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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ON JOSEPH'S INHERITANCE AND THE NIGHTMARES OF BEING IN THE GOSPEL OF SARAMAGO

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Abstract

This article analyses the relationship established between the character Joseph and the protagonist of the gospel according to Jesus Christ, by José Saramago, especially about what Jesus receives as inheritance. In this sense, it thinks about the representation possibilities of the sandals and the nightmares that, since Joseph's death, accompany the carpenter's son. From there, it reflects on the human being and his destiny according to the fictional universe constructed by the narrative, thinking about the tragic heroicity of man in the face of the idea of guilt, which can be considered as the central theme of the Saramago gospel.

Keywords: Being, José Saramago, Joseph, Tragic, The gospel according to Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

According to the discourse defended by Christian tradition, little is known about Joseph, or more specifically about what his life would have been like or how (and when) he would have died. It is argued that he was a descendant of King David, that he was a carpenter (cf. Mark 13:55), that he was Mary's husband, that he was an adoptive father of Jesus and who most likely died before Mary's son began his public life, also from unknown causes. Despite the gaps in the Bible regarding Joseph, he is one of the most important figures for the Catholic Church, which considers him to be one of its main saints. He is also venerated by other Christian denominations, such as the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church.

But who would Joseph be in Saramago's gospel? First and foremost, a man. I'll say that first of all, without beating about the bush, because, of all the textual facts built up in The gospel according to Jesus Christ about this and the other characters, his humanity is what caught my attention as a reader and what, as a researcher, I consider to be a truly important aspect.

The Man of Flesh and Bone

Saramago's Joseph is portrayed as a good Jew, a man endowed with faith and a deep religiosity. To reach this conclusion, it is enough to look at the fact that the character fulfils the obligations of his religion (keeping the Sabbath, visiting the temple in Jerusalem, making sacrifices to God, consulting the elders to resolve

issues of family life, etc.). In addition, they had a habit of thanking and praising God, praying daily — and several times a day. This can be seen in the following passage, for example, at the beginning of the gospel: —[...] he recited words of thanksgiving, words he recited each morning upon returning from the mysterious land of dreams, Thanks be to You, Almighty God, King of the Universe, Who has mercifully restored my soul to life [...]ll(SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 7).

Being this man's heir, the first thing that Jesus would receive as an inheritance, voluntarily or involuntarily, is precisely this: religion — which many, not seeing much difference, will also call faith.

Joseph would also have tried to leave the knowledge of his trade as an inheritance to his children1. The family's humility meant that he soon instructed them, "one after another", at the age considered correct, " in the secret skills of the carpenter‘s trade" (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 97), supported by knowledge from the Talmud and popular sayings. As the narrator himself points out, there was still no discussion of what today is considered child labour.

However, even before he was Jesus' father and Mary's husband, even before he was Jewish, Joseph in Saramago is what the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno would call "man of flesh and bone […] who is born, suffers, and dies — above all, who dies." (UNAMUNO, 2006, p. 1). Joseph is a man, I repeat, and an ordinary man among many others. He is a man who works, who sleeps, who has physiological needs and who is even sexually attracted to and has carnal relations with his wife, Maria:

> As if moving inside a swirling column of air, Joseph went into the house and shut the door behind him, there he paused for a moment, waiting for his eyes to become accustomed to the shadows. The nearby lamp cast a faint glow and gave scarcely any light. Wide awake, Mary lay on her back, listening and staring into space as if waiting. Joseph furtively approached and slowly drew back the sheet. She averted her eyes, began tugging at the hem of her tunic and no sooner had she pulled it up as far as her navel than he was on top of her, his tunic hitched up to the waist. Meanwhile Mary had opened her legs, or they had opened by themselves as she dreamed, and remained open, perhaps because of this sudden lassitude or the mere premonition of a married woman who knows her duty. God, Who is omnipresent, was there, but pure spirit that He is, was unable to see how Joseph‘s skin came into contact with that of Mary, how his flesh penetrated hers as had been ordained, and perhaps He was not even there when the holy seed of Joseph spilled into the precious womb of Mary, both sacrosanct, being the fount and chalice of life. For in truth, there are things God himself does not understand, even though He created them. Out in the yard God could neither hear the anguished gasp which escaped Joseph‘s lips as he experienced an orgasm nor the gentle moan Mary was unable to repress. [...] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 11).

This episode — despite presenting sex with a certain air of sublimity — goes brutally against what Catholic tradition advocates. Contrary to what is proclaimed by the Church, according to which Mary remained a virgin even after marriage, and therefore did not have or maintain sexual relations with her husband or any other man (cf. Vatican, 1566), in the Saramago‘s gospel, Mary's (and Joseph's) chastity is

forced solely and exclusively by pregnancy, when Joseph does not touch his wife, even though he looks at her with desire.

From where he was sitting, Joseph could see Mary in profile against the light of the fire. The reflection from its reddish glow softly lit up one side of her face, tracing out her features in chiaroscuro, and surprised that the thought should even cross his mind, he began to realize that Mary was an attractive woman, if one could say this of someone with such a childlike expression. Of course her body is swollen at present, but he can still see that agile and graceful figure she will soon regain once their child is born. These were the thoughts in Joseph‘s mind when, without any warning, as if his fesh were rebelling after all these months of enforced chastity, successive waves of desire incited by his imagination went surging through his blood and left him feeling dizzy [...] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 45).

Although Joseph's (and Mary's) heightened sexuality means a lot, it does not say everything about his humanity. It is true that portraying Joseph having sexual desires for his wife, or even having sex and orgasms with her, is capable of minimally undoing that almost divinized image that has crystallized. However, Saramago goes further by showing a Joseph who also has nightmares when he sleeps, who is capable of having faith and being afraid at the same time, who is a man like all the others because he dies (and knows that he dies).

This man's fate seems to be sealed. There are some very interesting signs that appear from the moment the character first appears in the narrative. The first of these is that, during the moment in which the narrator introduces this character for the first time, the rooster crows three times and, contrary to what usually happens, is not answered by the crowing of the other roosters in the neighbourhood:

> When he woke again, the cock was crowing. A dim, greyish light filtered through the chink in the door. Having waited patiently for the shadows of the night to disperse, time was preparing the way for yet another day to reach the world. For we no longer live in that fabulous age when the sun, to whom we owe so much, was generous to the point of halting its journey over Gibeon, thus giving Joshua ample time to overcome the five kings who were besieging the city. Joseph sat up on his mat, drew back the sheet, and at that moment the cock crowed for a second time, reminding him that there was another prayer of thanksgiving to be said, leaving aside any merits bestowed on the cock when the Creator distributed them among His creatures, Praise be to You, oh Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who gave the cock the intelligence to distinguish between night and day, prayed Joseph, and the cock crowed for a third time. At the first sign of daybreak all the cocks in the neighbourhood would usually crow back to each other, but today they remained silent, as if their night had not yet ended or was just beginning. (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 8-9).

It can be seen that this passage, although it contains facts that are not present in the biblical texts, seems to make a rich allusion to an episode that is reported in the texts validated by the Christian tradition: Peter, one of Jesus' disciples3, denies his Master three times in one of the most dramatic moments of Christ's life, when he had already been arrested and was about to be killed:

> And they seized him, and led him away, and brought him into the house of the high priest. But Peter followed afar off. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in

> the midst of the court, and had sat down together, Peter was sitting in the midst of them. 56 And a certain maid seeing him as he sat by the light [of the fire,] and looking intently on him, said, This man also was with him. 57 And he denied, saying, I do not know him, woman. 58 And after a little while, another seeing him said, Thou also art of them. But Peter said, Man, I am not. 50 And about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this one also was with him; for he is a Galilaean too. 60 But Peter said, Man, I know not what thou art saying. And immediately, while he was yet speaking, the cock crowed. 61 And the Lord turning looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said to him, Before the cock crows this day, thou wilt deny me thrice. 62 And he went out, and wept bitterly. (Luke, XXII: 54-60).

In the same way, the crowing of the rooster in the Saramago's gospel announces the beginning of a drama to be lived by Joseph — later experienced by Jesus-character and told by Jesus-narrator.

There is another important sign concerning Joseph's destiny: still in the first few pages, after this character is introduced into the story — to be precise, two pages after the solitary rooster has crowed for the third time — Joseph notices something different when he looks up at the sky, which for a few moments is dressed in a "mysterious colour". Look at the following passage:

> Looking up at the sky, Joseph felt overwhelmed. The sun is slow in appearing and in the sky there is not even a hint of dawn's crimson tints, no shades of rose or cherry, nothing except clouds to be seen from where Joseph was standing, one vast roof of low clouds like tiny flattened balls of wool, all identical and in the same shade of violet which deepens and becomes luminous on the side where the sun breaks through, before becoming increasingly darker until merging with what remains of the night over on the other side. Joseph had never seen such a sky, although old men often spoke of portents in the skies which attested to the power of God, rainbows which covered one half of the celestial vault, towering ladders which one day connected heaven and earth, providential showers of manna from heaven, but never of this mysterious colour which might just as easily be the beginning or end of this world, floating and hovering over the Earth, a roof made up of thousands of tiny clouds which were almost touching each other, and scattered in all directions like the stones of the desert. Terror-stricken, he thought the world was coming to an end, and there he was, the only witness of God's final judgement, yes, the only one. Silence reigns in heaven and on earth, no sounds can be heard from the nearby houses, not so much as a human voice, a child weeping, the sound of a prayer or curse, a gust of wind, the bleating of a goat or the barking of a dog. Why the cocks are not crowing, he muttered to himself, and he repeated the question anxiously as if the crowing of cocks might bring one last hope of salvation. Then the sky began to change. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 9-10).

What the narrator shows is the existence of an unusual day in the life of an ordinary man. On that day, the rooster did not crow as he used to, the sky was not the same either, the atmosphere was not the same and, unlike what used to happen, there was absolute silence all around. The change in the sky represents a change in

perspective in relation to the world and things, or else the harbinger of the darkness that, sooner or later, appears momentarily in the skies of any human being: the realization of the inevitability of death itself.

Joseph knows he is going to die. What we see in the following pages is precisely an "atmosphere of death" that haunts him throughout the narrative, through which fertile ground is built for the richest reflections on the finitude of life, such as those that can be had from the following episode, in which Joseph comes across the tomb of Rachel, one of Jacob's wives:

> When he reached the spot where Rachel is buried, a thought occurred to Joseph who came from the heart rather than the mind, namely that this woman who had been so anxious to have another child was to die at his hands, if you will pardon the expression, and before she could even get to know him. Without so much as a word or a glance, one body separates itself from another, as indifferent as the fruit that drops from the tree. Then an even sadder thought occurred to him, namely, that children should always die because of the fathers that begat them and the mothers who brought them into the world, and he took pity on his own son who was condemned to die although innocent.

Filled with confusion and anguish as he stood there before the tomb of Jacob‘s beloved wife, carpenter Joseph‘s shoulders drooped and his head fell forward, his entire body breaking out in a cold sweat, and now there was no one passing on the road to whom he could turn for help. He realized that for the first time in his life he doubted whether the world had any meaning and, like someone who had lost all hope, he said in a loud voice, This is where I shall die. [...] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 62-63).

In Saramago‘s gospel, Joseph is the ultimate representation of the man who knows he is going to die, but who wants to be eternal — or eternalized. The deep reflection he makes in front of Rachel's tomb proves this. Jacob's wife wanted Benjamin so much, but ended up losing her life so that he could be born. She was condemned to die, just as her son would one day, for a mistake that neither of them ever made. Because a son, from the point of view presented in the book, is synonymous with posterity or prolonging the life of his parents, the realization of the inevitability of his own death and the death of his son — a son for whom Mary and Joseph had also been waiting until very recently — was something extremely terrifying. This attempt to prolong the lives of the parents through the lives of their children is intricately linked to the concept of eternity that appears in the following passage:

> On returning to the cave Joseph went to look at his little son asleep in the manger before even telling his wife that he had found work. He thought to himself, He‘ll die, he must die, and his heart grieved, but then he reflected that, according to the natural order of things, he himself would die first, and that his death and departure from the land of the living would bestow on his son a kind of finite eternity, a contradiction in terms, an eternity which allows one to go on for a little longer when those whom we know and love no longer exist. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 63).

Joseph's reflections on death make him realize that, in relation to his final fate — if you'll pardon the redundancy — God would have made him as fragile or

helpless as the animals that used to be offered as sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple, and that his death was perhaps as small and irrelevant as theirs. Joseph's reflection goes hand in hand with what Jesus is told when, determined to look into the eyes of the cruellest shadows of his past, after leaving his mother and siblings and leaving home, he returns to Bethlehem and there, at the age of thirteen, he comes across — as if repeating Joseph's ways — a tomb, the final resting place of twenty-five innocent children:

> In the middle of a square with a spreading fig tree stands a tiny square building and one does not have to look twice to realize it is a tomb. Jesus approached, walked round it slowly, paused to read the faded inscriptions on one side, and this was enough to satisfy him that he had found what he was looking for. [...] Whose tomb is this. The woman pressed the child to her bosom as if anxious to protect it from some threat, and replied, Twenty-five little boys who died many years ago are buried here, [...] may the Lord go with you and protect you, It's a long time since I was three, At the hour of death men go back to being children, replied the woman before departing. [...] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 159-160).

In this passage from the book, there is one of the most profound reflections on the powerlessness of human beings in the face of death. When the woman with whom Jesus meets in front of the tomb of the innocents says that every man is always three years old at the time of death, what is being said is that every human being is fragile, defenceless and innocent in the face of the finitude of their own existence. Furthermore, what we see is a Jesus who takes no pleasure or satisfaction in the twenty-five lives that were lost so that he could be saved.

At this point in the narrative, Jesus-the-character does not know it yet, but Jesus-the-narrator is already fully aware that death, which has an appointment with man, does not stick to details or have a habit of being late. The narrator makes this clear when he recounts King Herod's funeral procession, reflecting on the realization that all men are heading towards death:

> The corpse was placed in a magnificent sarcophagus made of the purest gold and inlaid with precious stones, transported on a gilded carriage draped with cloth of purple and drawn by two white oxen. The corpse was also covered in cloth of purple, all that could be seen was a human form with a crown resting where the head should be. Behind followed the musicians playing their flutes and the professional mourners who could not avoid inhaling the overpowering stench, and as I stood there at the roadside even I felt squeamish, then came the King's guards on horseback, followed by foot-soldiers armed with lances, swords and daggers as if marching to war, an endless procession wending its awesome way like a serpent without any visible head or tail. I watched those soldiers in horror, marching in procession behind a corpse but also to their own death, to that death which sooner or later comes knocking on every door. Time to leave, comes the order promptly to kings and vassals alike, making no distinction between the rotting corpse at the head of the procession or those in the rear choking on the dust of an entire army, for the moment still alive, but heading for a place where they will remain forever. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 87-88).

Still on this subject, one of the reasons for Joseph's suffering in relation to the realization of the inevitability of his own death is the certainty that he will leave an incomplete work and that he will not see his son grow up. This reflection goes hand in hand with his analysis of the renovations he was helping to carry out in the temple in Jerusalem. He was able to imagine his work — a metaphor for his own life — complete, to its full extent, but he certainly would not be able to see this perfect work:

> Joseph suddenly became uneasy after feeling so happy only a moment ago. He looked all around him and saw the same familiar building site to which he had grown accustomed in recent weeks, slabs of stone and wooden planks, a thick layer of white dust everywhere and sawdust which never seemed to dry. Plunged into this unexpected gloom, he tried to find some explanation, only to conclude that it must be the natural reaction of someone who is obliged to leave his work unfinished, even if this particular job was not his responsibility and he had every reason for leaving. Rising to his feet, he tried to calculate how much time was left. The overseer did not so much as turn to look in his direction, therefore he decided to take one last look at the section of the building on which he had worked, to bid farewell as it were, to the timbers he had planned and the joists he had fitted, if they could possibly be identified, for where is the bee that can claim, This honey was made by me.. (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 73-74).

In this sense, saving Jesus from the massacre ordered by King Herod — who, after having one of his recurring nightmares, ordered the commander of his guard to kill all children up to the age of three — would, in a way, also be an attempt (as will be seen, fatally frustrated) to save eternity itself.

Another moment in which we can see a profound reflection on the cruelty of human existence is when Jesus, the son of the same man, threatens to resurrect his friend — and brother-in-law — Lazarus, but Mary of Magdala, Jesus' companion, stops him, arguing that death is too painful an experience to be lived through twice:

> Jesus told her, your brother will be raised from the dead, and Martha replied, I know he will come back to life on the Day of Resurrection. Jesus stood up and felt an infinite strength take possession of his soul, and in that supreme moment was convinced he could attempt and achieve everything, banish death from this corpse, fully restore it to life, give it speech, movement, laughter, even tears but not of sorrow, and truly claim, I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he asked Martha, Do you believe this, and she replied, Yes, I believe you are the Son of God who has to come into this world, and this being so, and with everything necessary disposed and arranged, such as strength and power and the will to use them, all Jesus has to do, looking at that body abandoned by its soul, is to stretch out his arms to it as if offering the path by which it must return, and say, Lazarus, Arise, and Lazarus will rise from the dead because it is the will of God, but at the very last moment Mary Magdalene placed a hand on Jesus‘s shoulder and said, No one has committed so many sins in life that they deserve to die twice, and dropping his arms, Jesus went outside to weep. (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 327-328).

Despite this fear and lament about the ephemerality of existence, and although it reduces man to "dust and nothingness" (cf. SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 5),

death seems to be, paradoxically, the one that offers man the ultimate resource against the pains of his existence. This can be seen when Mary of Nazareth comes across Joseph's lifeless body:

> Mary‘s tears overflow when she sees the pitiful state of her husband‘s legs. We really do not know what happens to life‘s sorrows after death, especially those last moments of suffering, it is possible that everything ends with death but we cannot be certain that the memory of suffering does not linger at least for several hours in this body we describe as dead, nor can we rule out the possibility that matter uses putrefaction as a last resort in order to rid itself of suffering. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 124).

The Sandals of Humanity

When it comes to the relationship between Joseph and Jesus, the metaphor of the sandals is something that cannot be ignored. They carry with them, on the surface of their idea, the veiled promise that they both must die on the way, being one of the most important legacies that Joseph leaves to his son.

After finding Joseph's unburied body, which had been crucified at the whim of the Romans and the indifference of the God he served, Jesus rescues his father's sandals and, by deciding to wear them, finds himself taking a new stance on life. With them, the boy becomes a man:

> Joseph‘s sandals had fallen to the ground beside that thick trunk of which he was the last fruit.

Worn out and covered in dust, they would have lain there forgotten if Jesus had not salvaged them without thinking. As if obeying an order and unnoticed by Mary, he stretched out his arm and tucked them under his belt, the perfect symbolic gesture as Joseph‘s first-born claims his inheritance, for certain things begin as simply as this and even today people say, In my father‘s boots I also become a man, or, expressed in more radical terms, In my father‘s boots I am a man. (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 124).

The sandals inherited by Jesus at a certain moment can be seen as objects that prove the finiteness of the father's existence and, at the same time, serve as a strong symbol of the new position — of authority, but also of suffering and martyrdom — to be occupied by the son:

> And James repeated the question, Where his father, Mary opened her mouth to speak, but that fatal word, like a hangman‘s noose, almost choked her, forcing Jesus to intervene, Father is dead, he told them and without knowing why, perhaps as incontrovertible evidence that Joseph was definitely dead, he took the wet sandals from his belt and showed them to his brothers, I‘ve brought these back. The older children were already close to tears but the sight of those forlorn sandals was too much for all of them and the widow and her nine children were soon crying their hearts out. Not knowing which of them she should comfort, Mary sank to her knees in a state of exhaustion and the children gathered around her, like a cluster of grapes from the vine which did not need to be trampled in order to release the colourless blood of tears. Only Jesus had remained standing, clasping the sandals to his bosom, musing that one day he would wear them, even the door but the house remained warm. […] Wearing his father‘s tunic, Jesus sat by the fire. The

> tunic was too long for him at the hem and sleeves and in other circumstances his brothers would have mocked him for looking like a scarecrow but this was not the time for jesting, not only because they were in mourning, but also because of the air of superiority which emanated from the boy, who suddenly appeared to have grown in stature, and this impression became even stronger when slowly and deliberately he held his father‘s wet sandals in front of the fire, a gesture unlikely to serve any useful purpose since their owner had already departed this world. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 128-129).

Owner of Joseph's sandals, Jesus was now the head of the house, the new "head" of the family. He was no longer seen as just a young boy, but now enjoyed more respect and admiration from his mother and younger brothers. However, when Jesus goes to the desert and meets God there, he notices that Joseph's sandals are too worn out:

> Jesus went into the desert. He had not gone far, had barely crossed the threshold of the world, when he suddenly became aware that his father‘s old sandals were falling apart beneath his feet. They had been made to last with constant patching, often in extremis, but Jesus‘s mending skills could no longer save sandals which had walked so many roads and pounded so much sweat into the dust. As if obeying some mandate, the last of the fibres disintegrated, the patches came apart, the laces broke in several places and in no time at all Jesus was walking practically barefoot. The boy Jesus, as we have got used to calling him, although being Jewish and eighteen years of age, is more adult than adolescent, suddenly remembered the sandals he had been carrying all this time in his knapsack for the sake of old times and he foolishly thought they might still fit. Pastor was right when he warned him, once feet grow they no longer shrink, and Jesus could scarcely believe he could once slip his feet into these tiny sandals. He confronted the desert in his bare feet, like Adam after being expelled from Paradise and, like Adam, he hesitated before taking that first painful step over the tortured earth that was beckoning him […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 196).

Here I want to point out that, at the age of eighteen, Jesus is no longer able to wear the sandals that belonged to his father. With them, Jesus became a man; without them, he became a self, walking naked and barefoot through the desert, like Adam, who according to Judeo-Christian mythology would have been the first man to walk on earth.

He then makes new sandals for himself out of sheepskins and wool. After the desert, Jesus is trying to retrace his own path and perhaps live through his own pain and death, freeing himself from his inheritance; but there is a passage that shows that this will not be possible. The narrator makes it clear that Jesus, his feet battered by the desert journey, is intimately connected to his father through the experience of pain:

> [...] and at that moment the feeling of loss, privation and solitude was so overwhelming that he felt quite alone, sitting here by himself on the bank of the Jordan, watching his feet in the transparent river and from one of his heels the fine thread of blood trickling and suspended in the water, suddenly that blood and those feet no longer belonged to him, it was his father who had come there, limping on pierced heels, to find relief in the cool waters of the

> River Jordan, [...] his feet bleeding with his father‘s blood [...] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 202-203).

The Nightmares of Being

If man differs from the animal in his ability to despair, as Kierkegaard would say, nightmares are the clearest signs of a humanity that, paradoxically, does not want to show itself in the light of day, but often wants to make itself visible in the darkness of night.

Along with Joseph's religion and sandals, Jesus inherited the nightmares, which began on the first night that the new head of the house slept next to the objects he had inherited from his father. But before I talk about Jesus' nightmares, let me talk about Joseph's nightmares, so that you can see how they are connected.

For Joseph, dreams are —the soul‘s memories of our body" (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 8). Furthermore, for Joseph, the dream is "the thought that wasn't thought when it should have been" (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 103). Throughout the narrative, Joseph makes these and other reflections on the meaning of dreams, giving clues that perhaps serve as keys to the possibilities of interpretation for the nightmares that visit the sleep of this and other characters from the beginning. The first of Joseph's nightmares is related to the luminous bowl:

> The following morning, after a restless night in which he was constantly disturbed by the same nightmare wherein he saw himself falling time and time again inside an enormous upturned bowl as if under a starry sky, Joseph went to the synagogue to seek the advice of the Elders. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 19).

There is, however, a nightmare that Joseph has on a recurring basis. This nightmare, in which Joseph is on his way to kill his own son, is, if we consider the relationship between posterity and eternity that I already talked about, the harbinger of the end itself:

> In the middle of the night, Joseph had a dream. He was riding down a road leading into a village and the _ first houses were coming into view. He was wearing military uniform and fully armed with sword, lance and dagger, a soldier amongst soldiers. The commanding officer asked him, Where do you think you‘re going, carpenter, to which he replied, proud of being so well prepared for the mission entrusted to him, I‘m off to Bethlehem to kill my son, and as he said those words, he woke up with the most fearsome growl, his body twitching and writhing with fear. Mary asked him in alarm, What‘s the matter, what happened, as Joseph shaking from head to foot kept repeating, No, no, no. Suddenly, he broke down and sobbed bitterly. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 83-84).

Joseph will die. Death will be his punishment. His crime? Joseph's crime was apparently being a man. Perhaps someone will say no, that his crime was not to have warned the mothers and fathers of the children of Bethlehem before Herod‘s soldiers brutally murdered them. But if we think about the idea of guilt as inheritance or the original guilt of god in the Saramago‘s novel, as I did on another occasion (Lima, 2024, 1-16), we understand that Joseph's crime was being a man, a son of Adam, powerless in the face of death and God's other designs.

Jesus' nightmare and Joseph's nightmare are essentially the same; what changes is the perspective: while Joseph dreams that he is on his way to kill his son, Jesus dreams that he is on his way to be killed by his father. Watch:

> [...] I dream that I'm in a village which isn't Nazareth and that you are with me, but it's not you, because the woman who's my mother in the dream looks quite different, and there are other boys of my age, difficult to say how many, with women who could be their mothers, someone has assembled us in a square and we're waiting for soldiers who are coming to kill us, we can hear them on the road, they draw near but we can't see them. At this point I'm still not frightened, I know it's only a nightmare, then suddenly I feel sure father is coming with the soldiers, I turn to you for protection, uncertain whether you're really my mother, but you're no longer there, all the mothers have gone, leaving only us children, no longer boys but tiny babies, I'm lying on the ground and start to cry, and all the others are crying too, but I'm the only one whose father is accompanying the soldiers, we look at the opening into the square where we know they will enter but there's no sign of them, so we keep on waiting for them to appear but nothing happens and, to make matters worse, their footsteps can be heard getting closer, they're here, no, they're not, and then I see myself as I am now, trapped inside that infant and I struggle to get out, it's as if my hands and feet were tied, I call out to you, but you're not there, I call out to my father who's coming to kill me, and just at that moment I woke up both last night and the night before. As he spoke, Mary shuddered with horror and when the meaning of the dream dawned on her she lowered her eyes in anguish, her greatest fears were about to be confirmed, and for some inexplicable reason Jesus had inherited his father's dream, and although it was slightly different, it was as if father and son independently had the same dream at the same time. [...] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 133-134).

In this passage, we see the complexity of the dreamlike relationship between Joseph and Jesus. We can see that they are both connected by the same nightmare, which is apparently an inheritance to be passed down from father to son, probably from when God made Adam fall into a deep sleep (cf. Genesis 2, 21) or, perhaps, when the Creator himself decided to rest on the first Sabbath in the history of the universe (cf. Genesis 2, 2-3). However, Jesus wants to break this cycle, he doesn't want to leave the same legacy, as can be seen in the following passage: "Oh Lord, send this dream to haunt my nights until the day I die, but I beseech You, spare my son, spare my son." (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 134).

Jesus then tries to dissociate himself from the image of his father. He runs away from home, abandoning his mother and siblings, and tries to build his own path, starting his own "hero's journey". Nevertheless, he takes Joseph's saddlebag and sandals with him.

Jesus will dream of his father repeatedly, but from a certain point onwards, the dream will not be the same. Furthermore, after that reunion with his father on the banks of the river — which it's not very clear whether it was a vision or a figment of Jesus' imagination — the son of man gradually begins to make peace with his own history and begins to identify himself as the carpenter's son. Even after being

proclaimed the son of the Saramago's God, Jesus sees Joseph as his father figure. He seems to want to live (and die) like Joseph, in other words, like an ordinary man:

> Come to the point and tell me what kind of death I can expect, A painful and ignominious death on a cross, Like my father, You're forgetting I'm your father, Were I free to make a choice, I'd choose him despite that moment of infamy, You have been chosen and therefore have no say, | want to end our pact, to have nothing to do with You, | want to live like any other man […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p.283).

Jesus, a Tragic Hero?

The image of Jesus, in the history of Christian tradition, is inseparable from the idea of the hero. For Christians, he is the saviour of the world, the redeemer of humanity, the one who rescues human beings, reconnects them to the Divine and offers them eternal life. In Saramago's novel, in apparent — but only apparent — agreement with this perspective, the narrator himself assumes that Jesus is the hero of this gospel:

> since Jesus is clearly the hero of our story, it would be all too easy for us to go up to him and predict his future, tell him what a wonderful life lies ahead, about those miracles he will perform to provide food or restore health, and one which will even overcome death, but it would scarcely be wise, because young Jesus, notwithstanding his aptitude for religious studies and his knowledge of patriarchs and prophets, enjoys the healthy scepticism one associates with youth and would send us away with a flea in our ear. Naturally, he will change his ideas once he meets God […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p.179-180).

This hero's journey begins when he decides to leave home after the death of his father, around the age of thirteen, and ends on the cross, at the moment of his death. We, the readers, are invited to go through this journey together with him, who, much more than a hero of humanity, that is, a repairer of humanity, wants to be a hero of his own humanity, that is, of himself. In this, he reveals himself as a true tragic hero.

To make the idea of what I am calling tragic clearer here, I will turn to Goethe's thought, for whom the tragic is based on an irreconcilable opposition (cf. GOETHE apud SZONDI, 2002, p. 25). When this opposition becomes reconcilable, the tragic disappears; however, this reconciliation, capable of putting an end to the tragic, does not depend on the subject (cf. SZONDI, 2002, p. 26).

As Szondi explains, the tragic has a dialectic that shows itself in the human being himself, —in whom ‗ought' and ‗desire' diverge and threaten to burst the unity of the I" (SZONDI, 2002, p. 26). In other words, man feels the need to desire that which he has no right to desire, entering into a conflict that is insoluble. The tragic in Goethe is also in the departure: —The fundamental motive of all tragic situations is the act of departing, which requires neither poison nor dagger, neither spear nor sword. To be more or less compelled to part an accustomed, desired, and upright situation by a powerful force that is more or less hated is also a variation of this theme.‖ (GOETHE apud SZONDI, 2004, p. 27).

In Saramago's gospel, Jesus appears as a tragic-modern hero. This is because his heroism is precisely the opposite of what is observed in the

conventional hero, who is more capable of overcoming — and does overcome — the limitations of the human condition and who often becomes a god (as happens with Christ himself, in the view of Christians in general, according to whom Jesus is God, being the second person of the so-called Holy Trinity). In Saramago, Jesus is an essentially human hero, who seems to struggle (in vain) first to save himself, which turns out to be impossible, and is also unable to prevent other lives from being lost.

In Saramago‘s gospel, Jesus appears as someone who wants to understand who he is and what he must do, in other words, what his mission in life is. These are two profound existential questions that have moved man since he began to smile and bury his dead. This can be seen, for example, in Jesus' great encounter with God and the Devil, in which he expresses his interest in these two questions, recognizes Joseph's paternity and wishes to assume his own humanity without reservation:

> Jesus said, I‘ve come to find out who I am and what I shall have to do henceforth in order to fulfil my part of the contract. God said, These are two questions, so let‘s take them one at a time, where would you like to start, With the first one, said Jesus, before asking for a second time, Who am I, Don‘t you know, God asked him, Well I thought I knew and believed myself to be my father‘s son, Which father do you mean, My father, the carpenter Joseph, son of Eli or was it Jacob for I‘m no longer certain, You mean the carpenter Joseph whom they crucified, I didn‘t know there was any other, A tragic mistake on the part of the Romans and that poor father died innocent having committed no crime.

You said that father, does this mean there is another, I‘m proud of you, I can see you‘re an intelligent lad and perceptive, There was no need for any intelligence on my part, | was told by the Devil. Are you in league with the Devil, No, I‘m not in league with the Devil, it was the Devil who sought me out, And what did you hear from his lips, That I am Your son. Nodding His head slowly in agreement, God told him, Yes, you are My son, But how can a man be the son of God, If you‘re the son of God you are not a man, But I am a man, I breathe, I eat, I sleep and I love like a man, therefore I am a man and shall die as a man […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 278-279).

About Jesus' second question — about what his mission would be — the dialogue that takes place between God and Jesus will shed light on the tragic heroism of the main character, given the impossibility of his escaping his destiny. When Jesus learns of what is in store for him — to die as a martyr to fulfil God's ambitious plans to extend his dominion over the world — he wants to break with the divine once and for all and, having already been born as the children of all men were born7, He also wants to live like an ordinary man. However, this is impossible: Jesus has no choice; the destiny that God has reserved for him is immutable, and God's will is inflexible. Any path that Jesus tries to follow to thwart God's plans will invariably lead him to fulfil God's will. That is his tragic heroism. Observe:

> I want to end our pact, to have nothing to do with You, I want to live like any other man, Empty words, My son, can‘t you see you‘re in my power and that all these sealed documents we refer to as agreements, pacts, treaties, contracts, alliances, and in which I figure, could be reduced to a single clause, and waste less paper and ink, a clause which would bluntly state that,

> Everything prescribed by the law of God is obligatory, even the exceptions […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 283).

From this perspective, Saramago's gospel seems to call into question the idea of free will, which is widespread among many Christians8 One can understand from this narrative that there is no free will when our possibilities for action (and desire) are circumscribed by God's implacable will. In this regard, Gustavo Bernardo explains the following:

> If God grants me free will, I simply don't have the free will to refuse free will. If God created me free to decide between good and evil, I am not free not to decide: the freedom he grants me is freedom on his terms, not mine; the freedom he grants me is the freedom to be punished by him — and with eternal hell — if I am not good in the narrow terms of what he understands by goodness, terms to which I do not have full access (KRAUSE, 2014, p. 181).

This possibility of understanding, which opens space to discuss the idea of guilt, is in line with the perception that man is unable to escape the destiny reserved for him by God, as the following fragment shows:

> If only it were true, he repeated to himself, thinking of all those who never left their place of birth yet death went there to find them, which only goes to prove that fate is the only real certainty. It is so easy, dear God, we need only wait for everything in life to be fulfilled in order: to be able to say, It was fate. Herod was destined to die in Jericho and be drawn on a carriage to the Fortress of Herodium, but death exempted the infants of Bethlehem from having to travel anywhere. […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p.89).

If he could not completely change his fate, Jesus at least had the chance to choose how he would die, and he chose to be crucified (cf. SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 339). He wanted not only to die like a man, but to die exactly the same death as his father, Joseph. In the end, he had death as his inheritance, and through death, father and son were reunited once again:

> Ordering Jesus to lie down, the soldiers extended his arms on the transom. As they hammered the first nail in, perforating the flesh of his wrist between two bones, sudden vertigo sent time into reverse, and Jesus felt the pain as his father had felt it before him, saw him as he had seen him on the cross at Sepphoris. Then they drove a nail into his other wrist and he experienced that first tearing of stretched flesh as the soldiers started to hoist the transom in stages to the top of the cross, Jesus‘s entire weight suspended from fragile bone, and it was almost a relief when they pushed his legs upwards and hammered another nail through his heels, now there is nothing more to be done except await death. Jesus is slowly dying, dying, and life is ebbing from his body […] (SARAMAGO, 1999, p. 340-341).

CONCLUSION

Saramago's novel, due to the relationship of complicity that is established between Joseph and Jesus, throughout the narrative, gives the reader the opportunity to reread these two emblematic figures. In this process of re-reading, one finds oneself faced with complex ideas that since always disturb and move human beings, such as guilt, destiny, freedom, death and eternity.

In the Saramago's narrative, father and son are men of flesh and blood, in whom virtue and defect, dream and nightmare, fear and courage, heroicity and tragicity merge into one abstruse fictional universe, very far from the binary conception (and therefore narrow-minded, limited) that many narratives — sometimes coated with an authority that poses as absolute and unquestionable — adopt to explain what we call reality. These are generally the same narratives that, because they privilege an extremely costume of the world, deliberately seek to confiscate the most important of our inheritances: the right we have to be human, and nothing more.

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