Shrinking the Leviathan Erection: The Satiric Body in José Saramago's *Memorial do Convento*

This article addresses a subject that has yet to receive its due attention in published studies of Saramago's historical fiction: the author's presentation of the human body. For several reasons, Saramago's treatment of the agency and conceptualization of the body is an essential component of his 1980s novels' offensive against the abiding influence of the *Estado Novo*'s account of Portuguese history and identity. This is especially true in *Memorial do Convento* (1982), Saramago's tale of life in the reign of Dom João V, 'the Magnanimous' (1706-1750). In this revisionist account of the construction, at Dom João's behest, of a gargantuan monastery-palace complex in the town of Mafra, Saramago focuses on the physical contribution of working people in order to counter notions that rulers and other 'great men' are the prime movers of human history. The novel's depictions of the undernourished, diseased and mutilated bodies of lower-class characters substantiate its attack on the iniquities of Dom João's authoritarianism, and on historical accounts that, by omitting the experiences of the poor and marginalized, presented his reign as a second Portuguese golden age. Meanwhile, its description of the religious laws regulating sexual behaviour and on their transgression suggests that the official ideology of Joanine Portugal sponsors not only physical brutalization, but also psycho-sexual perversion. *Memorial do Convento* counters Joanine dogma with a utopian vision based on Saramago's egalitarian and essentially materialist ideology. The novel's focus on the body and its functions helps to vindicate this world-view. It demonstrates

firstly the common biological constitution of all human beings, and secondly, the degradation of the inherent nobility and harmony of the human body and psyche by oppressive and hierarchical social orders such as Joanine absolutism and Salazarist authoritarianism.[1] Finally, it suggests that sexual desire, if redeemed from its association with shame, coercion and violence, can play a crucial role in the building of a fairer and freer society.

This article draws on Bakhtin's study of 'carnivalesque' and 'satiric' modes of humour to explore how this vision is articulated through satirical treatment of corporeal and, in particular, sexual imagery. It develops the observation of existing studies that much of the novel's satirical power derives from Saramago's imitation and subversion of the dominant aesthetic systems of Portuguese absolutism. This article focuses on *Memorial do Convento*'s manipulation of three discursive conventions, encountered in the literature and visual arts of the Iberian baroque. These conventions are the florid embellishment of written and spoken language demanded by court protocol; a monumentalist aesthetic informing Church and State architecture, sculpture, and ceremony; and the 'conceptualist' construction of allegory and multiple metaphor (famously exemplified by the poetry of Góngora and the sermons of António Vieira).[2] Frequently these conventions contributed to what José Antonio Maravall and Fernando de la Flor have characterized as

[1] *Memorial do Convento*'s implication of ideological parallels between the Joanine era and that of the Estado Novo has been noted in Ellen W. Sapega's 'O papel da memória na construção de um Novo Sujeito Nacional', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 32:1 (1995), 31-40, 35-36, and in Paulo Pereira's 'Inquisição: Entre História e Ficção na Narrativa Portuguesa', *Colóquio-Letras* 120 (Apr.-Jun. 1991), 117-123, 122.

[2] Óscar Lopes, in *Os Sinais e os Sentidos: literatura portuguesa do século XX* (*Colecção universitária, 11*) (Lisbon: Caminho, 1986), 201-08, was among the first to note *Memorial do Convento*'s 'claro mimetismo do estilo barroco, que se amolda a grande parte da narrativa' (207).

un <<Barroco de Estado>> - a 'lenguaje de poder' propagandizing the ideology of 'una monarquía absolutista confesional y de sus aliados'.[3] They articulated an apology for a rigid social hierarchy, while asserting the power of the absolute monarch who headed that hierarchy, a power exceeded only by the omnipotence of the supernatural God who supposedly anointed him. The divine justice of these powers and their dictates was thereby proclaimed on the basis of logic that was metaphysical or even purely aesthetic. In its pastiche of these rhetorical conventions, Saramago's novel draws on a range of devices employed by satirists of what Maravall terms the baroque era, using corporeal reference and grotesque representation of the body to disrupt or invert the ideological loading of this 'lenguaje de poder', and to attest to the common subjugation of all humans to the same natural forces.[4]

This article's analysis of Saramago's satirical use of corporeal representation therefore divides into three parts. The first considers his disruption of the discursive protocols used to disassociate leaders of Church and State from the human body and its functions. The official discourse of Joanine absolutism represents the monarch and those close to him as transcending sexual urges and other 'base' corporeal drives and functions. This

[3] Fernando R. de la Flor, Barroco: Representación e ideologia en el mundo hispánico (1580-1680) (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002), p.13, in his prólogo summarizing the thesis of Maravall's Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure (Theory and History of Literature, 25), trans. Terry Cochran, with a foreword by Wlad Godzich and Nicholas Spadaccini (Manchester: MUP, 1986) [La Cultura del Barroco, 1975]. As discussed below, Flor proceeds to question the presumption that this

cultura dirigida, masiva [que] constituye un discurso hegemónico y llega a proponer sus representaciones como modelos o interpretaciones unívocas del mundo, […] en cierto modo preexiste a los creadores y al que tales creadores, digamos, se suman, muchas veces de modo acrítico (ibid.).

[4] As will be explored below, Saramago's use of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century models for his satire on Joanine absolutism vindicates Flor's contention that

en este su desplegarse dogmático, […] la obra de arte barroca se convierte vicariamente en el vehículo impensado de un movimiento súbitamente vuelto *entrópico*, encarnando una <<energía nihilificadora>> (una fuerza radicalmente escéptica), en esencia contradictoria con los verdaderos intereses que la animan. (Flor, 2002:13).

attribution of transcendental asexuality associates them with a disembodied conception of the divine. In Saramago's accounts of palace life, courtly discourse is invaded by elements of lower-status discourses. These introduce allusions to a corporeality dissimulated by courtly language, and assert material evidence of the common humanity of individuals of all social ranks. Such allusions also reveal the relationship of royal and clerical power to the body's sexual urges and agency that is exemplified in the institution of hereditary monarchy. In these scenes, a further ideological contradiction emerges in accounts of Dom João's conception of his own power in essentially phallic terms. As this article's second section discusses, Saramago mocks the monarch's logical but heretical view of his genitals as a site of power, by subverting the baroque monumentalist aesthetic – epitomised by the Mafra monastery itself – that is employed to aggrandise God, the King and the institutions they command. Using devices that recall Jonathan Swift's evocation of Lilliput and Brobdignag, Saramago deflates monumentalist bombast by representing Dom João and other characters in grotesque disproportion to the symbols of their alleged power. Drawing on the discussion of concepts of sovereignty initiated by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, and relating these to Antonio Gramsci's notions of ideological hegemony, the article shows how such Swiftian disparities of scale refute the myth of the authoritarian ruler's divinely-ordained omnipotence. The contingencies of royal and allegedly divine powers are revealed, by demonstrating that authority depends on the harnessed will and strength of an acquiescent or coerced populace. The final section of the article explores how use of grotesque corporeal imagery illustrates and

condemns what Saramago implies is authoritarianism's perversion of human nature. Saramago reworks the grotesque imagery of Swift and other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century satirists in the service of his own radically different ideology. Conceiving of humanity in terms of a materialist, and emphatically sexual, ideal, he creates allegories of the grotesque disparities of wealth and power and the damage wrought by these on the human body and psyche. Further to this, Saramago demonstrates his accommodation of the life of the sexual body within a utopian materialist vision, through the apocryphal history that he counterposes to his retelling of the history of the Mafra monastery. This is the story of the construction of a wondrous flying machine, the *passarola* (big bird), powered by the levitating energy of captured human wills (*vontades*), found within the body in the form of a 'nuvem fechada' or dense cloud.[5] The *passarola* project, executed to the design of the priest and polymath Bartolomeu de Gusmão by his friends, the one-handed ex-soldier Baltasar Sete-Sóis and the clairvoyant Blimunda Sete-Luas, is a conceptualist allegory demonstrating that popular will and physical endeavour, not divine might, are the motors of history. It suggests the progress of morality and technology that could follow from the deregulation and integration into the civic and economic spheres of life of the human energy that is suppressed, commandeered and perverted by self-aggrandising tyrants.

The study of satirical humour in *Memorial do Convento* needs to take account of this novel's construction as a system of narrative, discursive, and ideological counter-positions, symmetries and inversions. Its narrative binds the two contrasting stories of

[5] Saramago, *Memorial do Convento* (Lisboa: Caminho, 1982), 124.

engineering projects through the agency of a group of protagonists including fictionalised historical figures – the King and his consort, and Bartolomeu de Gusmão – and fictional characters such as Baltasar and Blimunda.[6] This counter-posing of the historical and the apocryphal exposes first the accepted historical account's omissions and deceptions, and secondly how these are ideologically determined. Saramago's fictional accretions to historical fact fill in gaps in the record, reinserting the agency and experience of the oppressed and marginalised social constituencies omitted from what Saramago denounces as a 'partial and parcelled' historical narrative, and so oppose to the established view of the monastery's construction a vision of the heroism of the downtrodden labourers.[7] Meanwhile, Saramago also introduces an element of fantasy that, together with the narrative voice's frequent self-interruptions, advertises the gap between this new historical account and a complete and objective truth. Thus, while the novel engages the reader in a comprehensive review of the epistemological problems posed by narrative history, this fantastical element also allows for what Carlos Reis succinctly terms a 'fingimento sério' [seriously-intended make-believe]. Such signally a-historical elaboration permits hypothecation both about irrecoupably lost data relating to the past, and about the alternative path that society could have taken if guided by a more

[6] It should be noted here that, as both Ana Paula Arnaut and Horácio Costa have pointed out, the character of Blimunda is modelled upon references in travellers' accounts of mid-eighteenth-century Lisbon to a woman with the inexplicable power to view the interior of solid objects and human bodies. See Arnaut, *Memorial do Convento: história, ficção e ideologia* (Coimbra: Fora do Texto, 1996), 63-69.

[7] Saramago, in Carlos Reis, *Diálogos com José Saramago* (Lisboa: Caminho, 1998), 79: 'a história é parcial e é parcelar'.

enlightened ideological agenda.[8] This is exemplified in the story of the *passarola*, which is built through loving collaboration and for the betterment of the human condition. By commandeering human wills, and defying the injunctions against 'heretical' scientific experimentation of the Portuguese Church and its Inquisition, the builders of the *passarola* achieve a short-lived, but symbolically powerful, riposte to the reactionary hegemony of God and King.

The confrontation of conflicting historical perspectives in *Memorial do Convento* derives from juxtapositions and disjunctions of a linguistic or stylistic nature, as well as narratological ones. This collage of contrasting discourses not only disrupts mimesis in the narrative but also exposes the stratification of language into what Mikhail Bakhtin famously terms *heteroglossia*, or different discursive systems. According to Bakhtin, these heteroglossia articulate distinct ideological systems and positions, and the 'dialogic' or non-realist novel can subvert these by overturning the conventional hierarchy of aesthetic and truth values associated with different linguistic practices.[9] Thus, as 'a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological

[8] See Reis's description of the actions of *Manual de Pintura e Caligrafia*'s protagonist as metaphor for artistic creation conceived as the 'modelação de um mundo que não é mentira, mas antes um **fingimento sério**' in his *Diálogos*, 24 (bold type is Reis's).

[9] Bakhtin uses the term 'heteroglossia' to denote such disparate discourses or systems of utilization as exist in any language in the form of 'social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups' and so forth (Bakhtin, 'Dialogism and the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: UTP, 1981), pp.259-422, 292). A number of existing studies apply Bakhtin's theory of novelistic textuality to *Memorial do Convento*; these include Odil de Oliveira Filho, *Carnaval no Convento: intertextualidade e parodia em José Saramago* (*Coleção Prismas*) (São Paulo: UNESP, 1993), Lourenço, António Apolinário, 'História, Ficção e Ideologia: Representação ideológica e pluridiscursividade em *Memorial do Convento*', *Vértice*, 42 (September 1991), 69-78; Kaufman, 'A Metaficção Historiográfica de José Saramago', *CL*, 120 (1991), 124-136, Ana Paula Arnaut, *Memorial do Convento: História, ficção e ideologia* (Coimbra: Fora do Texto, 1996), and Mark Sabine, 'Form and Ideology in the Novels of José Saramago, 1980-1989' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 2001).

position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch' (ibid.) the novel can allude to an external reality and to its social relations and ideological conditions.[10] Bakhtin labels this subversion of discursive hierarchies 'carnivalization', by analogy with his identification in *Rabelais and his* World of carnival's celebration of the body and of its sexual, alimentary and excretory functions as an essentially 'popular' discourse, 'opposed to the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture'.[11] Bakhtin's use of this analogy is one instance of an association that he makes between the destabilization or inversion of discourses, and that of a similarly hierarchic and ideologically-loaded system of representation of the human body. 'Carnival' humour's assertion of the primacy of the material, the physical and the earthly inverts the valorization, in Judeo-Christian ideology, of 'all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract' over 'the material level […] the sphere of the earth and body in their indissoluble unity' (1984: 19-20). Bakhtin observes that modern western culture continues to represent authority in terms of a vertical hierarchy: downward denotes earth, upward heaven. Correspondingly, elevated discourse conventionally articulates matters spiritual and authoritative, while low talk is commonly applied to discussions of everyday life and matters physical, and in representations of the body, the head is naturally associated with the life of the mind, while the position of the genital organs, the belly and the buttocks

[10] *Memorial do Convento* is, in Bakhtin's terms, a 'dialogic novel', i.e. one that contains 'two socio-linguistic consciousnesses, […] that are not here unconsciously mixed […], but that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance. […] The important activity is not only […] the mixing of linguistic forms – [but also] the collision between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms' (1981: 360).

[11] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1984), 4.

backs up the association of the lower zones with the earth and matter (Bakhtin 1984: 20-21).

While Bakhtin's primary focus is Rabelais and medieval and early modern carnival, his brief allusions to an overarching historical theory of ideology and corporeal humour make his work a useful framework for the analysis of *Memorial do Convento*.[12] While the

hegemonic discourse of Joanine Portugal locates divinity and power in the ineffable, the spiritual and the celestial, the intrusion of earthy corporeal imagery in Saramago's pastiche – and in particular, the inversions of both corporeal and discursive hierarchies that Bakhtin terms 'carnivalesque' - attests to the material origins of human civilization, and to the subordination of all social powers to the universal and equalizing forces of life and death. This is exemplified from the first chapter of Saramago's novel, which re-tells the story of how Dom João vows to build a monastery if God will grant him an heir. Here, a mis-match between the language of court ceremonial and bawdy anatomical references exposes the dependence of royal and religious power on the body and on strictly-regulated sexual activity. This, of course, is a connection that both Monarch and Church seek to dissimulate, since it contradicts the association of the King with a divine spirit that has ordained his rule on Earth. The novel's well-known opening sentence introduces both the official discourse's aggrandizing and euphemistic dissimulation of the mechanics of dynastic coupling, and the narrative voice's insertion of corporeal references implying the monarchs' equality with the common herd:

> Dom João, quinto do nome na tabela real, irá esta noite ao quarto de sua mulher, Dona Maria Ana Josefa, que chegou há mais de dois anos da Áustria para dar infantes à coroa portuguesa e até hoje não emprenhou (1984: 11).

The termination of this pompous scene-setting with the disrespectful verb 'emprehar' redefines Her Majesty's status as that of a brood-mare in the project of succession. The clash of discourses ushers in a description of preparations for the royal couple's latest attempt at procreation, in which the prominence of prosaic corporeal references – to body parts, soiled undergarments, and 'cheiros e secreções' (15) – disturbs the hyperbolic reverencing of the sacrament of royal marriage. With solemn ceremony, the King is robed for action in 'o trajo da função e do estilo' (13): his nightshirt, in other words. An absurd superfluity of footmen pass his dirty clothes 'de mão e mão tão reverentemente como relíquias de santas que tivessem trespassado donzelas', and prepare the King like priests reverencing an altar, or pay attendance in pairs, 'dois que não se movem, dois que imitam estes, mais uns tantos que não se sabe o que fazem nem por que estão' (ibid.). The first consequence of this mismatch of elevated discourse and base referents is that the sexual act usurps the conventional position of religious observance or acts of statecraft. The exalted status conferred on the King's 'dever real e conjugal' belies the King's priorities and reveals the vulnerability of his absolute power to the vagaries of human frailty. The discursive mismatch highlights the role of quasi-religious ritual in disguising how Catholic and absolutist power depends on the instrumentality not of an ineffable deity but of sexual reproduction. As Ana Paula Arnaut observes, it recasts the Church's supplication for an heir and the 'dever real e conjugal' of copulation as a

[12] This has been remarked, but by no means exhaustively investigated, in existing studies that apply Bakthinian

throwback to pagan fertility rites.[13] The Christian ethic supposedly motivating the King's actions is as superficial and insincere as the refined discourse used to denote them. Religious observances are presented as a hindrance or 'dificultação canónica' (11) to royal intercourse. Meanwhile it is a different kind of clerical interruption that, in Saramago's account, occasions the royal vow:

> Enfim, de tanto se esforçarem todos ficou preparado el-rei, um dos fidalgos rectifica a prega final, outro ajusta o cabeção bordado, já não tarda um minuto que D. João V se encaminhe ao quarto da rainha. *O cântaro está à espera da fonte. Mas vem agora entrando D. Nuno da Cunha, que é o bispo inquisidor, e traz consigo um franciscano velho.* Entre passar adiante e dizer o recado há vénias complicadas, floreios de aproximação, pausas e recuos, [...] *e a tudo isto teremos de dar for feito e explicado, vista a pressa que traz o bispo.* (13, my italics).

The Bishop-Inquisitor's hurried intervention is recounted in a similarly 'low' discursive register, which helps to expose how the conventions of courtly language form a veneer covering the clergy's cynicism and the monarch's hubris.

Saramago's account of the preparations for royal copulation forms a prelude to his reinterpretation of the time-honoured legend of the Mafra vow. Here Saramago uses similar discursive disjunctions. The introduction of the discursive characteristics of the fairytale – a genre with minimal currency as a vehicle for factual truth - renders implausible the 'miraculous' revelation of divine will to the Franciscan brother who advises the King to make the vow.[14] In this context the reader becomes more disposed to

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theory to the text. See especially Oliveira Filho (1993) and Arnaut (1996).

[13] Arnaut, 1996:97.

[14] This tactic of recasting the hegemonic interpretation of the past as fairytale is, of course, reiterated in the postface on the novel's back cover that begins '[era] uma vez um rei que fez promessa de levantar um convento em Mafra.'

consider the following chapter's alternative explanation, even though the narrative voice dismisses it as rumour. This account claims that the Franciscans, having discovered from her confessor that the Queen is pregnant, saw their chance to extract a favour from a monarch with a weakness both for divine endorsement of his rule and for architectural prestige projects.[15]

Dom João's architectural interests are themselves examined by Saramago, with the effect of exposing the inconsistencies in the idealist foundation of Joanine absolutism. Prior to his robing for sex, the King is depicted toying with a huge scale model of St Peter's basilica:

> uma construção sem caboucos nem alicerces, […] miniatura de basílica dispersa em pedaços de encaixar, segundo o antigo sistema de macho e fêmea, que à mão reverente, vão sendo colhidos pelos quatro camaristas de serviço. (12)

Beyond making a mockery of Dom João's megalomaniac regalist fantasy of usurping the Pope, or even assuming the role of God, this scene suggests that his response to Frei António's prophecy derives from his enthusiasm for a more permanent architectural statement of royal might. At the same time, the model is also a symbolic prefiguration of the Mafra monastery's construction through an 'antigo sistema' of coupling of 'macho e fêmea'. While the toy St Peter's is constructed of wooden blocks that interlock 'segundo o antigo sistema', the Mafra monastery will arise as a consequence of the more literally sexual coupling of human 'pedaços de encaixar' in the 'antigo sistema' of hereditary

[15] Other notable surviving examples of João V's architectural endowments are the chapel of St John the Baptist in the church of São Roque, in Lisbon's Bairro Alto, the cloister of the convent of Santa Clara-a-Nova in Coimbra, and the University Library in the same city. This last in particular, with the centrally-positioned portrait of its founder commands a view of its three reading rooms and its entrance lobby, is a masterly architectural expression of Dom João's authoritarian absolutism.

monarchy. Given the law of dynastic succession that is so inconveniently integral to absolutist ideology, it is thus nonsensical to associate the royal personage and power with 'all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract' and to repudiate their foundation in 'the material level […] of the earth and the body' (Bakhtin 1984:20). This is observed again when the King dreams that he sees

> erguer-se do seu sexo uma árvore de Jessé, frondosa e toda povoada dos ascendentes de Cristo, até ao mesmo Cristo, herdeiro de todas as coroas, e depois dissipar-se a árvore e em seu lugar levantar-se, poderosamente, com altas colunas, torres sineiras, cúpulas e torreões, um convento de franciscanos (18)

The manner in which the King's fantasy of the Mafra monastery as penis-extension supplants that of being the progenitor of Christ's line confirms that (unconsciously at least) Dom João acknowledges the agency of the body rather than of an immaterial deity. The Mafra monastery serves as a cosmetic veil over the sexual mechanics of the hereditary principle, and as tribute to that principle's allegedly divine instigator. However, the glimpse into Dom João's unconscious suggests the incongruous absorption into the Church and State's idealist world view of aspects of a pre-Christian belief system that affirms the generative power of the Earth and the human body.

It is significant that the specific element of this materialist pagan world-view to which Dom João unconsciously cleaves is that of the phallic conception of the male sex. Several of *Memorial do Convento*'s many comic allusions to the male member serve not only to disrupt the Church-State discourse's dissimulation of corporeal agency, but also to render incongruous and ridiculous the phallic symbolism deployed in establishment art and discourse affirming the power of a unitary and aggressively domineering patriarchal

authority. The following paragraphs will explore these symbols, as they functioned in the context of a monumentalist language in architecture and the visual arts, which was widely employed in the governmental and institutional buildings of the age of absolutism to symbolize the monopolistic power and cohesion of the newly centralized state. Through devices recalling both Swift's satirical use of physical disproportion and the 'perspectivist' imagery frequently employed in Iberian baroque discourse, Saramago reveals how affirmations of the absolutist ruler's power rely on distorting the reality of his physical relationship to the world. Saramago's revised depiction of this relationship, by contrast, suggests the primordial equality of human beings.

Memorial do Convento's descriptions of the Mafra monastery dwell in particular on the gargantuan scale both of the building itself – the largest then existing in Portugal - and of its decorative elements, in particular the giant marble statues of saints on the church façade, the largest 'quase cinco metros de altura, gigantões atléticos, hércules cristãos, campeões da fé' (321). Thus the novel conveys how the Mafra monsastery, similarly to contemporary architectural projects such as the palace of Versailles or the new imperial Russian capital of St Petersburg, employed not just an unprecedented scale of ground-plan and elevation, but also a preponderance of massive forms, imposing or enclosing architectural rhythms and lines (e.g. in colonades, windows, staircases etc.), and the false perspective created by pilasters and *trompe l'oeil* decoration to overawe the visitor to official and religious buildings with a sense of size, solidity and power. The novel's accounts of royal and religious ritual conducted at Mafra also note the recourse to this aesthetic of monumentalism. In the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone of the

monastery, for example, the power of Church and State are represented through the transformation of material wealth and subservient humanity into imposing physical mass, centred on the figure of the King (130-6). These artistic strategies to assert gigantic status and power by proxy are the nearest realizable approximation to the megalomaniac fantasy in which the King indulges as he towers over his model of St Peter's and the diminutive sculpted saints of its façades (12). When Dom João stipulates to his architect that the Mafra monastery must prove 'que também o homem é capaz de fazer o trabalho que gigantes fariam' (328), he is thinking of asserting only his individual gigantism. The absolutist, rather than humanist, cast of his ambition becomes evident when he sets men to work on a construction whose bulk renders them ant-like in comparison.[16] Only when the King belatedly gives a thought to his mortality (and thus to his subservience to the universal forces acting on the body) does he worry that his resources may not match up to his ambition. Not even then does he heed the narrator's warning that 'todas as coisas têm de ser entendidas na sua justa proporção, os formigueiros e os conventos, a laje e a pargana' (329). Elsewhere, however, Saramago's account of events makes the King's efforts to dwarf his subjects with the symbols of his magnitude rebound spectacularly. This he achieves by appropriating to his egalitarian and materialist ideology the Swiftian satirical standby of grotesque images of disproportion. In *Gulliver's Travels*, it is indeed precisely through the inversion of the bombast of monumentalist aesthetics that the

[16] 'Ora, o mal desta obra de Mafra é terem posto homens a trabalhar nela em vez de gigantes, e se com estas e outras obras passadas e futures se quer provar que também o homem é capaz de fazer o trabalho que gigantes fariam, então aceite-se que leve o tempo que levam as formigas' (328-29). This image of the ant-like workers is the basis for an allusion to the use, in *Levantado do Chão* and in the Portuguese neorealist novel, of ants as a metaphor for workers resisting the power of the *Estado Novo*.

diminished stature of Swift's Lilliputians derides the pride and pettiness of a self-satisfied British imperialist ascendancy. In *Memorial do Convento*, the images of diminished human stature turn the monumentalist architectural and sculptural rhetoric of absolutism against its creator, revealing the King's ambition and arrogance to be disproportionate to his material capabilities. In the account of the ceremony of dedication of the monastery foundations, Dom João is belittled by the outsized stage, implements and religious artefacts created specially to demonstrate 'a suma grandeza deste monarca que vem entrando' (133). His descent of the 'espaçosa escada de madeira que tinha trinta degraus […] e de largura de dois metros' to lay the cornerstone seems like 'uma despedida do mundo […] uma descida aos infernos se não estivesse tão bem defendido por bençãos, escapulários e orações' (135). He grapples with a huge and absurd 'balde de prata cheio de água benta' in order to moisten the stone and fix it in place (ibid.). Saramago's ridicule homes in again on the King's phallic conception of his own power, with a pun on the slang use of the word 'pau' ('staff', but also, colloquially, 'penis' or 'erection') when he presents the King dwarfed by the altar cross before which he bows down, an 'enorme pau com cinco metros de altura, que daria para um gigante, Adamastor ou outro' (133). Beyond humiliating the bumptious monarch, this ingenious use of 'conceptualist' punning highlights how Church ceremonial emphasises not Christian values of self-sacrifice and love so much as the macho domination of established authority. At the same time it highlights divisions and ideological contradictions within the absolutism establishment. Spectacles such as the dedication ceremony were conceived to propagandize Dom João's fundamentalist interpretation of absolutist monarchy, equating

the person of the monarch with the state and subjecting even the Church to regal authority. As the historian Oliveira Marques argues, eighteenth-century Portugal's 'absolutismo real' professed

> a doctrina de que a autoridade do rei nao tinha limites e de que as barreiras do Estado estavam no próprio Estado. O absolutismo tradicional proclamava a subordinação do monarca aos costumes do País (lei comum), às leis da natureza, às leis de Deus conforme a interpretação da Igreja, e às leis que o próprio rei (e seus antepasados) promulgara para a nação. O despotismo [joanino] vinha proclamar que usos e costumes não desempenhavam qualquer papel; defender o princípio de que as leis naturais eram interpretadas pelo soberano e de que as leis de Deus estavam depositadas no próprio rei, incluindo a submissão da Igreja à sua vontade; e finalmente, negar que as leis do reino obrigassem o monarca.[17]

In the light of this, one might note that the recourse to gigantic representations of the royal personage and power that Saramago's novel remarks is also made in the age of absolutism's most influential treatise on sovereignty, namely Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. The famous engraving on the cover of Hobbes's work – depicting a gigantic sovereign, holding a sword and ecclesiastical crozier in place of orb and sceptre, whose body is composed of the figures of hundreds of individuals standing or kneeling to face his head in attitudes of willing obedience – fleshes out Hobbes's titular metaphor for a corporatist (but not necessarily absolutist) view of the state as a giant body made up of the united bodies of the whole populace.[18] The rhetoric of Joanine architecture and ceremony, however, works to suggest that the monarch alone embodies the 'leviathan'

[17] Oliveira Marques, *História de Portugal* (Lisbon: Ágora, 1972), vol. 1, pp.550-551. I am deeply grateful to Professor José Ornelas for bringing this source to my attention.

[18] See *Leviathan: or, The matter, form, and power of a common-wealth ecclesiastical and civil. By Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651), title page.

state.[19] While Saramago's suggestion of the King's hankering for a prosthetic giant phallus derides such self-aggrandizement, his accounts of the monastery's construction render visible the individual bodies of the populace, and his story of the *passarola* forms an allegorical riposte to the absolutist conception of sovereignty, by demonstrating that the monarch's power derives almost in its entirety from the appropriated will of the populace. This emerges from the notion of human will as a 'nuvem fechada' with motile power, which can be captured and set to a predetermined task (124). Bartolomeu de Gusmão's claim that 'é a vontade dos homens que segura as estrelas, é a vontade dos homens que Deus respira' (ibid.) suggests that by empowering the living to retain their wills, and/or by gathering those of the dead, humans can will the divine guarantor of absolutist authority out of existence by cutting off his oxygen supply.[20] The *passarola*, powered by the commandeered wills of the dead, is conceived by Bartolomeu as a means of exalting humanity in the collective sense. Thus it contrasts with the monastery, which rises, exalting God and King, through the enslavement of the wills of the living: specifically, those of the labourers led to Mafra in chains, without whose bonded 'força […]todo o poder de el-rei será vento, pó e coisa nenhuma' (244).[21] Although the

[19] See *Leviathan: or, The matter, form and power of a common-wealth ecclesiastical and civil. By Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651 [= between 1652-1659).

[20] The inverted relationship between God and humans implied by Bartolomeu's notion of *vontades* is discussed by Cerdeira da Silva (1989:120). For a full reading of the *vontades* and the *passarola* as allegory of a humanist challenge to Christian hegemony, see Sabine (2001:138-43).

[21] The subjugation of the will of the coerced labourers transporting the monastery's stones to Mafra is indeed remarked at this juncture when the narrative voice asks 'se Blimunda tivesse vindo […] que vontade veria em cada um, a de ser outra coisa' (243). The religious aspect of the official ideology appears to be an effective tool for subjugationg or dispersing popular will: Bartolomeu advises Blimunda and Baltasar to collect wills 'em procissões, autos-da-fé, […] nas obras do convento' (124), suggesting that such forms of participation in Catholic observance lead individuals to lose hold of their wills.

passarola project ultimately fails, and perhaps deserves to fail given the manner in which its builders appropriate others' wills, its brief flight, which saves its creators from the clutches of the Inquisition (193), constitutes a symbolic challenge to divine, ecclesiastical, and finally royal power. The machine's flight high over Mafra is the occasion for another Swiftian belittlement of the tyrannical monarch, whose half-built monastery appears from this aerial vantage point to be 'pouco maior que capela' (212). Saramago's shift of focus here – employing the typically baroque rhetorical device of 'perspectivism' – raises the question of whether the power of oppressive ideologies might likewise be diminished by more robust initiatives, including that of redressing an unbalanced vision of the past. Saramago's shrinking of Dom João and his leviathan erection is the correlative of his magnification of the common people, whose suffering and historical contributions are backgrounded in accounts of the past disproportionately focused on the wealthy and powerful.

When exploring Saramago's borrowings from Swift's and his contemporaries' satiric texts, it is crucial to remark how similar models of corporeal reference - in particular, the grotesque – are employed to confront a hegemonic state ideology with a world-view radically different to those of the prominent dissident voices of 'Augustine'-era Britain and Ireland or baroque Iberia. Bakhtin's theory of the changing relationship between comic conventions and ideology holds that whereas in medieval Europe, the 'grotesque realism' of carnival attempts to chart 'the very act of becoming and growth', in the capitalist era (as Bakhtin considers most evident in the culture of Romanticism), the grotesque expresses an 'alienated' view unto which 'something frightening is revealed in

that which was habitual and secure' (Bakhtin 39). There is a strong argument for expanding Bakhtin's period of reference in his extremely brief treatment of this 'alienated grotesque' to include the early modern period that witnessed the emergence of capitalist economics and the struggle of the bourgeoisie and humanism and later liberalism against the feudal elite and more socially immobilist ideologies such as absolutism. Indeed, Maravall's discussion of the baroque image of the world and of the human questions Bakhtin's seeming disregard for the prominence in baroque culture of the topsy-turvy, the dissonant and the grotesque (Maravall 1975:313). For Maravall, this reflects baroque culture's expression of a 'sentimiento de desconcierto ante el mundo de los hombres' (ibid.) and its generally pessimistic view of the human as 'un ser agónico, en lucha dentro de sí' (325). However, in discussing how such devices articulated not only a conservative reaction of dismay at the pressure for socio-economic change that threatened a habitual and secure world order, but equally could constitute 'una fórmula de protesta social' (315) through the conversion of 'la referencia a la <<oposición>> en la de <<desconcierto>>' (323), Maravall indicates a link between the baroque grotesque of Gracián or Quevedo and a similarly dystopian vision to that identified by Bakhtin in the romantic grotesque and indeed in 'Swift's gloomy world' (Bakhtin 308). Saramago's corporeal humour, while drawing on these writers' techniques for reinserting the human body and its functions into those eighteenth-century discourses, from Catholic idealism to a more secular transcendental rationalism, which sought at times to disregard them, rejects their (implicit or explicit) characterization of human flesh as irredeemably messy, wayward, and corrupted, a hazardous staging house for the soul. As Alan D. Chalmers

has discussed, in *Gulliver's Travels* the 'positive regenerating power' of 'images of bodily life such as eating, drinking, copulation, defecation' (Bakhtin 38) is reduced to a capacity to expose ideological contradictions, and there is no *celebration* of the body's connectedness to time and to the equalising forces of life and death.[22] Saramago, meanwhile, offer images celebrating the inherent dignity and worth of the body, thus suggesting that the faith and devotion dedicated in eighteenth-century Portugal to an ineffable deity might instead be invested in the material world, and in the body. Saramago demonstrates that sexual love and the sharing both of sensual pleasure and of fulfilling labour can be genuine spiritual experiences of joy, devotion and communion. The relationship of Baltasar and Blimunda illustrates his ideal of uninhibited physical love and its harmonious integration into an egalitarian, co-operative social order, after the couple reject the ministrations of the Church, sanctifying their union instead with their own improvised rituals inspired by unrestrained, affectionate and egalitarian sexual acts.[23] Saramago's depictions of their love-making suggest the body – even if mutilated as is that of Baltasar – to be a beautiful thing to be venerated and enjoyed without a rigid

[22] See Chalmers, 'The Future Made Flesh: Swift and the Satiric Body', in *Jonathan Swift and the Burden of the Future* (Newark, NJ – London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 78-102. Chalmers notes that 'Rabelais, according to Bakhtin, perceives the body as the basis of our vital connectedness to the larger sweeps of time, and as such it is to be revelled in and celebrated. In Swift's vision, the body and time form no such benign mutuality.' (1995:79). This is exemplified both in Gulliver's humiliations in Lilliput (where his faecal excretions must be cleared away daily by the cart-load) and in the gross physicality he describes in the gigantic Brobdingnagians (1995:88-91). Even in his non-satirical writings, Swift presents the human body as 'a calamity of conflicting functions from which to retreat, not an organic synthesis in which to revel' (1995: 80).

[23] Baltasar and Blimunda's unofficial union is blessed by Bartolomeu, in an impromptu ritualization of their eating from the same bowl (56) and sanctified during their first act of lovemaking, when they inscribe crosses on each others' chests with Blimunda's virginal blood (57). For a full account of how eroticism is integrated into the couple's work and collaboration with Bartolomeu and Domenico Scarlatti at the Quinta de São Sebastião da Pedreira, see Sabine (2001: 144-47).

agenda for procreation set by religious and dynastic dictates.[24] These depictions, of course, contrast with those of the King and Queen's loveless couplings, where it is worth noting Saramago's satire never derides the royal flesh or libido *per se*, but rather the dissimulation (or phallic aggrandisement) of these, and the monarchs' imposition upon their bodies of the Church's injunctions. This latter is exemplified in the Queen's martyrdom to demands for women's asexual passivity and submission to male lusts. During sex the Queen must 'sacrifica-sea uma imobilidade total' in order to prevent any loss of the monarch's seed. However, this immobility, coupled with the King's vigorous but short-winded attentions, merely makes impregnation more unlikely, an outcome for which the Queen alone is blamed (11). At other times, Dona Mariana attempts to preserve her chastity and her modesty by enveloping herself in a suffocating eiderdown. Such attempts to smother desire are counter-productive, and her erotic urges rebound in feverish dreams about her brother-in-law, the handsome Dom Francisco (17).

The Queen's predicament is but a minor symptom of a universal social ill that confines *Memorial do Convento*'s positive vision of the desiring body to the utopian space of São Sebastião da Pedreira and other hideaways in which Blimunda and Baltasar can develop their intimacy on terms of mutual respect, affection and devotion. The novel repeatedly demonstrates that the socio-economic iniquity of Joanine Portugal brutalizes and malnourishes the body. Simultaneously, however, a religious ideology that strips sexual encounters of joy, egalitarianism and dignity fosters oppressive and coercive sexual

[24] As Óscar Lopes observes, '[n]as suas manifestações tipicamente barrocas (áulicas, eclesiásticas ou de expressão colectivamente popular), a religião oficial aparece como reverso de uma luxúria incontida e indisfarçável; e é a uma sexualidade intensa e reabilitada que se associam todos os mais altos valores positivos' (1986:205).

practices and, with these, perverse sexual attitudes, as repressed desire resurges in degraded and malignant forms. It is in scenes that attest to the worst consequences of this that Saramago employs grotesque imagery satirically, to express alienation *not* from the body in its 'natural' form but from the corrupting effects of ideological and social conditions on the body. In a curious echo of Bakhtin's terms of discussion, Saramago's use of grotesque imagery in the contexts first of a 'redemptive', 'carnivalesque' humour and secondly of an alienated, satiric humour are most clearly contrasted in his descriptions of Joanine-era Lisbon's observations of Carnival and Lent (28-30). Indeed, while the licencious spirit of carnival does little to mitigate the filth, disease and deprivation suffered by the urban poor, it is Lent that temporarily redresses inequalities: 'a Quaresma […] quando nasce, é para todos' (27). This, however, only takes place in the sense that mortification of the flesh causes the wealthy to go hungry when fasting and makes customarily dominant men the victims of psycho-sexual violence. The description of *entrudo* (28) offers images of the inversion, along the vertical plane, of the functions, relative locations and status of body parts, in such fashion as Bakhtin claims articulates the subordination of social and ideological hierarchies to the egalitarian laws of the body and the natural world. Mouths and anuses (or faces and buttocks) swap places when 'esguichou-se água à cara com seringas de clisteres' (28). However, the freedom to '[espojar], de travessas, praças e becos, de barriga para o ar', and the short-lived liberation from the dominant order that it entails, are curtailed by the prevailing squalour of a city which 'é imunda, alcatifada de excrementos, de lixo, de cães lazarentos e gatos vadios, e lama mesmo quando não chove' (ibid.). This description offers no more than a gesture

towards the 'regenerative' life of the body in this account of carnival inversions that are prematurely curtailed. Meanwhile, it introduces grotesque images of the body that exploit the opposition not of 'higher' and 'lower' body zones but of body parts across a *horizontal* continuum. The physical deformities of rich and poor appear side by side on the same body, as a hideous vision of social inequality, when Lisbon is described as

> uma boca que mastiga de sobejo para um lado e de escasso para o outro, não havendo portanto mediano termo entre a papada pletórica e o pescoço engelhado, entre o nariz rubicundo e o outro héctico, entre a nádega dançarina e a escorrida, entre a pança repleta e a barriga agarrada às costas. (*MdoC*, p.27)[25]

This anthropomorphic allegory of a grotesquely divided civic body offers one more example of Saramago's employment, to satiric effect, of allusions to the iconography of the baroque era. It is a contrastive reminder of the emblem of the conjoined twins that symbolised harmony between two individuals or entities, also recalls the allegorical - and often satiric - use of the fantastical grotesque body by artists such as Arcimboldo, and also could be considered a re-working of the well-known allegory of Death found in Baltasar Gracián's *Criticón* (1651-1657):

> entró finalmente la tan temida reina, ostentando aquel su tan estraño aspecto a media cara; de tal suerte, que era de flores la una mitad y la otra de espinas, la una de carne blanda y la otra de huessos; muy colorada aquélla y fresca, que parecía de cosas entreveradas de jazmines, muy seca y muy marchita ésta […] .[26]

[25] Oliveira Filho refers to this image as an 'oposição carnavalesca', 'opondo, de forma irreverente, uma classe a outra' (Oliveira Filho, p.54). While Oliveira Filho is correct to stress the manner in which the image highlights class differences, the image seems to me more shocking than 'irreverente'.

[26] Baltasar Gracián, *El Criticón* (third part, *crisi* eleven), ed. with an intro. by Santos Alonso (Madrid: Cátedra, 1980), p.773. I retain the orthography of Santos Alonso's edition. On the use of conjoined twins as allegorical emblem, see e.g. Alison Saunders, *The Seventeenth-Century Emblem: A study in diversity* (Genève: Droz, 2000), 54-56.

Significantly, though, while Gracián's image can be read as voicing either protest through conversion of 'la referencia a la <<oposición>> en la de <<desconcierto>>' (Maravall, 1975 :323) or merely, as Santos Alonso suggests, a 'perspectivist' belief that 'el mundo lo ven los personajes con doble perspectiva tan sólo porque […] [el] mundo es engañoso, tiene dos caras'[27], Saramago's use of the same device presents not the human being *per se*, but rather Joanine society, as 'un ser agónico, en lucha dentro de sí' (1975:325). The two equally distorted halves of the body of Lisbon correspond not to a timeless natural order but to a historically specific social order; the image expresses alienation from a man-made perversion of natural laws, not from the body itself. Furthermore the image vindicates the principle of the equality of all human beings by presenting the status quo as an aberration, so disharmonious that not even the temporary inversion of *Entrudo* (seen by Bakhtin as an officially-sanctioned, though nonofficial, alternative order providing time-off from prevailing social customs) affords any significant relief.

Meanwhile, the Lenten period creates a more substantial redistribution of privilege, through fasting, but also through relaxation of the surveillance of women's sexual conduct. The Lenten 'costume de deixar que as mulheres corram às igrejas sozinhas' suspends the normal habit of keeping women 'em casa presas' (*MdoC*, p.30). Upper-class

[27] Santos Alonso, op. cit., 'Introducción', p.41. As Santos Alonso explains, Gracián's perspectivist rhetoric advances the belief that the world and humankind's destiny within it are not fixed in some immutably ideal state but subject to constant flux:
Si todo cambia, y solamente si todo cambia, es posible esa dualidad perspectivista. Si todo permanece, es imposible que haya más de una perspectiva racional. Al hablar del expresionismo, quedó claro el carácter cambiante y autodestructivo del mundo en *El Criticón*. Sólo así nos explicaremos su perspectivismo (Alonso, op. cit., 'Introducción', p.39).

women, 'livres de uma vez no ano', (ibid.) can exploit these six weeks of relative liberty to seek excitement outside marriage, failing which, the custom of spectating at the penitent's parade affords an opportunity for discreet masturbation (*MdoC*, p.29). Despite Saramago's privileging of feminist and sexual libertarian values (e.g. in the sympathetic presentation of Blimunda), these temporary freedoms are not signalled as beneficial. On the contrary, as is suggested by corporeal images entailing the inversion of conventional hierarchies, such inversions proceed from the liberation of masochistic and sadistic urges, arising respectively in men and women who at other times submit to the sexual laws that reduce a woman's sexual role to that of a 'vaso de receber' (11). Thus when male penitents process through the streets, their (female) lovers are presented overlooking them from the superior position of balconies, 'possessas, frenéticas', and inciting their consorts to ever more extreme self-flagellation:

> as mulheres reclamam força no braço, querem ouvir o estralejar dos rabos do chicote, [...] Está o penitente diante da janela da amada, em baixo na rua, e ela olha-o dominante, (*MdoC*, p.29)

Religious devotion is but a pretext for this sado-masochistic interaction, which is presented as the expression of unnaturally antagonistic relationships both with the body and with the Other:

> Deus não tem nada que ver com isto, é tudo coisa de fornicação, e provavelmente o espasmo de cima veio em tempo de responder ao espasmo de baixo, o homem de joelhos no chão, desferindo golpes furiosos, já frenéticos, enquanto geme de dor, a mulher arregalando os olhos para o macho derrubado, abrindo a boca para lhe beber o sangue e o resto. (*MdoC*, pp.29-30)

This account of Lenten observances and penitential processions not only justifies Óscar Lopes's contention that 'a religião oficial aparece [no romance] como reverso de uma

luxúria incontida e indisfarçável' (1986:205). Tying in with other references to the prominent role in official iconography and popular entertainment of spectacles of violence, pain and death, it also suggests how innate sexual urges re-emerge not as a means of expressing love, but twisted into a means of dissipating or transmitting feelings of hate, humiliation, aggression, and guilt that are fostered by subjugation to a hierarchical, repressive and brutal ideology.[28] Meanwhile, only the fantasy of Baltasar and Blimunda's relationship permits the emergence of the 'sexualidade intensa e reabilitada [a] que se associam todos os mais altos valores positivos' (Lopes, ibid). Respect for and dependence on Blimunda, together with Bartolomeu's teaching of a humanist, egalitarian and materialist ethics, lead Baltasar to share the dissent from the dominant ideology that his partner is led to by her crypto-Jewish background and the dangerous insights permitted by her penetrating vision. Blimunda and Baltasar's defiance of the authority and teachings of Church and State thus develops in tandem with egalitarian, loving habits, in a manner that appears to 'rehabilitate sexuality' as it neutralises the psychological damage wrought by the dominant ideology. Sexual love is integrated with industry (the building of the *passarola*), laughter, and art (the music of Scarlatti) into the kind of seamless communist 'organon' envisioned by Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*.[29] However, as the failure of the *passarola* project and

[28] Maravall asserts that 'el espectáculo popularmente mantenido, desenvuelto ante las masas, de la violencia, el dolor, de la sangre, de la muerte fue utilizado por los dominantes y sus colaboradores en el Barroco, para conserver atemorizadas a las gentes y de esa manera lograr más eficazmente su sujeción a un regimen integrador […] el testimonio spectacular, truculento, de la misma, se alcanzaba el objetivo hacia el que se orientaban todo el planeamento patético y pesimista del Barroco: la necesidad de poner en claro la condición humana, para dominarla, contenerla y dirigirla' (333-35).

[29] See my discussion of this in Sabine 2001: 142-46.

consequent deaths of two of its three architects indicates, in the socio-economic conditions of eighteenth-century Portugal (if not also in those of the present day) such a social vision could be little more than a flight of fantasy. As David Frier has argued, *Memorial do Convento* stresses the Gramscian idea that the aspirations of innovators and free thinkers must always be closely aligned with the free and conscious will of the mass of society, rather than being dependent on a coercive appropriation of that will.[30]

Here, finally, interpretation of the novel returns to the question of history, because Saramago's call to renewed debate about historical 'truth' aims ultimately to rally that popular will to the cause of socialist revolution, while simultaneously cross-examining the historiographical premises of the Marxist ideology guiding the development of that cause. *Memorial do Convento* confirms that Saramago's essentially post-modernist questioning of historical practices co-exists with a materialist affirmation of the primacy of the human body. Written and published during a period of disappointment and retreat for the revolutionary left in Portugal (as, indeed, in many parts of the developed capitalist west), the novel foregrounds the issues of sexual politics investigated by psychoanalytic Marxists such as Althusser and Marcuse over the previous two decades, which generally remained excluded from the discussions and manifesti of the principal Marxist organizations in the country. Beyond their contribution to Saramago's satirical project of cutting the high and mighty down to size, the novel's various representations of the body

[30] Frier, 'Ascent and Consent: Hierarchy and Popular Emancipation in the Novels of José Saramago', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 71 (1994), 125-38.

attest to the equality and inherent nobility of all human beings and of the natural justice of a libertarian socialist ethics.

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