he lately had exhibited. Tertuliano reacts by challenging common sense's certainties about gendered behaviors: "So a man is anyone who isn't subject to weaknesses, […]. Well, it seems to me that common sense has a very chauvinistic way of expressing itself," to which common sense replies, "That's not my fault, it's just the way I was made[.]" Common sense then goes on to describe its truth value as "a kind of arithmetic mean" that depends upon the men and women who use it (Saramago 2004, 313). Saramago seems to suggest that there is no such thing as a god-like will or law existing outside human beings and determining their gendered behaviors: the circularity of the argument invalidates putting the blame on patriarchy or male dominance for the gender binary, which, in the end, is substantiated and reproduced by actions, living practices in society. Which, as *The Double* makes clear, does not imply tacit complicity with the gendered violence that is the result of the ancient and yet always new masculine-dominant status and its endless play or mirrors.

Conclusion

Saramago's philosophical novels – *Blindness*, *All the names*, *The Double*, and *Seeing* – all present a structure of repetition that warns against the increasing massification not only of the economy but of the individual desires that enable and support it. The desire to exhibit 'manly' characteristics of emotional and physical strength, to recall the confrontation between Tertuliano and common sense, is not any less at the turn of the millennium, when *The Double* was written and published, than it was at the time of the invention in Mesopotamia of writing and multiple other civilizational instruments and concepts. But neither the characters of *The Double* nor of the other "reflective" novels (as Saramago preferred to call them) are necessarily the result of Saramago's engagement with a postmodernist aesthetic and its critique of humanism.

To pick up on a comment by the author in one of his interviews with José Halperín, those characters need to be imagined not as representations of human beings but as experimental figures "in limit situations" that put their existences to the test (2003, 82-83). Tertuliano, a typical doppelgänger character experiencing isolation and loneliness (Vardoulakis 2010, 14), finds himself in a "limit situation"

ensuing from what might be understood as a collective "androcentric unconscious" (Bourdieu 2001) that he senses he cannot live up to. Hence, identifying with a technologically produced and reproduced model of dominant masculinity that he ultimately and tragically usurps. But his transformation does not take place in a historical vacuum: past and present coexist in the character, in "una síncronia absoluta," encompassing all time periods (Saramago 2005, 17), and hence the reference to his history of Mesopotamian civilizations virtually closing the novel. What happens to the protagonist, Saramago suggests, is bound to happen to any other common man made insecure by both traditional oral knowledge, in the form of common senses, and great examples of male heroes from the past.

And, yet, there is a moment in the narrative when Saramago has Tertuliano imagine the possibility of another, freer, way to exist "naturally," arguably without looking for a reflection of self-affirmation on a screen or an image outside himself. It does happen as a result of his consumption of B-rate movies in which his look-alike acts, so he is elated with the realization that, no longer depressed, he is experimenting a radical transformation. The analogy to the natural world could not be more poetic, nor more suggestive: He

> view[s] himself as a chrysalis in a state of profound withdrawal and undergoing a secret process of transformation. Despite the somber mood that had been with him ever since he got out of bed, he smiled at the comparison, thinking that, were this the case, then, having entered the cocoon as a caterpillar, he would emerge from it a butterfly. Me, a butterfly, he murmured, now I've seen everything (Saramago 2004, 196).

Taking into consideration the ways in which Saramago dramatizes the processes whereby a human being becomes a normative male, indeed in view of an ideal one; and after perusing the ironic, but still open and direct critical dialog about the sexism, if not misogyny, of his male characters, one can wonder where the author could have taken that metaphor had he had the moral courage to do so without irony or humor.

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