

ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY? READING SARAMAGO ALOUD

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In his 2001 story, *A Maior Flor do Mundo*, purportedly written for children and perhaps one of the most obvious examples of “traditional” storytelling in Saramago’s work, a metafictional discourse about the difficulties faced by the author in completing his task of narration runs alongside the story proper (Saramago 2005). In the book, the presence of the author/narrator is brought to the fore by João Caetano’s illustrations which bear a striking resemblance to Saramago. However, even without the added benefit of illustrations, the narrator’s place in Saramago’s other prose fiction is prominent and has been commented on by numerous critics, as has his deliberately difficult style of writing, although relatively little formal critical attention has been devoted so far to this aspect of his work. It is a style which the author himself describes as having a distinctly oral quality (Arias 73-74). The following examination will show how Saramago uses the written word to breathe new life into the Portuguese tradition of oral storytelling, and to blur the perceived divide between oral and written literature while simultaneously drawing his readers’ attention to some of the key preoccupations that are recurrent in his work. I will pay particular attention to the 1995 novel, *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, in which Saramago uses the written word to appeal to all of his readers’ senses (Saramago 2001). The vivid descriptions of the rapid degradation of the unnamed city and its society evoke terrible sights, sounds, and even smells, and Saramago uses the oral and aural qualities of the text to force the reader into a similar position to that of the characters in the novel, as Krabbenhoft very pertinently observes (130).

Following a brief discussion of some of the qualities of oral literature in general, I will move on to examine in closer detail some of the ways in which Saramago refers to and revives the oral tradition. The analysis will focus on three

elements in particular: firstly, how Saramago's distinctive use of punctuation contributes to the oral qualities of the text; secondly, the aural properties of the text, and how the author exploits specific speech patterns in order to highlight certain issues; and finally, I will identify some instances in the text of oral storytelling, and I will discuss how Saramago uses these to propose a renewing of old customs (although it should be clarified here that Saramago does not merely advocate a simple return; rather, as we have come to expect from this author, the idea of revisiting the past—as he does when recreating eighteenth-century Portugal in *Memorial do Convento*—necessarily incorporates a degree of re-evaluation, too). Throughout this paper, I will argue that Saramago uses the printed text with the intention of forcing his readers to become listeners—hearing the text if they are to understand it. I will show how he re-evaluates and challenges cultural traditions and recognisable speech patterns, and I will suggest that in creating what Stegagno Picchio refers to as an aural, rather than a visual text (137), Saramago opens up a dialogue between himself and his readers, and between readers and text, thus allowing the ideological and philosophical aspects of the text to resound with greater clarity. In this respect, I will be attempting to disprove Genette's assertion that literature is something that is experienced first and foremost in the domain of the mind (4). Instead, I will be exploring how, as D'Haen would have it, the novel can be viewed as having a structure and narrator/audience relation that are similar to those of natural narratives (10).

Oral and popular literatures have traditionally been considered as having less scholarly value than, and being distinctly separate from, the written word. Finnegan suggests that this may be because written or printed forms of literature are somehow more tangible—their physical nature offers something more concrete than the naturally evolving and seemingly elusive forms of oral literature (165). The modern divide between the two forms is often seen to be bridged only by the transcription of oral literatures, thus providing scholars with a graspable text that can be studied, or a script from which one can read aloud. However, as Fontes

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explains, many learned writers of the Middle Ages drew on folk literature for material for their written work (4). Furthermore, Richardson has identified in his research on the oral transmission of written texts in Renaissance Italy that the performance was often considered to have greater force than the physical text. The distinction between oral and printed literature is undoubtedly more pronounced nowadays, yet as Finnegan observes, the spoken word and written texts are not entirely separable from one another (169); rather, the two methods of narration are related and frequently overlap. D'Haen goes even further, asserting that the novel is a formal version of the spoken narrative, and is thus familiar to all of us (10).

The verbally delivered text is comprised not only of words, but also of other acoustic elements such as rhyme, rhythm and intonation, as well as visual expression and movement. All of these are difficult, if not impossible to transcribe. Indeed, Saramago has frequently alluded to such difficulties in his fictional writing, for example in the often-cited passage from *A Jangada de Pedra* where he comments on the power of opera in allowing several voices to sound at once, as opposed to writing, or more accurately reading, which processes details one after the other, the reader being unable to process two phrases simultaneously (1991, 14). In *Levantado do Chão*, the narrator explains precisely why the act of storytelling is so difficult: “Todos os dias têm a sua história, um só minuto levaria anos a contar, o mínimo gesto, o descasque miudinho duma palavra, duma sílaba, dum som, para já não falar dos pensamentos...” (Saramago 1994, 59). Nevertheless, the written text is not limited to words alone, and its visual aspect can also guide our understanding of how it is to be read, determining for example whether it is poetry or prose (Finnegan 173-74). The Saramaguian prose text appears visually as page after page of practically unbroken print, and this is one of the fundamental ways in which the author causes his readers to become listeners.

The oral and aural qualities of Saramago's writing can be seen from as early as *Levantado do Chão*, and it was when writing this novel that Saramago claims to have conceived of

his distinctive style of writing, which, he tells Carlos Reis, developed naturally when he was in the Alentejo and listening frequently to people telling stories (42). Since the publication of *Levantado do Chão* in 1980, most of Saramago's prose fiction has been marked by the use of a very reduced punctuation which is limited to just commas and full stops. The author claims that this represents real speech more effectively, and pointedly rejects the intonation and clarification that other signs can add, saying that we do not use punctuation when we speak (Arias 75). The limited punctuation obliges the readers to add their own intonation and search for the deeper significance of the words, thus intensifying the level of participation on the part of the reader, who can no longer read passively and must make a concerted effort to navigate the text. While many critics have applauded this so-called revolutionary style (see, for example, Calbucci 91), it seems from the multitude of comments posted on literature discussion websites that there are as many other readers who hate it, to the point of finding his books unbearably difficult to read (see for example the very mixed reviews posted on the Amazon Customer Reviews Website¹). In answer to such criticisms, Saramago has famously and frequently advised those who find his work difficult to read it aloud in order to hear its musical qualities (see his comments in Reis 103). Saramago's current English translator, Margaret Jull Costa, explains that this can be the key to understanding his writing, because it is only on reading aloud that one is able to perceive the rhythm of his sentences, which often carries the sense (212).

In Saramago's fictional writing since 1980, dialogue is only identified by means of a comma followed by a capital letter to differentiate between speakers, meaning that there is often a certain level of ambiguity as to who is speaking. In a novel such as *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, this reflects the difficulty that the blind have in identifying each other once they have lost their sight. In the following passage, we can see how even the narrator is unable to identify the individuals speaking, and instead can only identify the gender of the voices:

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Os nossos já estão enterrados, Se enterram uns, também podiam ter enterrado os outros, respondeu de dentro uma voz de homem, O combinado foi que cada camarata enterraria os mortos que lhe pertencessem, contámos quatro e enterrámo-los, Está bem, amanhã trataremos dos de aqui, disse outra voz masculina, e depois, mudando de tom, Não veio mais comida, perguntou, Não, respondeu o médico, Mas o altifalante diz que três vezes ao dia, Duvido que venham a cumprir sempre a promessa, Então será preciso de racionar os alimentos que vierem chegando, disse uma voz de mulher (Saramago 2001, 95-96).

The speaking voice changes nine times in this short passage, and the characters' voices mingle with that of the narrator. The lack of conventional punctuation means that the readers must decide for themselves whether a phrase should be read as a question or a statement. Introductory or concluding phrases such as "respondeu o médico" are sparse, and the only character clearly identified above is the doctor. This serves to make the rest of the characters in the passage, who cannot be identified visually, appear as nothing more than disembodied voices distinguishable from one another only by gender, highlighting the confusion experienced by the doctor himself, and thus extending that disorientating experience to the readers.

In *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, indeed in any of Saramago's novels, the multitude of characters' voices are interspersed with the voice of the narrator (associated, due to his anonymity and privileged viewpoint, with the authorial voice). Indeed, in an interview with Arias that took place in 1997—only two years after the publication of *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*—Saramago insists that the narrator's voice in his novels is his own, and that he only uses the device of an apparently separate narrator as a kind of intermediary or filter to avoid the ontological confusion that would be caused by the intrusion of too much of his own person into the work of fiction (26). Such comments should perhaps be read with a certain degree of skepticism, however, when one recalls how frequently the author intervenes in the novel, from *Levantado do Chão*, when the author (not the narrator) discusses the death of Germano Santos Vidigal with Dr Romano (Saramago 1994, 177), to *A Maior Flor do Mundo*,

where the author implicitly refers to that first novel and stresses that the responsibility for revision also lies with his youngest readers (although the epigraph on the back cover of the book suggests with some force that the author intends for it to be read by adults): “Este era o conto que eu queria contar. Tenho muita pena de não saber escrever histórias para crianças. Mas ao menos ficaram sabendo como a história seria, e poderão contá-lo doutra maneira...” (Saramago 2005, n.p.). Nevertheless, it may still be said that the individual voices of the narrator and principal characters (such as the doctor’s wife and the old man with a black eyepatch in *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*) resound clearly and independently, resulting in what Bakhtin describes as a polyphony of independent voices (21).

Saramago also represents and exploits other speech patterns, such as the rhetoric of government announcements typical of times of crisis, expertly imitating the style and vocabulary of similar speeches in the real world. The government announcement to the blind internees of the asylum in *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* follows a rhetorical pattern of using metaphor to persuade the public of the legitimacy of the proposed action, as identified by Charteris-Black (10). The speech uses the familiar concept of quarantine against infection by the unknown “disease” (although it is not explicitly identified as infectious), and might be said to recall situations such as Adolf Hitler’s 30 January 1939 speech in which he uses the metaphor of disease in his perception of Jewry as a threat to the German nation (Domarus 1447). In terms of its construction in particular, the government announcement in *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* may also be said to emulate John F. Kennedy’s “Quarantine Speech” at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, in which Kennedy states the government’s obligation to report the events in detail, and claims to be acting in defence not only of the USA, but of the entire Western Hemisphere. Kennedy goes on in this speech to systematically number the steps to be taken against Cuba in order to maintain the status quo, with the threat to the communist nation being made abundantly clear, and the force of the rhetoric progressing in

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crescendo throughout the speech to its final climactic warning to potential critics that if the American government were to do nothing, the Western world would find itself in even greater danger (Kennedy n.p.). The announcement in *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* uses the passive voice to explain the position it has been forced into: “O Governo lamenta ter sido forçado a exercer energicamente o que considera ser seu direito e seu dever” (Saramago 2001, 49). On a superficial reading, the speech does appear to offer some comfort, promising food and encouraging organisation amongst the inmates: “O Governo está perfeitamente consciente das suas responsabilidades”; “sexto, três vezes ao dia serão depositadas caixas de comida na porta da entrada” (Saramago 2001, 50). However, the rhetoric is soon revealed to be unambiguously empty: it only thinly disguises the badly thought-out arrangements that do not take into account that those quarantined are newly-blind and therefore unused to a world without vision (“primeiro, as luzes manter-se-ão sempre acesas”; “quarto, os internados lavarão manualmente as suas roupas”; Saramago 2001, 50); and it indicates a threat which will be fulfilled later in the novel (“segundo, abandonar o edifício sem autorização significará morte imediata”; Saramago 2001, 50). As the story progresses, this speech is entirely emptied of its value, to the extent that the narrator chooses not to repeat it in its entirety at only its second playing. The promised deliveries of food are quickly seen to be insufficient and the government’s promise that it has made the decision to quarantine the blind in the best interests of all concerned loses all significance, while the threat is put into action by the soldiers outside when they shoot the car thief who goes to ask for medical assistance and those who go to collect food. By the time the power finally fails and the recorded message ceases, it has come to be almost entirely ignored, useful to the blind only as a means of trying to keep track of time (and even this is futile): “O Governo, neste momento as luzes apagaram-se e o altifalante calou-se. Indiferente, um cego deu um nó no cordel que tinha nas mãos, depois tentou contá-los, os nós, os dias, mas desistiu, havia nós sobrepostos, cegos, por assim dizer” (195).

Saramago also parodies religious language, calling on his readers' assumed cultural background (we must remember that the author is from a predominantly Catholic country) and inviting a re-evaluation of traditions and rituals. Towards the end of the novel, the doctor's wife takes sanctuary in a church, following a terrifying experience in which she sees will-o'-the-wisps around dead bodies in a supermarket basement. On entering the church, however, she observes that all of the religious images have had their eyes covered with a white band or a stroke of white paint. The passage describes these images in turn, making them clearly identifiable to a reader with knowledge of Catholicism. Each description ends with a pronouncement about their eyes being covered:

...e estava além uma mulher a ensinar a filha a ler, e as duas tinham os olhos tapados, e um homem com um livro aberto onde se sentava um menino pequeno, e os dois tinham os olhos tapados, e um velho de barbas compridas, com três chaves na mão, e tinha os olhos tapados, e outro homem com o corpo cravejado de flechas, e tinha os olhos tapados (Saramago 2001, 301).²

The above passage demonstrates very effectively how Saramago exploits recognisable speech patterns, emptying them of their original significance and imbuing them with a new resonance: when spoken aloud, the rhythm and the musical intonation that come naturally from the loose rhymes (“mulher/ler” and “aberto/pequeno”) contained within the phrases, and the repetition of “olhos tapados,” give this passage a “call and response” style reminiscent of a Catholic litany such as the “Litany of the Saints” (reproduced in part below). In such orations, the priest reads the first line (in standard typeface), and the congregation responds (in italics), repeating the same line every time and thus reinforcing the call to God:

Holy Mary,	<i>pray for us.</i>
Holy Mother of God,	<i>pray for us.</i>
Holy Virgin of virgins,	<i>pray for us.</i>
St. Michael,	<i>pray for us.</i>
St. Gabriel,	<i>pray for us.</i>
St. Raphael,	<i>pray for us.</i>

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All you Holy Angels and Archangels, *pray for us.*
St. John the Baptist, *pray for us.*

Conversely in the case of *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, however, with each repetition of the response phrase (“*tinha os olhos tapados*”), a little more hope ebbs away as the doctor’s wife realises that every image is as blind as the people who pray to them. Even amongst the saints, there is not a single one left unaffected by the white blindness. As Kristeva observes, this type of carnivalesque upturning of the speech act implicitly contests its empirical origins (439). In this case, it accentuates the responsibility and uniqueness of the doctor’s wife who, as the only one who can see, is now to all intents and purposes the only remaining hope for salvation. In this way, the author leads his readers through their (anticipated) cultural background towards this particular interpretation of the doctor’s wife as a potential Christ-type figure (Frier 99).

Reading silently can be passive, because it can allow the reader to maintain a level of distance from the text. As the passage above demonstrates well, reading aloud means that the reader becomes the listener, and enters into a dialogue with the text, being forced to confront the issues it presents (indeed, in the later *Todos os Nomes*, Saramago’s narrator refers directly to his readers as listeners: Saramago 2000, 216). The idea of the experience of a story being shared between the storyteller and his listeners becomes a recurrent image in *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, as Saramago presents episodes of “traditional” storytelling in the sense of having a narrator-character and listeners. Again, academic study of literature has tended to view the written text as somehow more reliable than spoken narratives, which are prone to adaptation and change according to the memory and whim of the storyteller. In *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, however, oral storytelling becomes a means of helping the blind to survive, and to maintain a sense of humanity. The first to go blind are quarantined in a disused mental asylum, with no entertainment. Eventually, an old man with a black eyepatch joins the ward of the central characters, bringing with him a portable radio and news of the city outside. He listens to the news bulletins and repeats the stories in his own words to those in

the ward, who then pass the information on in “Chinese whispers” fashion. He also turns storyteller in a more traditional sense when the others in the ward gather around him and he tells them of what he witnessed in the city before he, too, turned blind. In this way, he could be seen to function as a successor to the mediaeval wandering minstrel: an outsider who joins and entertains a community, bringing with him news from the surrounding regions. The difference in this case is that the old man does not move on; he stays with the group and becomes one of the central characters of the novel.

By the time they escape from the asylum, the extent of the blindness is such that even the narrator can only re-tell what he has heard rumour of, and again, this can be viewed as comparable to an instance of Chinese whispers. For example, he admits that because there are no witnesses to verify his story about a bank chairman and his attendant who are trapped in a lift when the power fails, go blind and presumably die there, there is no way of knowing whether it happened exactly as he relates it or in another way. When the narrator has told the “official” account of events, it is left to the old man with the black eyepatch to take over narratorial responsibility once again and describe what he saw happening in the banks before he turned blind. With the juxtaposition of these passages, Saramago shows how legend and eyewitness accounts, and old and new methods of storytelling collide. Such instances are not limited to *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*; indeed they can be seen from Saramago’s earliest novel, *Levantado do Chão* where folklore about werewolves, werepigs and werechickens is used, as Sabine points out, to draw attention to the lot and the fears of the women in the rural community. In the case of *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, the confrontation between old and new methods of storytelling emphasises how, with the breakdown of society, the modern way of living becomes suddenly outmoded, and the new way of life forces people to resurrect old methods if they are to survive. At its most extreme, this is demonstrated by the neighbour of the girl with dark glasses, who lives primitively, breeding and catching rabbits and chickens in

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her back yard, and eating the meat raw as she has no means to cook it.

This upturning of the norms is demonstrated by the oral qualities of the Saramaguian text in two contrasting yet similar scenes towards the end of the novel. In the first, the doctor and his wife, and the girl with dark glasses cross a large square where groups of the blind are listening to speeches made by other blind people:

No caminho para a casa da rapariga dos óculos escuros atravessaram uma grande praça onde havia grupos de cegos que escutavam os discursos doutros cegos, à primeira vista nem uns nem outros pareciam cegos, os que falavam viravam inflamadamente a cara para os que ouviam, os que ouviam viravam atentamente a cara para os que falavam. Proclama-se ali o fim do mundo, a salvação penitencial, a visão do sétimo dia, o advento do anjo, a colisão cósmica, a extinção do sol, o espírito da tribo, a seiva da mandrágora, o unguento do tigre, a virtude do signo, a disciplina do vento, o perfume da lua, a reivindicação da treva, o poder do esconjuro, a marca do calcanhar, a crucificação da rosa, a pureza da linfa, o sangue do gato preto, a dormência da sombra, a revolta dos marés, a lógica da antropofagia, a castração sem dor, a tatuagem divina, a cegueira voluntária, o pensamento convexo, o côncavo, o plano, o vertical, o inclinado, o concentrado, o disperso, o fugido, a ablação das cordas vocais, a morte da palavra, Aqui não há ninguém a falar de organização, disse a mulher do médico ao marido (Saramago 2001, 284).

All manner of individual myths and remedies are pronounced, but as the doctor's wife remarks, all these are useless without some level of organisation. However, in the next passage, there are more organised, interdependent systems of survival being expounded:

Atravessaram uma praça onde havia grupos de cegos que se entretinham a escutar os discursos doutros cegos, à primeira vista não pareciam cegos nem uns nem outros, os que falavam viravam inflamadamente a cara para os que ouviam, os que ouviam viravam atentamente a cara para os que falavam. Proclamavam-se ali os princípios fundamentais dos grandes sistemas organizadas, a propriedade privada, o livre câmbio, o mercado, a bolsa, a taxação fiscal, o juro, a apropriação, a desapropriação, a produção, a distribuição, o consumo, o abastecimento e o desabastecimento, a riqueza e a pobreza, a a comunicação, a repressão e a delinquência, as lotarias, os edifícios

prisionais, o código penal, o código civil, o código das estradas, o dicionário, a lista de telefones, as redes de prostituição, as fábricas de material de guerra, as forças armadas, os cemitérios, a polícia, o contrabando, as drogas, os tráficos ilícitos permitidos, a investigação farmacêutica, o jogo, o preço das curas e dos funerais, a justiça, o empréstimo, os partidos políticos, as eleições, os parlamentos, os governos, o pensamento convexo, o côncavo, o plano, o vertical, o inclinado, o concentrado, o disperso, o fugido, a ablação das cordas vocais, a morte da palavra. Aqui fala-se de organização, disse a mulher do médico ao marido (Saramago 2001, 295-296).

These scenes evoke the tradition of oral literature in two ways: firstly, because of the imagery of the scene of an orator and a group of listeners; secondly, because of the method of narration. The narrator's introduction to each passage is strikingly similar, as are the concluding remarks made by the doctor's wife, and this in itself is reminiscent of the folktale, where certain constants such as the functions of the *dramatis personae* must be in place for the story to be recognisable to the audience, although the characters themselves and certain other elements may be variable (Propp 20). We should also note that although many of the solutions expounded are different in each passage, there are also important similarities here, and particularly in the final lines of each episode. Perhaps most notably and most concerning in the context of this article is the repetition of the phrases "a ablação das cordas vocais" and "a morte da palavra," which are announced in both passages and could be read as suggestions of a possible means to escape the blindness. However, although in the second passage, the blind are talking about organisation, the methods they promote are based in the old world—a world with sight—and thus are ultimately as futile as the fantastic remedies being expounded in the first excerpt, or indeed the government announcements played to the internees in the disused asylum: telephone directories, for example, despite their highly organised state, become redundant when nobody can read them and there is no longer a telephone network (just as all the names that the Conservador of *Todos os Nomes* retains in his head are useless if nobody else can access them). By repeating these phrases in the second passage, Saramago

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draws attention to them. If we consider them more deeply, what could be understood from these phrases is precisely the opposite of what the blind are promoting: in order for this blind society to adapt and survive, a new dialogue—a new word—is needed. As the written word becomes ineffectual, the spoken word gains power, and the oral tradition is reborn.

This idea becomes even clearer when considered in the light of a slightly earlier episode. The doctor's wife meets a blind writer, who is trying to record his experiences on paper, tracing the indentations made by his ballpoint pen with his fingers in a hopeless attempt to leave a coherent written account. Not only do some of the lines overlap, as the doctor's wife observes, but the act of writing for the benefit of a reader with sight is entirely ineffectual in a city where everyone is blind. Notably, this episode is immediately succeeded with another instance of oral storytelling when the doctor's wife, on returning to her apartment, reads from a book to the others.

These passages highlight the importance of what we can usefully learn and employ from old methods such as oral storytelling. Firstly, repetition and (often only slight) modification of stories is natural to traditional storytelling, where tales would be repeated frequently, yet rarely, if ever, retold in exactly the same way. In *A Maior Flor do Mundo*, Saramago even incites his readers to repeat and embellish his own story, just as the author himself frequently returns to the past in his novels and elaborates on and challenges the “official” version of events. Secondly, the oral recounting of stories is, by its nature, an act of community: it must take place with both a storyteller and at least one listener. Such an act opens up the possibility of dialogue, of interaction, and of reaching out to and forming a meaningful relationship with the Other, and these concepts are central to Saramago's work as a whole, and in particular to *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*. Horácio Costa raises the question of whether relationships and sight are linked, citing as demonstrative examples of this the dialogues between the doctor and his wife, the old man and the young girl. Notably, it is the old man with the

black eyepatch—the character who acts most frequently as storyteller in the novel—who develops the most unexpected and close connection with another, in his blossoming relationship with the girl with dark glasses. Furthermore, it is in the last hundred or so pages of the novel that the instances of orality become more pronounced, and also that we really see a sense of community beginning to develop.

For the readers, Saramago's deliberately complex writing becomes relatively simple when read aloud, allowing the oral and aural qualities of it to resound. D'Haen explains that this also means that the reader is forced to concentrate less on the voices within the novel, and more on the author's voice, and thus on the ideas presented through the text (15). We can see, then, that Saramago appropriates and revitalises the tradition of oral literature in order to highlight one of the main concerns of this novel, and of his fictional writing as a whole: individual action—to be understood here as the act of reading silently—may be the norm, but that it is only in terms of our relation to the Other that a useful and beneficial dialogue can be opened up, and this is demonstrated through the reciprocal action of oral literature in which significance can only come from the full participation of both story-teller and story-listener.³

Notes:

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/customer-reviews/0156007754/sr=8-1/qid=1178534073/ref=cm_cr_dp_2_1/103-81929134797411?ie=UTF8&customer-reviews.sort%5Fby=SubmissionDate&n=283155&qid=1178534073&sr=8-1> [accessed 7 May 2007].

2. The descriptions correspond to: Saint Anne and her daughter Mary (Jesus' mother); Saint Anthony of Padua; Saint Nicholas; Saint Sebastian. I am grateful to Mrs Anne Cronnell for confirming my identification of these figures.

3. I thank Dr David Frier for his generosity in commenting on draft versions of this article, part of which appears in my MA thesis, "Labyrinth Imagery and Discourse in José Saramago's *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* and *Todos os Nomes*" (University of Leeds, 2007).

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