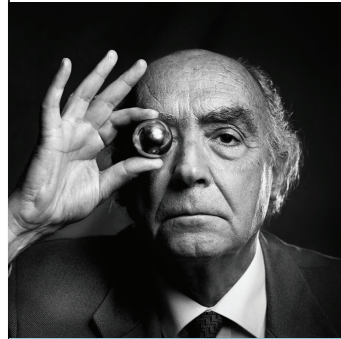




SKYLIGHT, JOSÉ SARAMAGO



HUMAN
NATURE IS, BY
DEFINITION,
A TALKATIVE
ONE,
IMPRUDENT,
INDISCREET,
GOSSIPY,
INCAPABLE OF
CLOSING ITS
MOUTH AND
KEEPING IT
CLOSED.

THE CAVE, JOSÉ SARAMAGO

In all souls, as in all houses, beyond the façade lies a hidden interior. — Raul Brandao

From the Foreword by Pilar del Río, President, José Saramago Foundation

“a novel of characters – set in Lisbon of the early 1950s when the Second World War has ended, but not the Salazar dictatorship which hangs over everything like a shadow or a silence”

“It is not a political novel, and we should not, therefore, necessarily conclude that the reason it remained unpublished was because it fell victim to the censors. And yet, given the prudish times in which it was written, its content must have had some bearing on that decision not to publish.”

“The novel rejects established values: the family is not a symbol of hearth and home, but of hell; appearances count for more than reality; apparently praiseworthy utopian dreams are revealed for the hollow things they really are”

“It is a novel that explicitly condemns the mistreatment of women, but treats love between two people of the same sex as natural, albeit, in the circumstances, anguishing.”

“ a gift ...that [provides] context for reading his other novels in the light of what he was writing as a young man”

My thoughts

Thank you for this selection! Coincidence, serendipity, ‘Lady Luck’ at work—whatever force was in play this could not have come at a better time for me freshly home from Portugal and still under the spell of Lisbon’s considerable charms. Grappling with this book took me to a brush up on Portugal’s 20th century history and, of course, to finally meeting Saramago described by the great Harold Bloom in 2003 as “the most gifted novelist alive in the world today” and in 2010 “a permanent part of the Western canon.”

My comments are in reaction to comments in the Foreword written by Pilar del Rio, Saramago’s widow and the President of the Jose Saramago Foundation. She wrote: *Skylight* is a novel of characters.

Here’s how I would characterize it:
Skylight is a novel ...

of secrets revealed and protected,
of cigarettes and smoking,
of annoying argument,
of depressing descriptions of the ravages of age,
of vulnerability that invites exploitation,
of pettiness,
of spiritual emptiness,
of the unheroic,
of the mundane,
of self-centredness,
of lovelessness,
of the tyranny of necessity
of characters who are cartoonish —ghoulish and villainous; only alert to details of mood and temperament when the possibility of un-masking presents itself. Otherwise, except for Silvestre and Mariana, no one seems truly interested in finding their way into the interior —another way of saying ‘knowing’ any of the other characters. Love is either instinctual (mothers for their children), a vague memory, or repressed lust. (Silvestre’s definition of love involves a whole other set of considerations.)

The almost plot-less story involves character interactions largely within each self-contained unit that propel them towards carefully detailed dilemmas, that, in the end, remain unresolved. The one unit that welcomes a new character, Abel Nogueira, who comes to live with Silvestre and Mariana as their lodger is offset by the one unit that sends something out, a false letter that drives out both the lodger and the ‘visitor’ on whom Lidia is dependent, thereby ostracizing her socially and reducing her economically. The novel ends with a

dialogue without resolution and with the various groupings in each unit changed: reduced in number but, on one of the few positive notes, closer to the possibility of more openness, authenticity, and liberation.

I disagree with the Foreword. I think it is very much a political novel advancing Saramago's political ideals—communism, non-belief, and pessimism, and directly refuting the values advanced under the Salazar dictatorship (God, Fatherland, and Family) which vigorously rejected communism and socialism.

As to its being a novel of characters... : I was touched by the story of Henrique's newly developing love for his father Emilio and Emilio's reciprocating experience. I was impressed by Lidia's spunk and I felt sympathy for her plight at the end —her ostracism by the others. I liked Candida and her daughters and their aunt who with the gift of the bust of Beethoven somewhat redeemed herself in the readers' eyes. What a lovely family ritual they had developed in listening together to music played on the radio. The harmony restored in this unit was an oasis of hope counterbalanced on the ground floor by Silvestre and Mariana's loving marriage. Although the challenges and sufferings of the other characters were believable, and well and originally described they did not wholly engage my sympathies and I don't think they were meant to. Caetano and Justina are like characters in a farce, with the ever-present smiling photograph of their dead daughter merely reinforcing the overdone quality of their characterization. Caetano is like an operatic villain, Justina a dark, haunting spirit.

Great masterpieces of symphonic music, opera and literature, poetry, and drama are swept into the novel with obvious precision of inclusion. What are we to make of this? Is this counterpoint? Contrapuntal!—e.g. Honegger was a fan of Ragtime; a false letter is a plot device in *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

...And what are we to make of the title and the many descriptions of cloud covered skies, sunlight breaking through the clouds, the misty river etc. Does this signify hopefulness—the possibility of revelation? Will the light break through?

I am reminded of theatre of the absurd —Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard etc.; of the films of Ingmar Bergman and all the other inscrutable, unfathomable plays and movies I sat through during the 60s and early 70s when European artists, despite the iron curtain and the Cold War embraced ideas similar to those advanced by Saramago. I was unpersuaded then and have remained so. I've never been able to unravel Marxism from Stalinism or any of its other totalitarian manifestations. There is a famous photograph of Saramago embracing Fidel Castro and I believe they were mutual admirers. This is anathema to me.

CHARACTERS	AGE	APARTMENT— within sight of the river	OCCUPATION
Silvestre		Ground Floor Right	Cobbler
Silvestre’s wife Mariana			Housewife
Abel Nogueira	Not yet 30 yrs		Lodger
Adriana	34 yrs	Top Floor Left	Office worker
Isaura, Adriana’s sister			Seamstress
Candida, Adriana’s and Isaura’s mother			Housewife
Aunt Amelia, their aunt (Candida’s sister)	3 yrs younger than Candida		‘Household Administrator’
Justina		1 st Floor Left	Housewife
Caetano Cunha	‘not quite 40 yrs’		Linotype operator – night shift at the newspaper
Matilde	8 yrs — died of meningitis		
Anselmo		Top Floor Right	
Rosalia, his wife (Maria Claudia) Claudinha, their daughter	19 yrs		Office worker
Lidia (Lili)	32—33 yrs	1 st Floor Right	Mistress
Paulino Morais	56 yrs		Lidia’s 3x /week visitor
Lidia’s Mother	‘in her 60s’		

CHARACTERS	AGE	APARTMENT	OCCUPATION
Carmen		Ground floor Left	
Henriquinho, her son	6 yrs		
Emilio Fonseca, Carmen’s husband	30 yrs – ‘8 miserable years of marriage’		Jewelry company sales rep
Carmen’s father Filipe			
Carmen’s mother Mercedes			
Carmen’s cousin Manolo			

Other ‘Works’ referenced/incorporated

[Music] Beethoven’s Third Symphony — *Eroica*

The **Symphony No. 3** in E-flat major, Op. 55, (also Italian *Sinfonia Eroica*, *Heroic Symphony*) by Ludwig van Beethoven is one of his most celebrated works marking the beginning of his creative middle-period. The work is in four movements:

1. *Allegro con brio* (12–18 min.) (E ♭ major)
2. *Marcia funebre: Adagio assai* (14–18 min.) (C minor)
3. *Scherzo: Allegro vivace* (5–6 min.) (E ♭ major)
4. *Finale: Allegro molto* (10–14 min.) (E ♭ major)

“Any silly song could be described as ‘lovely,’ but that music, well, it’s...” ...It’s beautiful. Yes Adriana that’s precisely what it is. ...Why should the word ‘beautiful’ be so difficult to say?” asked Isaura, smiling. ...Aunt Amelia, still shocked by her earlier inability to pronounce the word, attempted an explanation: “I think I do. It’s like the word ‘God’ for believers. It’s a sacred word.”

[Book] *The Maias*

Os Maias: Episódios da Vida Romântica ("The Maias: Episodes of Romantic Life") is a realist novel by Portuguese author José Maria de Eça de Queiroz, also known under the modernized spelling Eça de Queirós. *Maia* is the name of a fictional family, although some episodes fit into the history of the real Maia family. As early as 1878, while serving in the Portuguese consulate at Newcastle upon Tyne, Eça had at least given a name to this book and had begun working on it. It was mainly written during his residence in Bristol, and it was first published in 1888. The book largely concerns the life of young aristocrat Carlos da Maia in 1870s Portugal, when along with his best friend João da Ega he spends his time making witticisms about society and having affairs. The novel uses the Monarchy's decline in Portugal (late 19th century), as a predominant theme, reflecting its author's own regret at his country's slow decay.

José Saramago, Portugal’s only Nobel literature laureate to date, describes “The Maias” as “the greatest book by Portugal’s greatest novelist.” Even so, its 19th-century author, José Maria Eça de Queirós, could use a bit more of an introduction. He may be Portugal’s Flaubert, but like the greatest novelists of many peripheral countries, he remains largely unknown to English-language readers. A new translation of “The Maias” offers an appealing chance to discover him.

...“The Maias” must have seemed shockingly contemporary in its *verismo*: its narrative ends in 1887, just a year before the book was published. But it is not a revolutionary tract. Rather, in Margaret Jull Costa’s excellent translation, its appeal remains its strongly etched characters, not only the beloved and enlightened patriarch, Afonso da Maia, and his no-less-wealthy grandson, Carlos, but also assorted snobby aristocrats, drunken writers, greedy politicians, self-important businessmen, social climbers — and beautiful women.

[Book] *The Nun*, Diderot

[Music] *The Dance of the Dead* by Honegger. Libretto by Paul Claudel. Performed by Jean-Louis Barrault. Oratorio composed in 1938.

“The chorus of the dead, in a thousand cries of despair and sorrow, declared their pain and remorse, and the Dies Irae smothered and overwhelmed the giggling of a lively clarinet. Blaring out of the loudspeaker, Honegger managed finally to vanquish that anonymous piece of ragtime.”

[Music] Ragtime

Erik Satie, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud and the other members of The Group of Six in Paris never made any secret of their sympathy for ragtime, which is sometimes evident in their works. Consider, in particular, the ballet of Satie, *Parade (Ragtime du Paquebot)*, (1917) and *La Mort de Monsieur Mouche*, an overture for piano for a drama in three acts, composed in the early 1900s in memory of his friend J.P. Contamine de Latour. In 1902 the American cakewalk was very popular in Paris and Satie two years later wrote two rags, *La Diva de l'empire* and *Piccadilly*. ... Even the Swiss composer Honegger wrote works in which the influence of African American music is pretty obvious. Examples include *Pacific 231*, *Prélude et Blues* and especially the *Concertino* for piano and orchestra.

[Book] *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky (2nd vol. French Translation)

[Book] *Adriana’s Diary*

[Play] *Romeo & Juliet*, Shakespeare

[Visual Art] Rafael Bordalo

[Music] *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Donizetti

Lucia di Lammermoor is a *dramma tragico* (tragic opera) in three acts loosely based upon Sir Walter Scott's historical novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*. The story concerns the emotionally fragile Lucy Ashton (Lucia) who is caught in a feud between her own family and that of the Ravenswoods. The setting is the Lammermuir Hills of Scotland (Lammermoor) in the 17th century. Act 2 involves Lucy’s brother using a forged letter to prove that Edgardo has forgotten her and taken a new lover thereby hoping to persuade her to renounce her vow to Edgardo, for the good of the family, and marry Arturo.

[Poetry] Fernando Pessoa

[Music] Chopin *Nocturne*

[Music] Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*

Quotable Monologues

Emilio speaking to his son Henrique: When you grow up, you’ll want to be happy. You don’t give a thought to that now, which is why you are happy. The moment you think about it, the moment you want to be happy, you will cease to be happy. Forever. Possibly forever. Do you hear? Forever. The stronger your desire to be happy, the unhappier you will be. Happiness isn’t something you can conquer. People will tell you that it is. Don’t believe them. Happiness either is or isn’t.”

Quotable Dialogues

On choosing between good music and bad music/good and evil:

Amelia: “It’s not confusing, it’s true. There is good music and bad music. There are good people and bad people. There is good and evil. And you can choose between them...”

Candida: “If only it were that easy. Often we don’t know how to choose. We haven’t learned how...”

Amelia: “Some people can only choose evil, because they’re naturally twisted!”

Candida winced as if in pain, then said: “You don’t know what you’re saying. That can only happen when people are mentally ill. We’re talking about people who, according to you, are capable of making a choice. Someone as sick as that wouldn’t be able to!”... “Let’s forget about music for the moment, because it’s just getting in the way. Tell me, if you can, what is good and what is evil? Where does one end and the other begin?”

Amelia: “That depends on your particular point of view...”

Candida: “If everyone thought like you, we would never get anywhere. We need rules, we need laws!”
“But who makes them? And when? And why?”

Silvestre’s philosophy of life as told to Abel: “I learned to see beyond the soles of these shoes. I learned that behind this wretched life we lead there is a great idea, a great hope. I learned that each individual life should be guided by that hope and by that ideal. And people who don’t feel that must have died before they were born.... You (speaking to Abel) belong to another group, the ones who haven’t yet been born.” ...
“experience is only worth anything when it’s useful to other people, and you’re not useful to anyone.”

Abel: “I agree that I’m not useful, but in what way has your life been useful?”

Silvestre: “I tried to do something, and even if I failed, at least I tried.”

Abel: “You tried in your own way, yes, but who’s to say it was the best way?”

Silvestre: “Almost everyone nowadays would say it was the worst. Is that the group you belong to?”

Abel: “To be perfectly honest, I don’t know.” ...

Silvestre: “You don’t know? At your age and after everything you’ve seen and been through, you still don’t know?” ...How can you not know? Has twelve years of living the way you’ve been living not shown you how badly people live? The poverty, the hunger, the ignorance, the fear?

Abel: Yes, but times have changed...

Silvestre: Yes, times have changed, but people haven’t.”

Abel and Silvestre discuss being useful:

S: Think of all the people who live their entire lives without ever realizing how useless they are. In order for someone to be truly useful, he must, at some point, feel his own uselessness. At least then he’s less likely to go back to being useless...”

A: Be useful, that’s all you ever say to me. But how can I be useful?

S: That’s something you have to discover for yourself, like everything else in life. No one can give you advice about that. I’d really like to—if I thought it would do any good.... We won’t become what we are meant to be in life by listening to other people’s words or advice. We have to feel in our own flesh the wound that will make us into proper men. Then it’s up to us to act...

Abel and Silvestre discuss the need for love:

S: Your problem Abel is that you have no love.

A: I’m your friend, aren’t I and friendship is a form of love.

S: Agreed ...

S. Everything connects with everything else. When I said your problem was that you had no love, you assumed I was referring to love for a woman, didn’t you?

A: Yes, I did. I’ve fancied lots of women, but never loved one. I must be dead inside. ...Anyway were you not referring to love for a woman?

S: No.

A: So?

S: I meant a different kind of love. When you’re walking down the street, have you never felt a sudden desire to embrace the people around you?

A: ...No

S. Well that’s the love I’m talking about.

A: You’d make an excellent apostle, you know.

S: I don’t believe in God, if that’s what you mean. Maybe you think I’m an old sentimentalist...

A: Not at all!

S: Maybe you think it’s just old age speaking. Well, in that case, I’ve always been old. I’ve always thought and felt the same. And if there’s one thing I do believe in, it’s love, that kind of love.”

A: It’s wonderful to hear you say that, but it’s pure utopianism. And contradictory too. Didn’t you say earlier on that life was a dung heap, a steaming dung heap?

S: It is, but life is like that because certain people wanted it to be, people who had, and still have their disciples.

A: Would you want to embrace them too?

S: I’m not as sentimental as that. How could I love the very people who are responsible for the lack of love between others? ...It’s something Saint-Just said, one of the leaders of the French Revolution. ...there should be no freedom for the enemies of freedom. Applying it to our conversation, you could translate it as: we should hate the enemies of love.

A: ...I agree with Saint-Just but as for the rest, no, I’ve never met anyone I could love like that. And I’ve met a lot of people. They’re all as bad as each other. I may have found an exception in you, not because of what you’ve just been telling me, but because of what I know about you and your life. I understand that you can feel that kind of love. But I can’t. I’ve taken a lot of knocks in life. I’ve suffered. I certainly wouldn’t do what that other fellow did, and turn the other cheek ...

S: Neither would I. I’d cut off the hand of anyone who hit me.

A: If everyone did that, there’d be no two-handed people left in the world. If someone takes a beating, they’re sure to beat up someone else one day, if they haven’t done so already. It’s all a question of opportunity.

S: That way of thinking is called pessimism, and people who think like that are only helping those who want to spread a lack of love among ordinary people.

A: Forgive me, but like I said, what you’re proposing is pure utopianism. Life is a fight to the death, always and everywhere. It’s a case of every man for himself. Love is the cry of the weak, hatred is the weapon of the strong. Hatred for their rivals and competitors, for those contending for the same piece of bread or land or the same oil well. Love is either just a joke or something that gives the strong a chance to make fun of the weakness of the weak. For them, the existence of the weak is useful as a pastime, an escape valve.

S: Are you one of the strong or one of the weak? ... You don’t know what you want, you don’t know where you’re going, and you don’t know what you have. ...I can at least tell you that a life without love, a life like the one you described just now, isn’t life at all, it’s a dung heap, a sewer.

A: Indeed it is, but what are we going to do about it?

S: Change it! ...[by] loving each other with a lucid, active love, a love that can overcome hatred!...make sure the active side never forgets about the lucid side, and that the active side never commits the same kinds of villainous deeds as those who want men to hate each other. Active, but lucid. And above all, lucid!
...

A: I need to find my own path. ...I want my pessimism to keep me safe from facile, comforting illusions—like love.

S: But Abel, anything that isn’t built on love will only generate hate!

A: You’re right, my friend, but perhaps that’s how it will have to be for a long time yet. The day when we can build on love has still not arrived.

Quotable Narrative Reflections

Emilio reflecting on his feelings about his son: “Of course he loved his son: he had engendered him, how could he not love him? Not to do so would be unnatural. However, he knew full well that he was a stranger in that house, that nothing here really belonged to him, even though it had been bought with his money. Having is not the same as owning. You can have even those things you don’t want. **Owing means having and enjoying the things you have.** He had a home, a wife and a son, but none of them was truly his. He only had himself, but even then not entirely. ...”

Abel reflecting on his feelings following dinner with Silvestre and Mariana: ...”perhaps S and M were different, different from all the other people he had met so far. Simpler, more human and more open. What

was it that gave to the poverty of his hosts the ring of pure gold? (This, by some obscure association of ideas, was how Abel experienced the atmosphere in their apartment.) “Happiness? That doesn’t seem enough. Happiness is like a snail; it withdraws into its shell when you touch it.” But if it wasn’t happiness, what was it then? “Understanding, perhaps, but understanding is just a word. No one can understand another person unless he is that other person. And no one can be simultaneously himself and someone else.” ... “Is it simply in the nature of certain people, that capacity to give off some life-transforming energy? Something ... something that could be everything or almost nothing. But what is it? That’s the question. So let’s ask that question.” ... What kind of people are they? What is that capacity of theirs? In what way do they transform life? Are those even the right words to describe it? Does the mere need to use words make it impossible to find an answer? But then how do we find the answer?” ... It’s kindness,” thought Abel, “but that doesn’t seem enough either. There’s something here that eludes me. I can see that they’re happy. They’re very understanding and kind, I can see that too, but there’s something I can’t put my finger on, possibly the most important thing, which might be the cause of that happiness, understanding and kindness. Or perhaps—yes, that’s it—perhaps it’s simultaneously the cause and the consequence of that kindness, understanding and happiness.”

Abel’s further reflections on the meaning of life: The hidden meaning of life... “But the hidden meaning of life is that life has no hidden meaning.” Abel knew Pessoa’s poetry well. He had made of his poems another Bible. ... No one feeling a thirst for humanity would try to slake that thirst on Fernando Pessoa’s verses: it would be like drinking salt water. And yet what wonderful, fascinating poetry! Gratuitous, yes, but what does that matter if, when I plumb my own depths, I find that I, too, am gratuitous and futile? And that’s what Silvestre can’t stand: the useless life. We should be fully engaged with life, each individual should reach out beyond himself. Being merely present isn’t enough. Being a mere witness is tantamount to being dead. That’s what he meant to say. It doesn’t matter if you stay in one spot, but your life should reach out if it is not to be a mere animal existence, as unconscious as the water flowing from a spring. But how to reach out: And where to” ... Silvestre’s is one answer, someone who has a religious belief is another. How many more are there? And, of course, the same answer may be right for various people. Just as another may be right for only one person and no one else.

Quotable narrative description

Narrative description of Henrique’s new-found happiness: H was the happiest of children. There was an even greater happiness, though, one that admitted of no comparison: this was when his father placed a hand on his head. At such moments, H almost fainted.”

Justina’s dilemma: The situation was clear to her now. It was a choice between pleasure and power. ... Speaking out would mean that last night’s experience would never be repeated. Saying nothing would mean subjecting herself to whatever conditions her husband chose to impose on her. Justine moved between those two poles—newly awoken desire and the desire to be in control. One excluded the other. Which to choose? And what scope did she have to make such a choice? If she chose control, how could she resist desire now that she had experienced it? If she chose submission, how could she bear submitting to a man she despised? ... The Sunday-morning sun flooded in through the window like a river of light. ... I don’t love him and yet he drove me mad with pleasure. Is it the same for other people? Do they feel nothing but loathing and pleasure? And what about love? Can pure animal lust give you the kind of pleasure you should only get from love? Or is love just lust in disguise?

Claudina’s dilemma: ... She had not written the letter, but she knew nonetheless that she had been responsible for his breakup with Lidia. She knew that she had reached this point not because of what she had done, but because of what she had not done. She knew all this. The only thing she did not know was whether she wanted to take Lidia’s place, because that was what it came down to now, wanting or not wanting. If she had told her parents everything, she would not be going back to the office in the morning. But she preferred not to tell them. Why? Was it a desire to deal with things in her own way? But “her own way” had gotten her into this situation. Was it the reserved silence of someone who wants to be independent? But at what price?

Carmen's dilemma: She was leaving too, but would be back in three months. But what if she didn't come back? What if she stayed in her hometown with her son and her family? ...What could be simpler? ...It was then that Carmen remembered that, as the law stood, she could not stay abroad without her husband's consent. She was leaving with his authorization, and she could only stay on with his authorization. ...Would it not be the worst of punishments to have to return to Lisbon after three months of freedom?

Plot devices

Caetano's fake letters:

1. **To take revenge against his wife for her besting him in their latest argument:** "One night he went straight home after work. He had in his pocket a letter (*– an anonymous revelation that Justina was having an affair*) he had written to himself, disguising his handwriting. He had used different ink from the sort he normally used and an old pen that made his writing more angular and blotted the smaller letters. It was a masterpiece of dissimulation. Not even an expert would spot that it was a fake."
2. **Emboldened by the surprising yet successful outcome of the first fake letter, to take revenge against Lidia for rejecting him he writes an anonymous letter to Paulino Morais saying Lidio had been unfaithful to him with the cobbler's lodger. Lidia refuses to say whether or not the letter is true:** "It's up to you whether you choose to believe what the letter says rather than believe me, but you've already said that you believe the letter, so what are you waiting for?"..."I assume you've already considered that if I tell you it's not true, you're liable to receive more such letters? How long do you think you could stand that? Do you expect me to wait here at your beck and call until the time comes when you stop believing me?"

Backgrounder notes

Wikipedia: António de Oliveira Salazar (28 April 1889 – 27 July 1970) was Prime Minister of Portugal from 1932 to 1968. Salazar founded and led the *Estado Novo* ("New State"), the corporatist authoritarian government that ruled Portugal until 1974. After the Portuguese *coup d'état* of 28 May 1926, Salazar entered public life with the support of President Óscar Carmona, initially as finance minister and later as prime minister. Opposed to democracy, communism, socialism, anarchism and liberalism, the ideology of Portugal was conservative and nationalist in nature under his rule. Salazar also promoted Catholicism, but argued that the role of the Church was social, not political, and negotiated the Concordat of 1940. One of the mottos of the Salazar regime was "*Deus, Pátria e Família*" (meaning "God, Fatherland, and Family"). With the *Estado Novo* enabling him to exercise vast political powers, Salazar used heavy-handed censorship and a ubiquitous secret police to quell opposition, especially that related to the Communist movement. He supported Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and, like Franco, kept his nation neutral during World War II. Portugal joined NATO and began the Portuguese Colonial War. The doctrine of Pluricontinentalism was the basis of his territorial policy, a conception of the Portuguese Empire as a unified state that spanned multiple continents. The *Estado Novo* collapsed during the Carnation Revolution of 1974, four years after Salazar's death. Evaluations of his regime have varied, with supporters praising his regime's outcomes and critics denouncing its methods. The general consensus, however, is that Salazar was one of the most influential figures in Portuguese history.

Wikipedia: José de Sousa Saramago (16 November 1922 – 18 June 2010), was a Portuguese writer and recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Literature. His works, **some of which can be seen as allegories, commonly present subversive perspectives on historic events, emphasizing the human factor.** In 2003 Harold Bloom described Saramago as "the most gifted novelist alive in the world today" and in 2010 said he considers Saramago to be "a permanent part of the Western canon", while James Wood praises "the distinctive tone to his fiction because **he narrates his novels as if he were someone both wise and ignorant.**"

A proponent of **libertarian communism**, Saramago criticized institutions such as the Catholic Church, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. Libertarian communism also known as anarcho-communism (also known as anarchist communism, free communism and communist anarchism) is **a theory of anarchism which advocates the abolition of the state, capitalism, wage labour and private property (though some strains retain respect for personal property) and in favor of common ownership of the means of production, direct democracy and a horizontal network of workers' councils with production and consumption based on the guiding principle:** "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need". Some forms of anarchist communism, such as insurrectionary anarchism, are strongly influenced by egoism and radical individualism, believing anarcho-communism is the best social system for the realization of individual freedom. Some anarcho-communists view anarcho-communism as **a way of reconciling the opposition between the individual and society**. Saramago joined the Portuguese Communist Party in 1969 and remained a member until the end of his life. As such he stood for the 1989 Lisbon local election in the list of the Coalition "For Lisbon" and was elected alderman and presiding officer of the Municipal Assembly of Lisbon. Saramago was also a candidate of the Democratic Unity Coalition in all elections to the European Parliament from 1989 to 2009, though was often in positions thought to have no possibility of being elected. His political engagement led to comparisons with George Orwell: "Orwell's hostility to the British Empire runs parallel to Saramago's latter-day crusade against empire in the shape of globalisation." When speaking to *The Observer* in 2006 he said "The painter paints, the musician makes music, the novelist writes novels. But I believe that we all have some influence, not because of the fact that one is an artist, but because we are citizens. **As citizens, we all have an obligation to intervene and become involved, it's the citizen who changes things. I can't imagine myself outside any kind of social or political involvement.**"

An atheist, **he defended love as an instrument to improve the human condition**. The Catholic Church criticised him on numerous occasions due to the content of some of his novels, mainly *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* and *Cain*, in which he uses satire and biblical quotations to present the figure of God in a comical way. The Portuguese government also lambasted his 1991 novel *The Gospel according to Jesus Christ* and struck his nomination for the European Literature Prize, saying the atheist work offended Portuguese Catholic convictions. The book portrays a Christ who, subject to human desires, lives with Mary Magdalene and tries to back out of the crucifixion. Following the Swedish Academy's decision to award Saramago the Nobel Prize in Literature, the Vatican questioned the decision on political grounds, though gave no comment on the aesthetic or literary components of Saramago's work. Saramago responded: "The Vatican is easily scandalized, especially by people from outside. They should just focus on their prayers and leave people in peace. I respect those who believe, but I have no respect for the institution."

The Nobel committee praised his "parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony", and his "modern skepticism" about official truths.

Saramago addresses serious matters with empathy for the human condition and for the isolation of contemporary urban life. His characters struggle with their need to connect with one another, form relations and bond as a community, and also with their need for individuality, and to find meaning and dignity outside of political and economic structures.

The José Saramago Foundation was founded by José Saramago in June 2007, to defend and spread the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to promote the culture in Portugal, and to protect the environment. The José Saramago Foundation is located in Lisbon in the historic Casa dos Bicos. in Lisbon.

José Saramago: Prophet of Doom

**Pessimism is our only hope. The gospel according to José Saramago
by Adam Langer**

Emerging from an elegant luncheon held in his honor into a clear, sunshiny afternoon, Nobel Prize winning author José Saramago says there is only one word to convey his emotional state: "Boredom."

"I don't see people walking," he says through an interpreter when asked if he's enjoying his brief trip to the States, where he's meeting with his American publisher about his forthcoming novel, *The Cave*. "I only see cars. I cannot understand why. I do understand the physical part of it, but I don't understand the human part of it, why people don't walk.... To travel in a car all the time is like being in a spaceship that protects you from everything. But if Americans are happy with this way of life, that's up to them."

This sort of statement is not out of character. Saramago, a devout communist and a self-described pessimist, is given to making sweeping pronouncements. You ask him a basic question and, more often than not, you get a fable or a metaphor in response. The only odd thing about this particular jeremiad against America's automotive culture is where the author has made it: in Manhattan in the middle of the day, after striding nimbly past a crowd of pedestrians who seem through the author's wise, oracular gaze to be invisible. Sometimes you get the impression that Saramago is speaking from an alternate reality, one that only he can see. But what do you mean nobody walks, you ask him—look at all the people on the street. You asked him about America, he says with a sly, toothy and vaguely disquieting grin. "New York is not America."



Photograph by Christina Fallara

Saramago, for his part, was born in Azinhaga, Portugal, to a peasant family in 1922—his grandparents were swineherds, his father was a policeman and a World War I artillery officer, and he himself trained to become an auto mechanic and a metalworker. He came to international fame late, near the age of sixty, having begun his career as a civil servant before working in the Portuguese publishing business as a production manager, translator and editor. He did publish a novel in 1947 (*The Land of Sin*), but he didn't publish another (*Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*) until 1977. "I had nothing worth telling, therefore I remained silent," he has said on more than one occasion.

Over the past twenty-five years, though, Saramago has moved speedily to become the most famous author Portugal has ever produced, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is not only our "strongest living European novelist" but one of the world's few living geniuses, according to author, critic and professor Harold Bloom, whose latest book is, appropriately enough, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*. Saramago now lives on the Canary Islands with his wife, Spanish journalist Pilar del Rio, and their dogs, animals who figure prominently in the author's work as seers, caregivers and creatures more sympathetic and perceptive than humans. He moved there to the island of Lanzarote in 1992 after a feud with the Portuguese government, which, along with the Vatican, denounced his controversial novel *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*.

His books have "a rare largeness of vision," says his English translator, Margaret Jull Costa, who first became aware of the author after reading *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*. Costa, who has translated Saramago's two most recent novels (*All the Names* and *The Cave*) and will translate his next work, *The Duplicated Man*, after it is published in Portuguese this fall, says she "was bowled over by [*The Gospel's*] intelligence and humanity and by its sheer imaginative power." When it comes to addressing moral and political issues, there is perhaps no one since Franz Kafka—one of the writers with whom Saramago is most often compared—who has been able to do it with such great humor and irony. And Saramago arguably surpasses Kafka in terms of his humanity, his ability to render heartbreak in a single sentence. His

characters, he has said, are always "wiser and better than myself."

Speaking to Saramago, though, there is a sense of doom that permeates his speech, a feeling that every sentence he utters has to fairly ooze with philosophical rigor. At the luncheon held to celebrate the publication of *The Cave*, Saramago darkens the collective mood by decrying human behavior, invoking the words of famed Austrian animal behaviorist and fellow Nobel Prize winner Konrad Lorenz: "I have found the link between animal and civilized man; it is us." He repeats the quotation that evening at a speaking engagement with Bloom at the New York Public Library. While sitting in his publisher's office, he observes grimly that "language is dying almost every day; culture is dying every day."

"You may disagree with such a pessimistic vision," he says. "But if there is a way for the world to be transformed for the better, it can only be done by pessimism; optimists will never change the world for the better."

"What does reading do?

You can learn almost everything from reading.

But I read too...

So you must know something.

Now I'm not so sure.

You'll have to read differently then.

How?

The same method doesn't work for everyone, each person has to invent his or her own, whichever suits them best, some people spend their entire lives reading but never get beyond reading the words on the page, they don't understand that the words are merely stepping stones placed across a fast-flowing river, and the reason they're there is so that we can reach the farther shore, it's the other side that matters.

Unless...

Unless what?

Unless those rivers don't have just two shores but many, unless each reader is his or her own shore, and that shore is the only shore worth reaching."

— [José Saramago, *The Cave*](#)

Wikipedia: Dialogue is a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people, and a literary and theatrical form that depicts such an exchange. The term dialogue stems from the Greek *διάλογος* (*dialogos*, conversation); its roots are *διά* (*dia*: through) and *λόγος* (*logos*: speech, reason). As a narrative, philosophical or didactic device, it is chiefly associated in the West with the Socratic dialogue as developed by Plato, — in whose works it is closely associated with the art of dialectic — but antecedents are also found in other traditions including Indian literature. In the 20th century, philosophical treatments of dialogue emerged from thinkers including Mikhail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire, Martin Buber, and David Bohm. Although diverging in many details, these thinkers have articulated a holistic concept of dialogue as a multi-dimensional, dynamic and context-dependent process of creating meaning. Educators such as Freire and Ramón Flecha have also developed a body of theory and technique for using egalitarian dialogue as a pedagogical tool.

Martin Buber assigns dialogue a pivotal position in his theology. His most influential work is titled *I and Thou*.^[18] Buber cherishes and promotes dialogue not as some purposive attempt to reach conclusions or express mere points of view, but as the very prerequisite of authentic relationship between man and man, and between man and God. Buber's thought centers on "true dialogue", which is characterized by openness, honesty, and mutual commitment.

The physicist David Bohm originated a related form of dialogue where a group of people talk together in order to explore their assumptions of thinking, meaning, communication, and social effects. This group consists of ten to thirty people who meet for a few hours regularly or a few continuous days. In a Bohm

dialogue, dialoguers agree to leave behind debate tactics that attempt to convince and, instead, talk from their own experience on subjects that are improvised on the spot.

The Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, known for developing popular education, advanced dialogue as a type of pedagogy. Freire held that dialogued communication allowed students and teachers to learn from one another in an environment characterized by respect and equality. A great advocate for oppressed peoples, Freire was concerned with praxis—action that is informed and linked to people's values. Dialogued pedagogy was not only about deepening understanding; it was also about making positive changes in the world: to make it better.

Wikipedia: Cain and Abel (/kem, 'eɪbəl/; Hebrew: קַיִן, הֶבֶל *Qayin, Hebel*; Arabic: قابيل، هابيل *Qābīl, Hābīl*) were sons of Adam and Eve in the biblical Book of Genesis. Cain, the firstborn, tilled the soil, and his brother Abel was a shepherd. The brothers made sacrifices to God, each of his own produce, but God favoured Abel's sacrifice instead of Cain's. Cain murdered Abel. **God punished Cain to a life of wandering, but set a mark on him so that no man would kill him.** Cain then dwelt in the land of Nod (נֹד, "wandering"), where he built a city and fathered the line of descendants beginning with Enoch. The narrative never explicitly states Cain's motive (though it does describe him as being wrathful, and his motive is traditionally assumed to be envy), nor God's reason for rejecting Cain's sacrifice, nor details on the identity of Cain's wife. Some traditional interpretations consider Cain to be the originator of evil, violence, or greed. According to Genesis, Cain was the first human born and Abel was the first to die.