

**RETRACING
THE STEPS
THAT WERE
TAKEN**

**JOSÉ
SARAMAGO
1922—2022**

SARAMAGO: THE WORK

*I do not separate
the condition of
a writer from
that of a citizen.*

José Saramago's work consists of a wide range of titles covering various literary genres.

At the centre of his body of work is the novel. In his cultivation of this, Saramago has left us, for example, *Baltasar & Blimunda*, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, *Blindness* and *The Elephant's Journey*. He also published short stories, plays, diaries, poetry, chronicles, memoirs and essays.

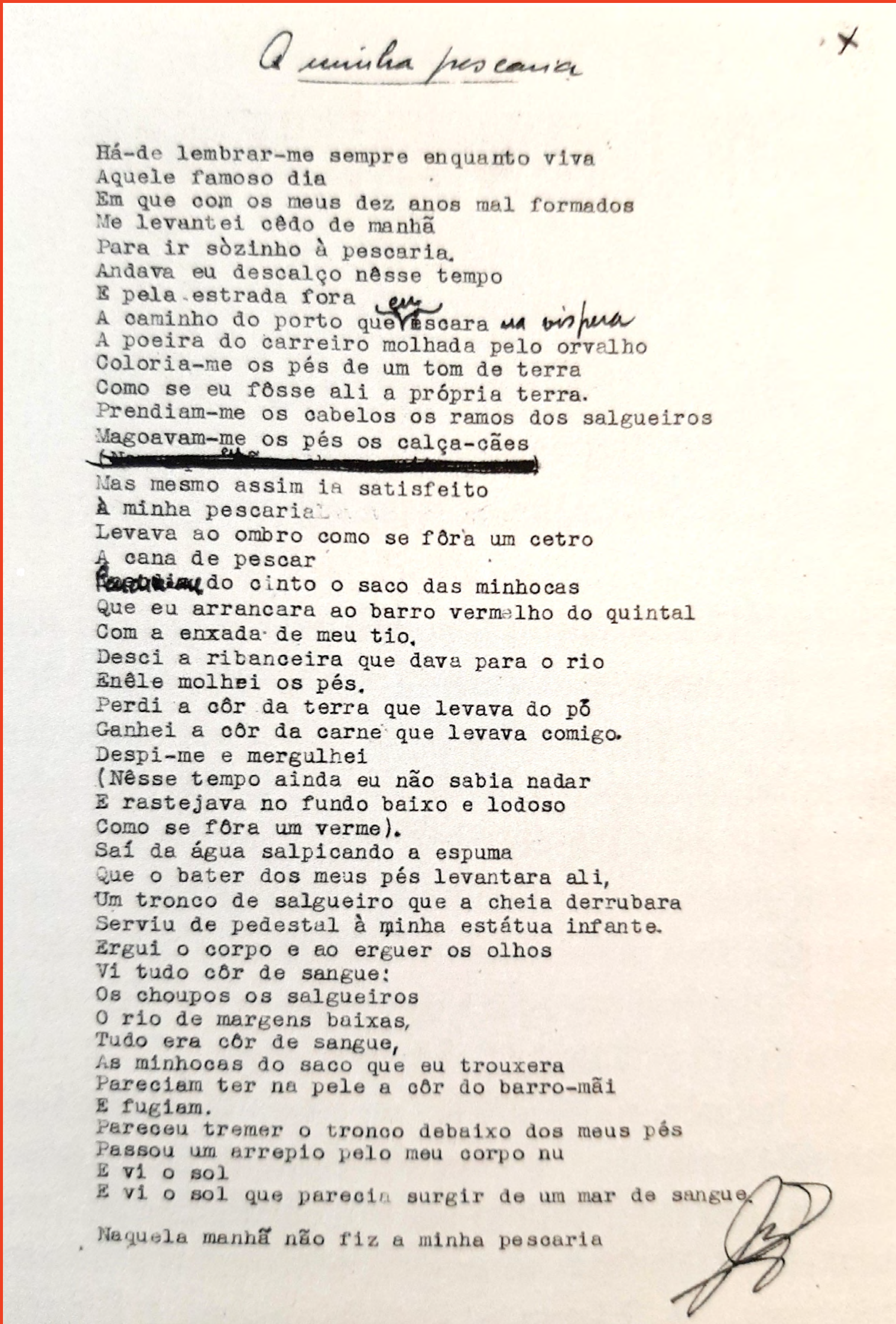
Saramago's work includes major themes and striking characters: amongst others, Blimunda and the Doctor's Wife, Ricardo Reis and Lídia, Maria de Magdala and Senhor José from *All the Names*, several dogs and an elephant. With them, in essays and public interventions, Saramago talks to us about men's relationship with God, love and human cruelty and rebellion against the powerful or the injustices of social life.



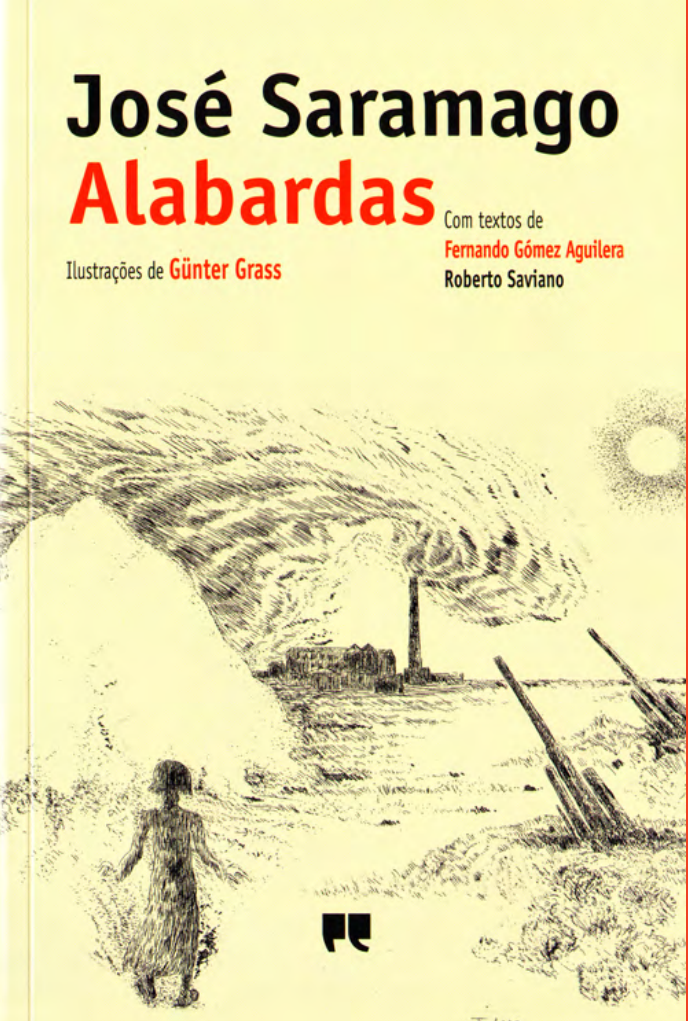
JOSÉ SARAMAGO
IN THE EARLY
1940s.

«Now I can clearly see those who were my life-masters, those who most intensively taught me the hard work of living, those dozens of characters from my novels and plays that right now I see marching past before my eyes, those men and women of paper and ink, those people I believed I was guiding as I the narrator chose according to my whim, obedient to my will as an author, like articulated puppets whose actions could have no more effect on me than the burden and the tension of the strings I moved them with.»

SPEECH IN STOCKHOLM (1998).



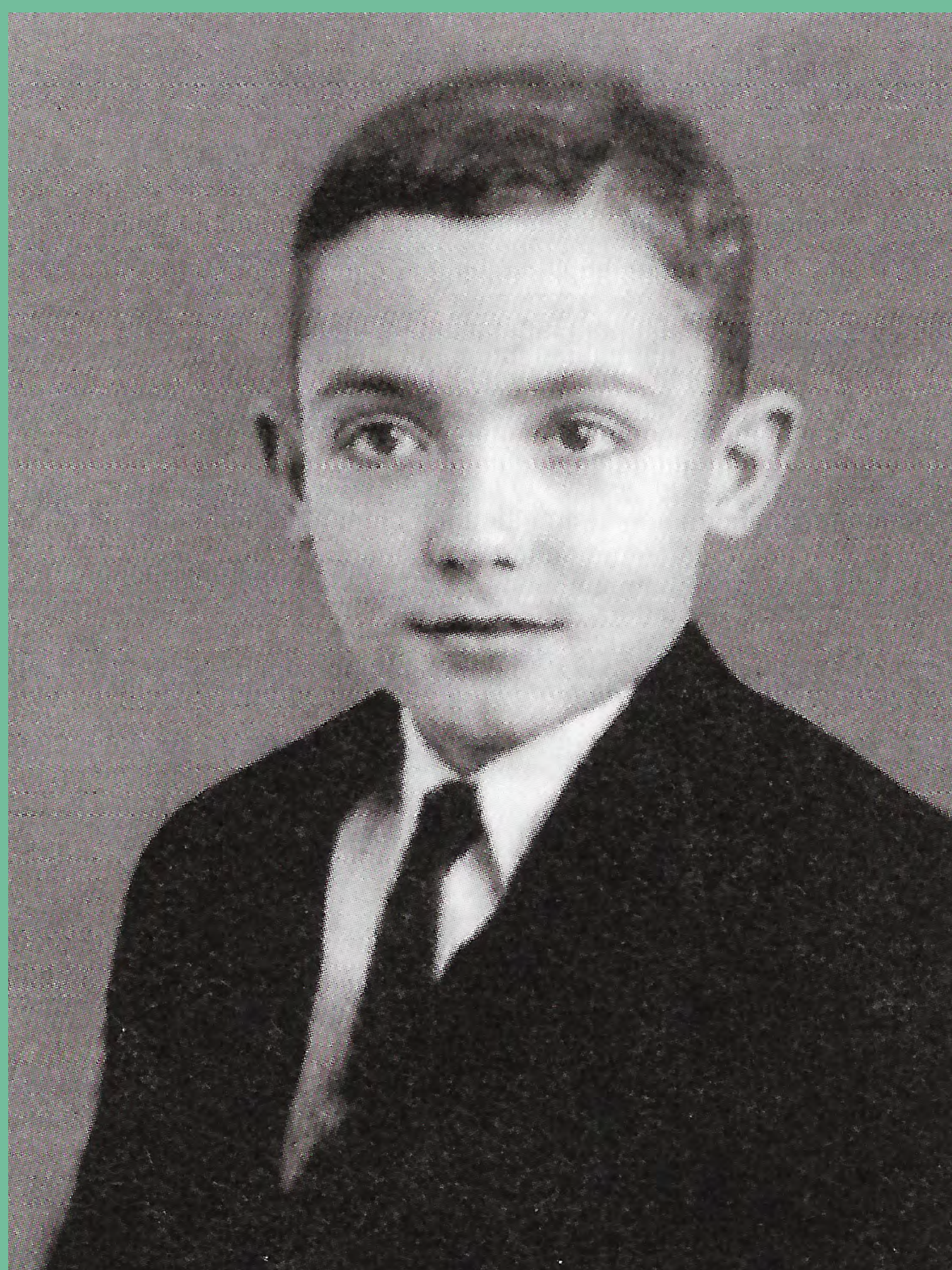
POEM OF YOUTH (UNPUBLISHED).



THE FIRST NOVEL (1947) AND THE LAST, (2014) UNFINISHED.

THE MAKING OF THE WRITER

*From lessons
in poetry,
the youngster
already had some
knowledge.*



JOSÉ SARAMAGO AT THE AGE OF 10.

José Saramago's education was restricted by a social background that did not allow him access to university. In the 1930s, José de Sousa Saramago went to primary school, then attended Gil Vicente High School, later gaining entrance to Afonso Domingues Industrial School.

Literature makes a relatively early appearance in Saramago's life. His initiation into literature was largely self-taught, consisting of occasional but intensive reading. There begins the growth of a literary family tree, its branches being Fernando Pessoa and Kafka, Montaigne and Jorge Luis Borges, Raul Brandão, Garrett and Father António Vieira.

On reaching almost twenty-five years of age, Saramago published *Country of Sin* (1947). A literary silence of almost two decades followed.



JOSÉ SARAMAGO'S STUDENT CARD.

«I remember that a book of mine, my first book, I must have had it when I was twelve or thirteen. (...) When this happened, I was still at Gil Vicente High School, in the first two years of the course that I did not finish, of course. Next, I went to Afonso Domingues Industrial School, when I would have been thirteen; and after that, the whole period of technical education, where there was literature (...). There, I started with textbooks, where I learnt a few things, knowing that there were some gentlemen who were authors. Later I read a lot in Galveias library, at night, until the time I was already working in the workshops of the Civil Hospitals of Lisbon, as a locksmith-mechanic.»

IN CARLOS REIS, *DIALOGUES WITH JOSÉ SARAMAGO*.



GALVEIAS PALACE. PHOTOGRAPH BY A. PORTUGAL (1945).

THE MAKING OF THE WRITER

Everything that is in the novels can be found in the chronicles.



JOSÉ SARAMAGO AT THE 1ST OF MAY DEMONSTRATION IN 1974.

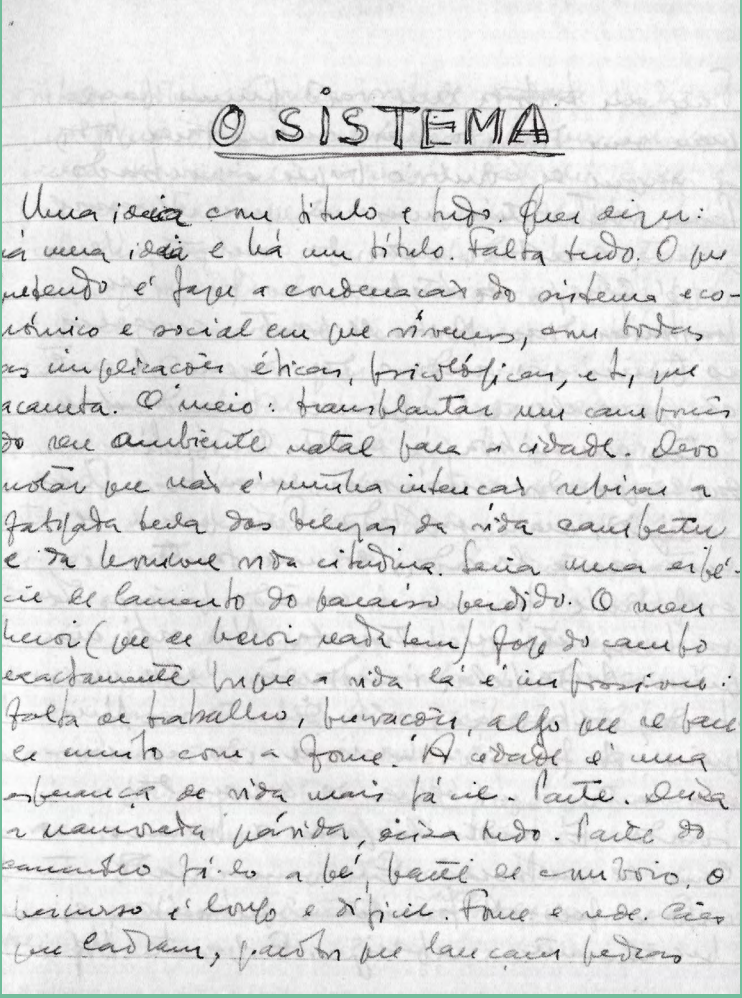
Before his first high-profile novel (*Raised from the Ground*, 1980), José Saramago lived a quiet cultural existence. However, he did not stop publishing, especially in the press; He, who by then, was a writer in the making, left unfinished manuscripts and aborted literary attempts along the way. For example, the novel *Skylight* was only published in 2011, after the author's death.

In the meantime, José Saramago was a translator, an employee at a publishing house, a storyteller and a chronicler. From this last activity, one experience remained that would be of great use to the novelist he was yet to become.

This is also the time of poetry: *Possible Poems* (1966), *Probably Joy* (1970) and *The Year of 1993* (1975), the last of these containing texts already in transition to narrative. Meanwhile, the time for freedom had arrived and with it the writer had gained an acute awareness of himself and his craft. *The Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (1976) bears witness, in an autobiographical tone, to this newfound awareness.

«Having started my literary life very early, since at the age of twenty-five I published a novel that if it wasn't good was bad either, only twenty years later I went back to publishing a book, a fact that certainly induced some people of good will to wonder if the author decided to remain silent for years to gain vital experiences that he could then transfer to literature. Obviously I say no, that no one is sure to live another twenty years.»

THE STATUE AND THE STONE



COVER OF THE FIRST EDITION OF THE NOVEL *MANUAL OF PAINTING AND CALLIGRAPHY*, BESIDE IT, NOTES FOR A NOVEL NEVER WRITTEN (C. 1952).

THE TIME OF THE STATUE

He who portrays, portrays himself.

The second half of the 1970s is decisive for the emergence of themes that José Saramago explores in more depth in his great novels of the 1980s. Thus, authorial responsibility and the application of History in fiction become central to Saramago's literary career.

The *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (1976), represents the triumph of writing as a way of unveiling reality; the short stories in *The Lives of Things* (1978) can be read as embryos of novels to come later; and *Raised from the Ground* (1980), a story with strong social implications, shapes the epic of a group marching towards the liberation of 1974.

The same liberation is dramatized in *The Night* (1979), immediately before the appearance of Camões in *What will I do with this Book?* (1980).



WHAT WILL I DO WITH THIS BOOK? BY GRUPO APOLLO (2010).

«This narrative is about to end. It has lasted the time that was necessary to finish one man and start another. It was important that the face which exists should be recorded and that the first traces of one about to emerge should be sketched out.»

MANUAL OF PAITING AND CALLIGRAPHY

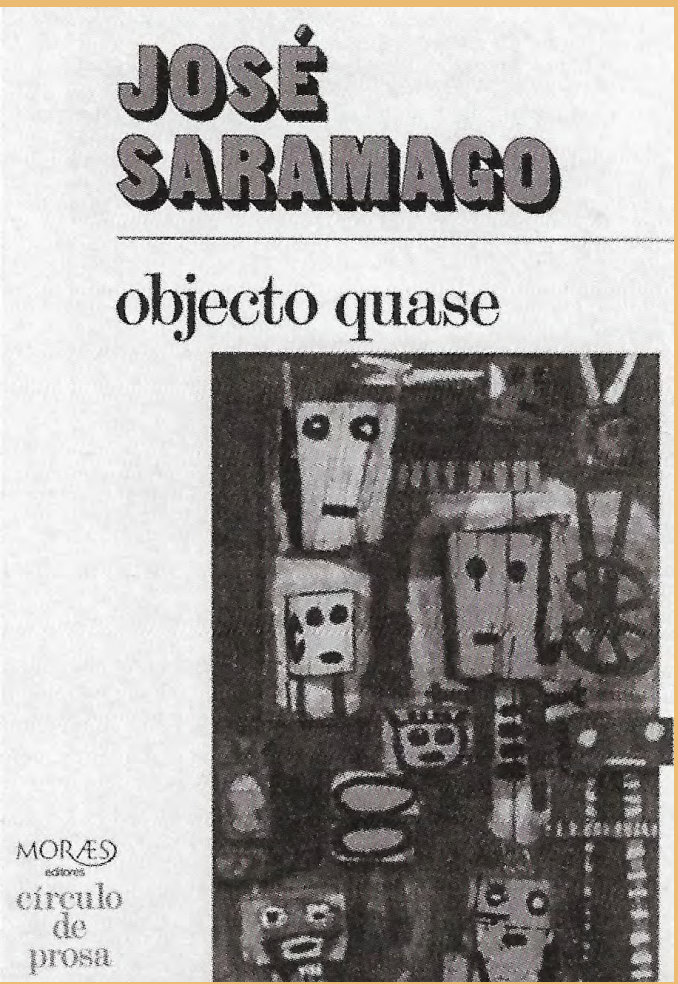
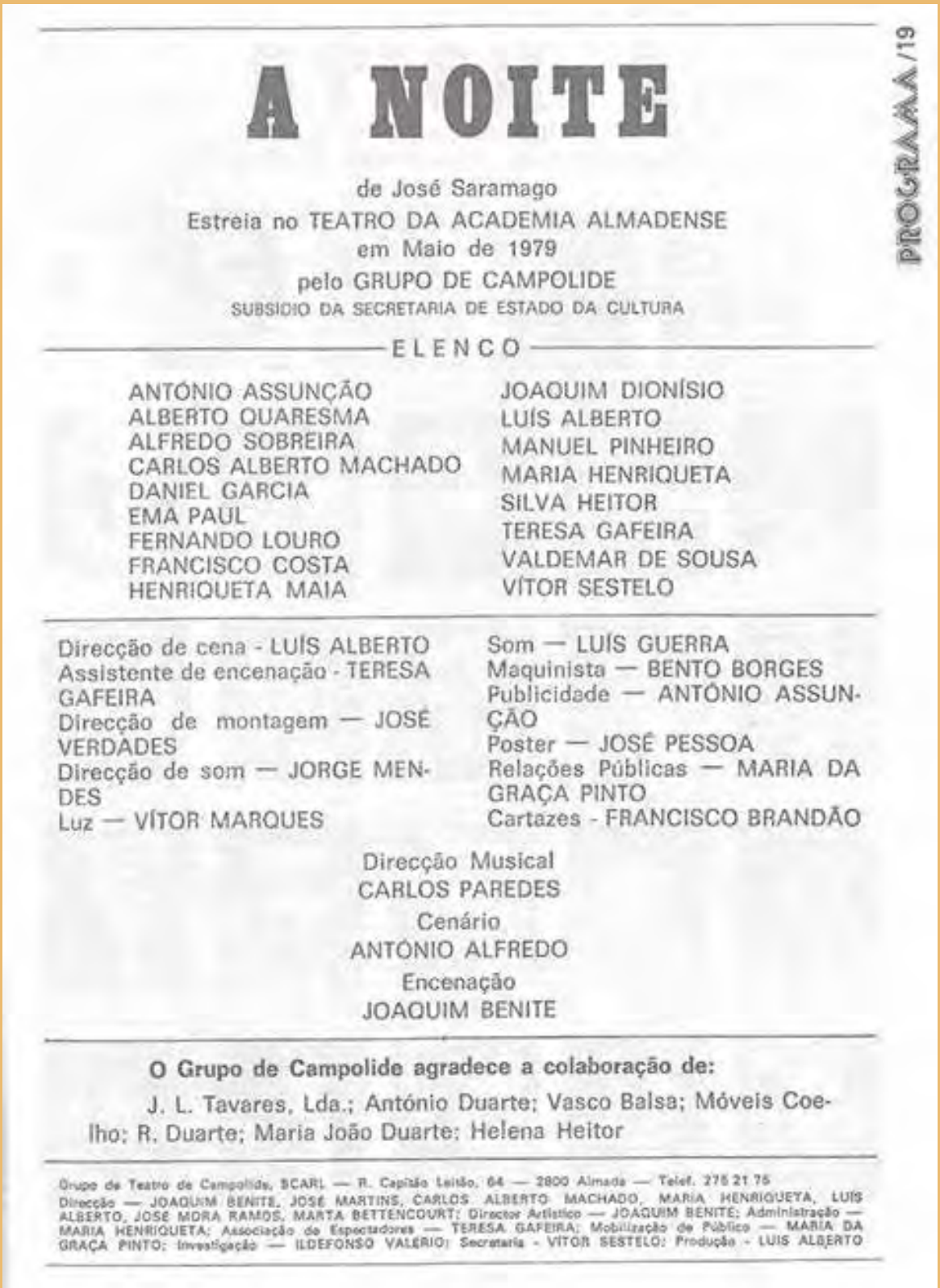


PRESENTATION OF RAISED FROM THE GROUND, CASA DO ALENTEJO, 1980.

«Overhead, the red kite is counting, one million, not to mention those we can't see, for the blindness of the living always overlooks those who went before, one thousand living and one hundred thousand dead, or two million sights rising up from the ground, pick any number and it will always be too small if we do the sums from too great a distance (...).»

RAISED FROM THE GROUND

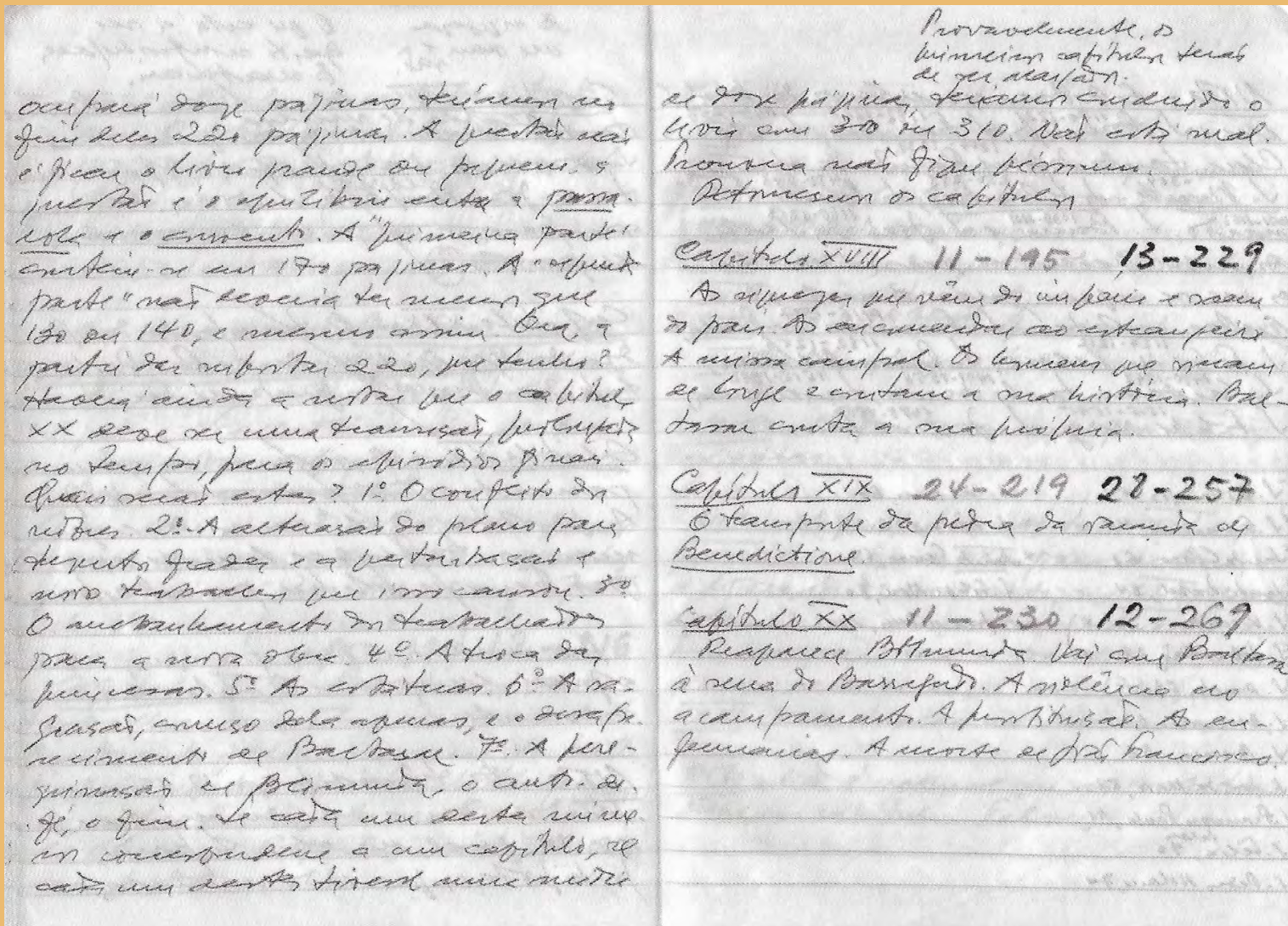
POSTER FOR PREMIERE OF THE NIGHT.



COVER OF THE 1ST EDITION OF THE LIVES OF THINGS.

THE TIME OF THE STATUE

History has
buried millions
of living men.



ABOVE, NOTES FOR THE WRITING OF *BALTASAR AND BLIMUNDA*. ON THE RIGHT, *OS PASSATEMPOS DE EL-REI*, BY JOSÉ SANTA-BÁRBARA.

The purpose, revealed by José Saramago, of "putting this into a novel" made the Convent of Mafra the central element of an ideological revision of history. In it, fiction presents us with obscure characters, others more unusual (such as Blimunda) and a whole revision of "official" historical truths.

Following a similar impulse, Saramago, in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (1984) revives the Pessoaan heteronym. On his return to Portugal, Ricardo Reis engages in a dialogue with Pessoa and casts a discreetly critical eye over Salazarian Portugal and Europe, where totalitarian regimes are emerging.

In a way, these are novels centred on Portugal. On another note, it was a revisiting of Portuguese land that gave rise, in 1981, to *Journey to Portugal*.



«There are other fellows, too, named José, Francisco, and Manuel, very few named Baltasar, but many named João, Álvaro, António and Joaquim, and perhaps even the odd Bartolomeu though never the one who disappeared, as well as Pedro, Vicente, Bento, Bernardo, and Caetano, every possible name for a man is to be found here and every possible kind of existence, too, especially if marked by tribulation and, above all, by poverty (...).»

BALTASAR AND BLIMUNDA

«Let's go then, said Fernando Pessoa, Let's go, agreed Ricardo Reis. Adamastor did not turn around to look, perhaps afraid that if he did, he might let out finally his mighty howl. Here, where the sea ends and the earth awaits.»

THE YEAR OF THE DEATH OF RICARDO REIS



CHICO DIAZ AS RICARDO REIS, IN *THE YEAR OF THE DEATH OF RICARDO REIS*, DIRECTED BY JOÃO BOTELHO.

THE TIME OF THE STATUE

Outside of History
there is nothing.



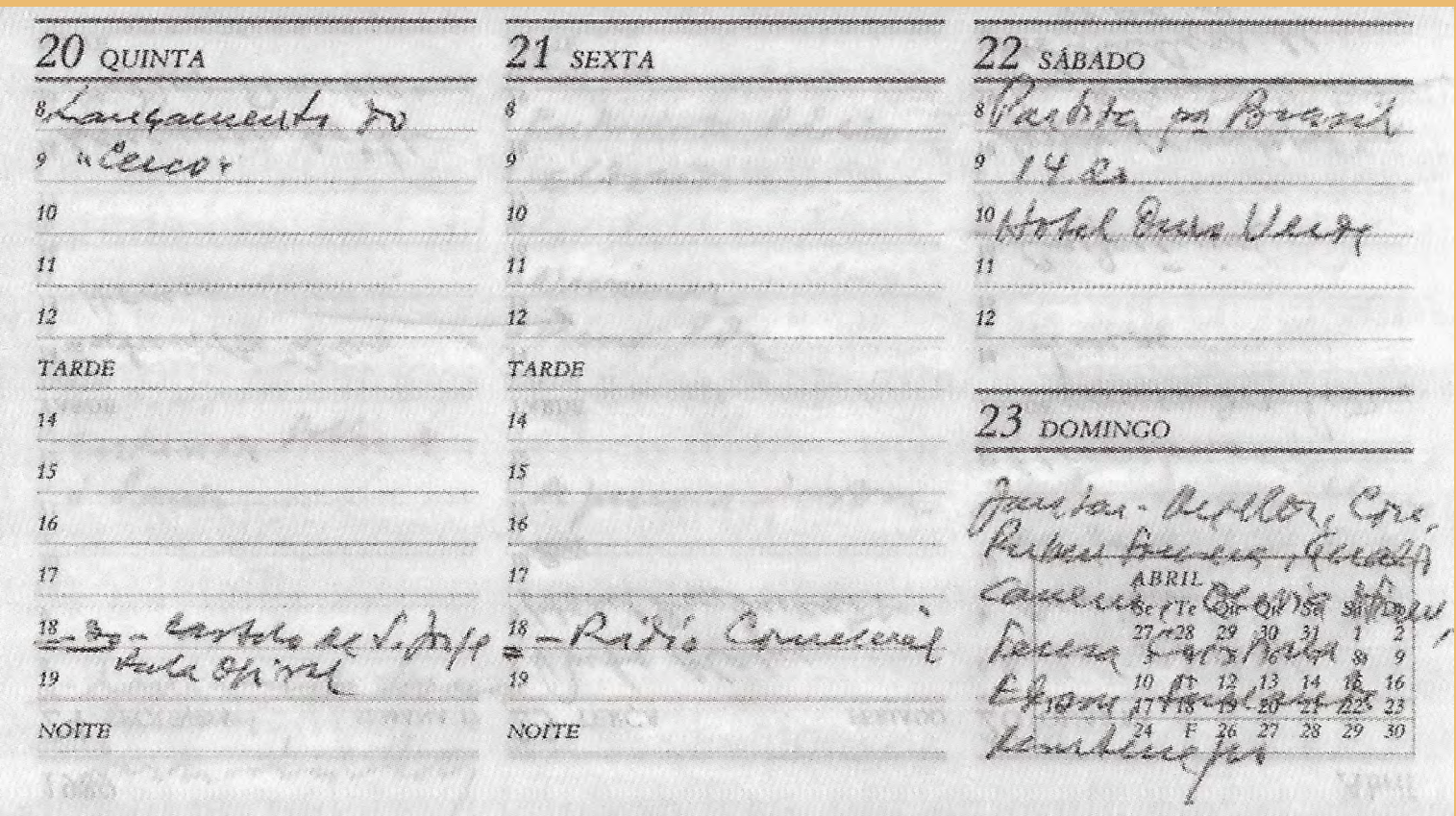
THE STONE RAFT BY
O BANDO THEATRE
COMPANY.

The theme of writing, already present in *The Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*, is further developed in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989). In this case, a truth is presented, that is different from that which was known and is now questioned: the reviewer-writer Raimundo Silva makes evident, through language, a kind of fragility that affects a stable historical episode. Once again, the fiction proposes a subversive and critical knowledge of history.

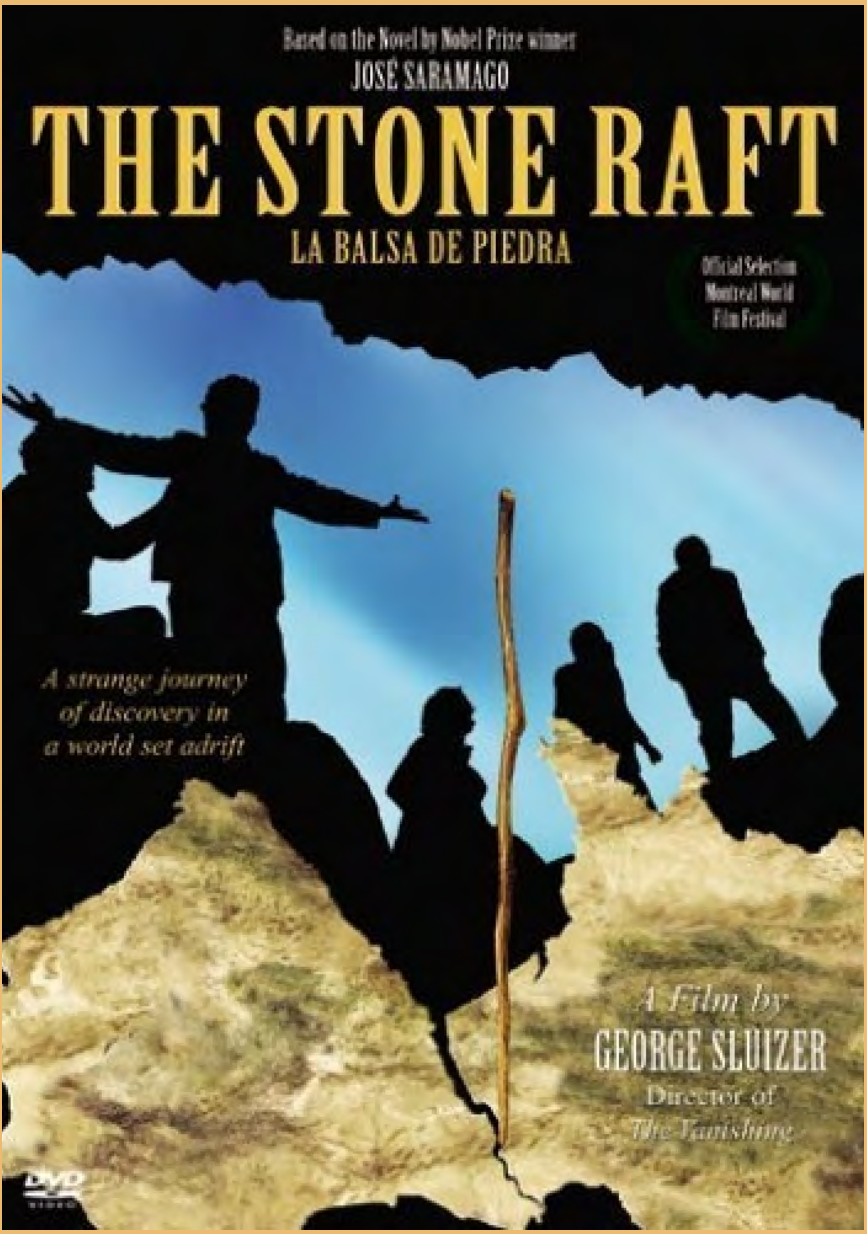
With a different purpose, but still in accordance with History, Saramago constructs an extremely original allegory: that of the Iberian Peninsula separating from Europe. *The Stone Raft* (1986) sails southwards, away from Europe, linking the Portuguese and the Spanish in search of a shared destiny.

«The novel *The Stone Raft* is, all of it, from the first to the last page, the literary consequence of a historical resentment personally assumed. Although the Portuguese ... took, for good and evil, the name and spirit of Europe to other parts of the world, they were then left on the fringes of history.»

LAST LANZAROTE NOTEBOOK



JOSÉ SARAMAGO'S DIARY WITH AN ENTRY FOR THE LAUNCH OF *THE HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF LISBON*.



POSTER OF THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC ADAPTATION OF *THE STONE RAFT* BY GEORGE SLUIZER.

«And what the book now says is that the crusaders will not help the Portuguese to conquer Lisbon, thus it is written and has come to be accepted as true, although different (...), and someone would have to narrate the history anew (...).»

THE HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF LISBON

THE TIME OF THE STATUE

*I am an atheist
produced by
Christianity.*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Saramago published three works that embody his critical relationship with God and Christianity: two plays (*The Second Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, 1987; *In Nomine Dei*, 1993) and a novel: *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991).

The first denounces the degradation of the Christian message of Franciscanism, as well as intolerance and fanaticism (*In Nomine Dei*). In its turn, *The Gospel according to Jesus Christ* is an interpretation of Jesus as a human figure, in his relationship with others and with God. The image that remains of God is that of an authoritarian and oppressive figure, even affecting Jesus, his own creation.

Following the controversy that *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* provoked, with repressive measures taken by the political power of the time, José Saramago went to live in Lanzarote. However, he never considered himself a political exile.

«Jesus realized then that he had been tricked, as the lamb led to sacrifice is tricked, and that his life and been planned for death from the very beginning. Remembering the river of blood and suffering that would flow from his side and flood the globe, he called out to the open sky, where God could be seen smiling, Men, forgiven Him, for He knows not what He has done.»

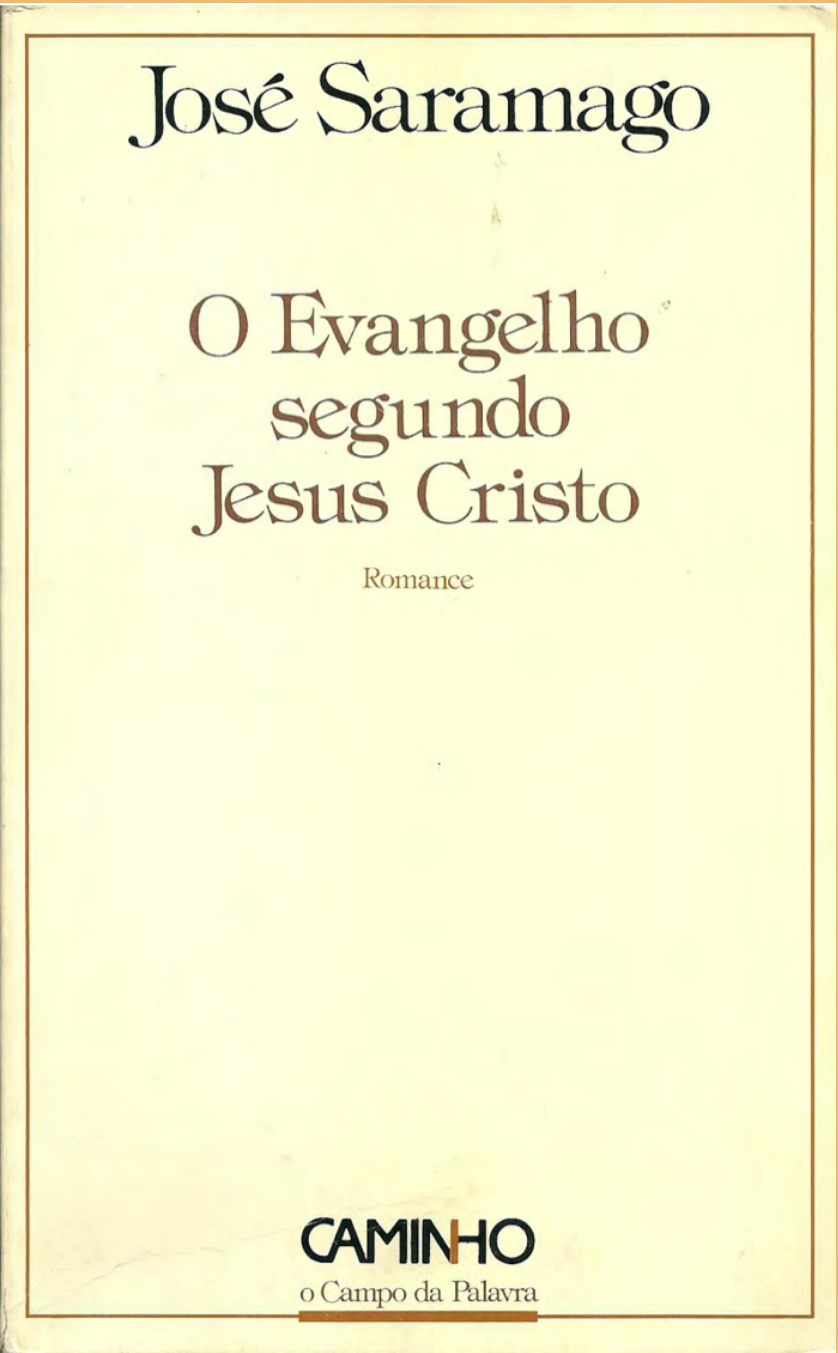
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST, STAGED BY JOSÉ POSSI NETO.

«I have always lived very much at peace with my atheism (...). But there is one thing I am very clear about: if it's true that I'm out of the Church, I'm not out of the cultural world created by it»

INTERVIEW TO O GLOBO (1993).



JOSÉ SARAMAGO IN HIS HOUSE IN LANZAROTE AND THE COVER OF THE FIRST EDITION OF *THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST*.

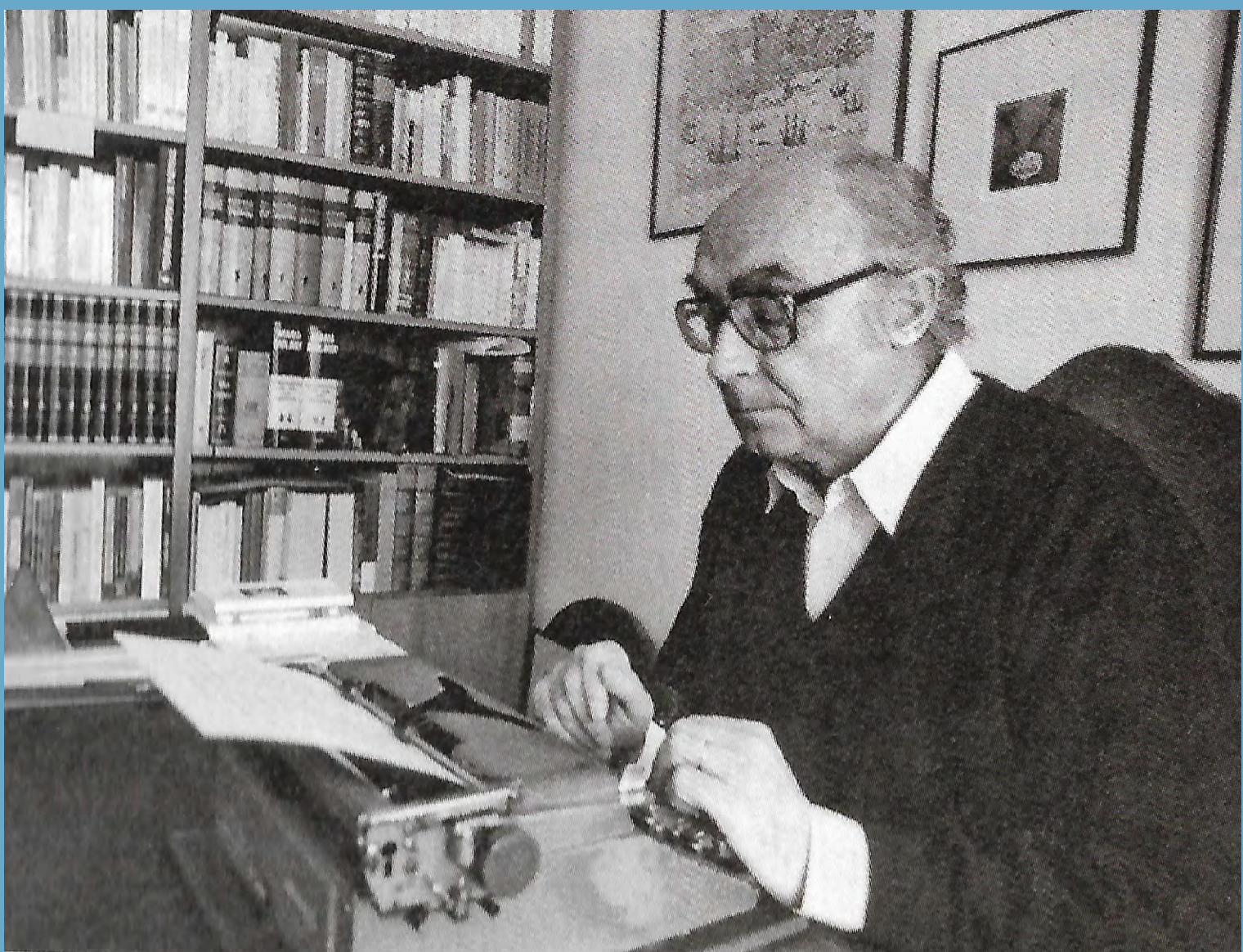
THE TIME OF THE STONE

A metaphor is always the best way of explaining things.

The novels that follow *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* are an attempt to enter "the deepest part of ourselves". We are now in the "time of the stone". With it comes concise writing and, at the same time, allegory becomes a predominant literary process, with a distinct metaphorical feature. The "time of the stone" is thus surpassed, when José Saramago describes "the face, the gesture, the clothes, the figure".

Blindness (1995) and *All the Names* (1997) are novels from the "time of the stone". In the former, a devastating epidemic represents more than physical blindness, it is also a brutal crisis of human reason, the source of cruelty, selfishness, and violence. In the latter, a trivial character devotes himself to the persistent search for an unknown woman; this being a metaphor for the search of another, the search forces a reflection about identity, even after the death of that other.

Meanwhile, in 1995, José Saramago was honoured with the Camões Award.



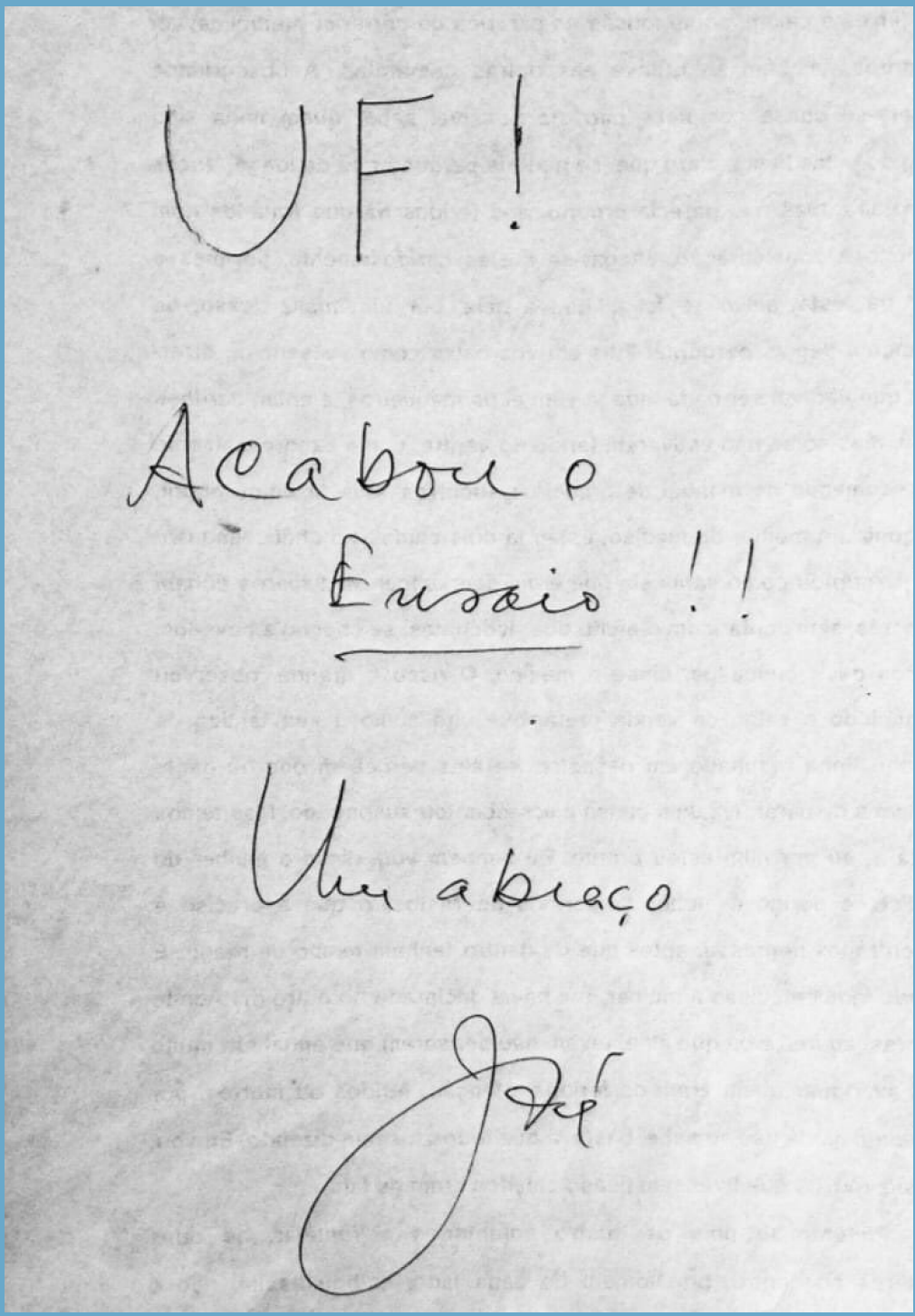
JOSÉ SARAMAGO IN THE LATE 1990s.

«In my novel *Essay on Blindness* I tried, using allegory, to tell the reader that the life we live is not governed by rationality, that we are using reason against reason, against life itself. I have tried to say that reason should never be separated from human respect, that solidarity should not be the exception, but the rule.»

LANZAROTE NOTEBOOKS. DIARY — IV



POSTER FOR FILM ADAPTATION OF *BLINDNESS* BY FERNANDO MEIRELLES.



A MANUSCRIPT BY JOSÉ SARAMAGO WRITTEN ON 8TH AUGUST 1995.

«There was an almost absolute silence, you could scarcely hear the noise made by the cars still out and about in the city. What you could hear most clearly was a muffled sound that rose and fell, like a distant bellows, but Senhor José was used to that, it was the Central Registry breathing.»

ALL THE NAMES

THE TIME OF THE STONE

*If we are like this,
let each of us ask
ourselves why.*



JOSÉ SARAMAGO NOBEL PRIZE.

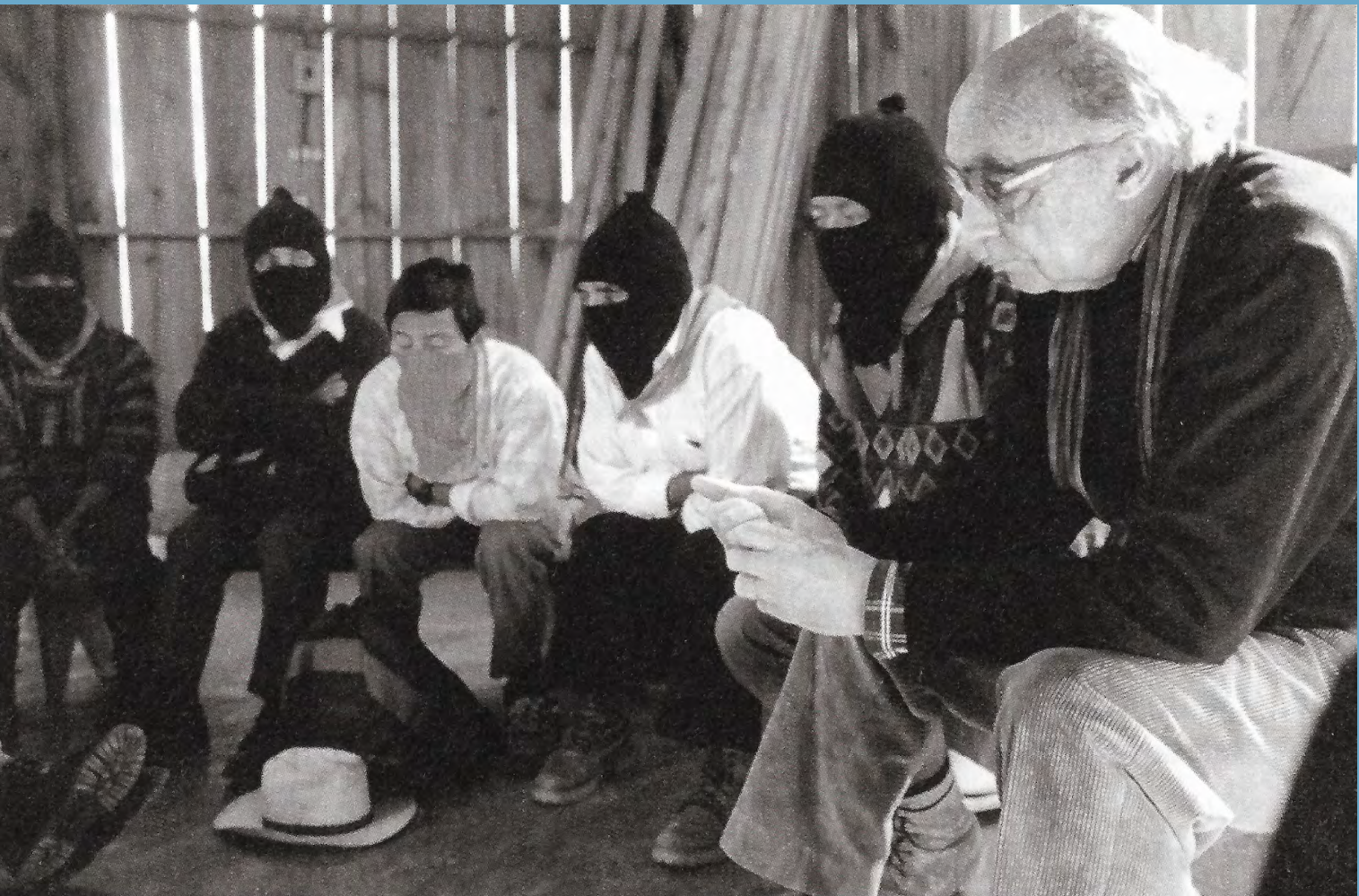
On 8th October 1998, the Swedish Academy announced that Saramago had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. On 10th December, Saramago was handed the Nobel Medal and Diploma by the King of Sweden.

At the turn of the century and the millennium, Saramago's civic and political intervention became more pronounced, along with the growing ethical concern, evident in his novels.

By way of allegory, which harks back to the Platonic myth, *The Cave* (2000) tells us of the violence exerted on the weak in an increasingly globalized and inhuman world. The subject of "the other", already present in *All the Names*, reappears in *The Duplicate* (2002), coupled with the subject of identity and its related meanings: compassionate understanding of the other, respecting difference and bridging the distance between men.

«The Chiapas Indians are not the only humiliated and offended in this world: everywhere and ever, with independence of race, of color, of customs, of culture, of religious belief, the human being who boasts of being always knew how to humiliate and offend those whom, with sad irony, continue to call their fellowmen.»

LANZAROTE NOTEBOOKS. DIARY — IV



ABOVE, JOSÉ SARAMAGO IN CHIAPAS, 1999. BELOW, JOSÉ SARAMAGO WITH GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ.

«Tertuliano Máximo Afonso got up from the chair, knelt down in front of the television, his face as close to the screen as he could get it and still be able to see, It's me, he said, and once more he felt the hairs on his body stand on end, what he was seeing wasn't true, it couldn't be (...).»

THE DOUBLE



POSTER FOR THE FILM ADAPTATION OF *THE DOUBLE* BY DENIS VILLENEUVE.

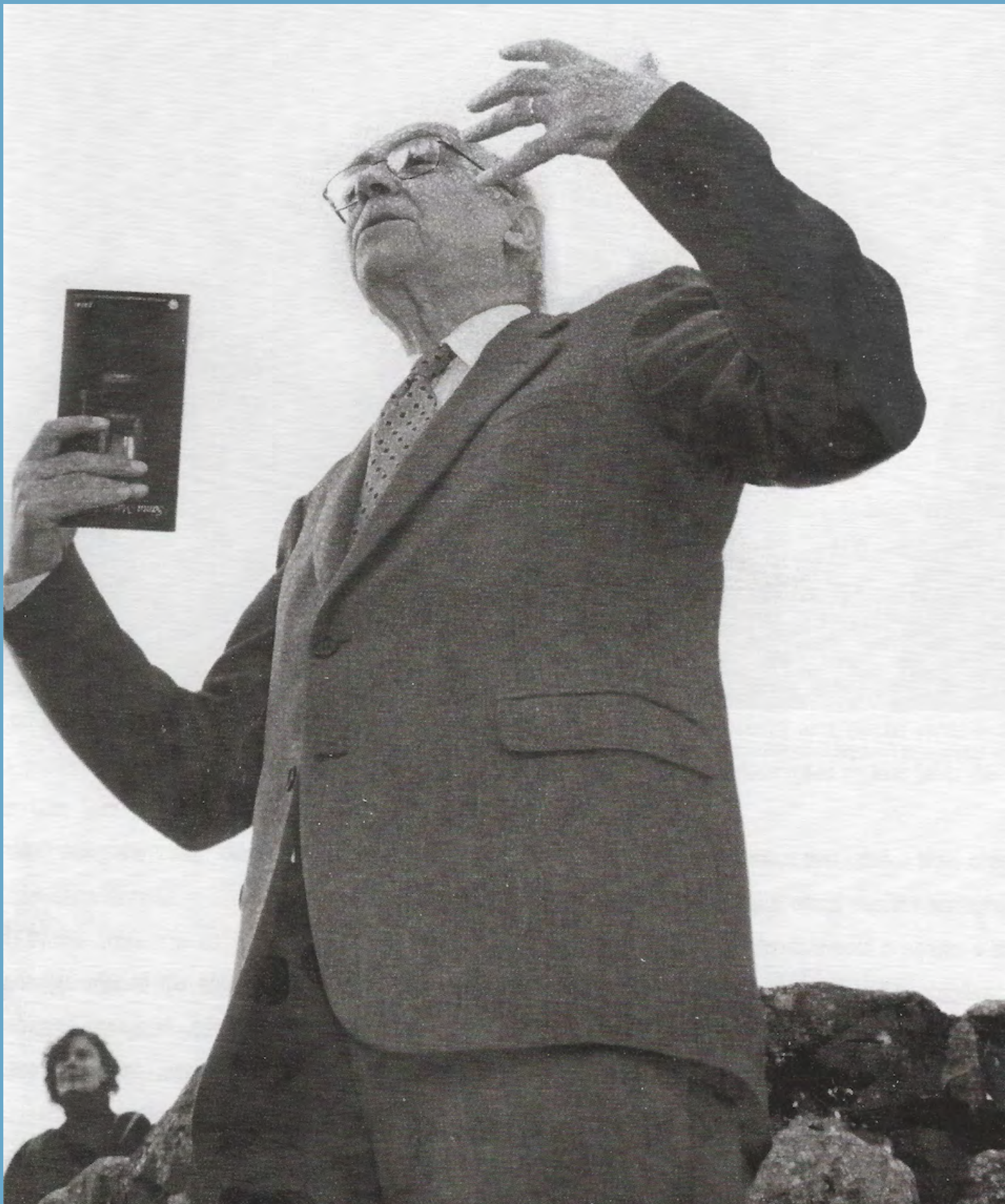
THE TIME OF THE STONE

When a politician lies, he destroys the basis of democracy.

In *Seeing* (2004), we observe the effect of continuity with characters that come from *Blindness*. At the same time, José Saramago insists on combining narrative with essayistic register. The blank ballot epidemic makes this story a novel with a strong political tone, questioning the contradictions of democracy and issuing, what we may call, prophetic warnings.

Again, in an allegorical tone, *Death at Intervals* (2005) is about an unusual situation: the suspension of death. More than an enquiry into immortality, the novel is a fictional digression in a sarcastic tone about the human condition, its fragilities, and contradictions.

Alongside these novels, Saramago returns to theatre and deconstructs a literary myth in *Don Giovanni or, the Dissolute Absolved* (2005). Saramago's text is the libretto for Azio Corghi's opera *Il Dissoluto Assolto*.



JOSÉ SARAMAGO IN 2003.

«Democracy cannot be limited to simply replacing one government with another. We have a formal democracy; we need a substantial democracy.»

EL PAÍS (2004)

«The following day, no one died, this fact, being absolutely contrary to life's rules, provoked enormous and, in the circumstances, perfectly justifiable anxiety in people's minds, for we have only to consider that in the entire forty volumes of universal history there is no mention, not even one exemplary case, of such a phenomenon ever having occurred (...)»

DEATH AT INTERVALS



JOSÉ SARAMAGO AND AZIO CORGHI.



COVER OF THE FIRST EDITION OF DON GIOVANNI, OR THE DISSOLUTE ACQUITTED.



SPANISH EDITION OF DEATH AT INTERRUPTIONS.

THE TIME OF THE STONE

Without God
my work would
be incomplete.

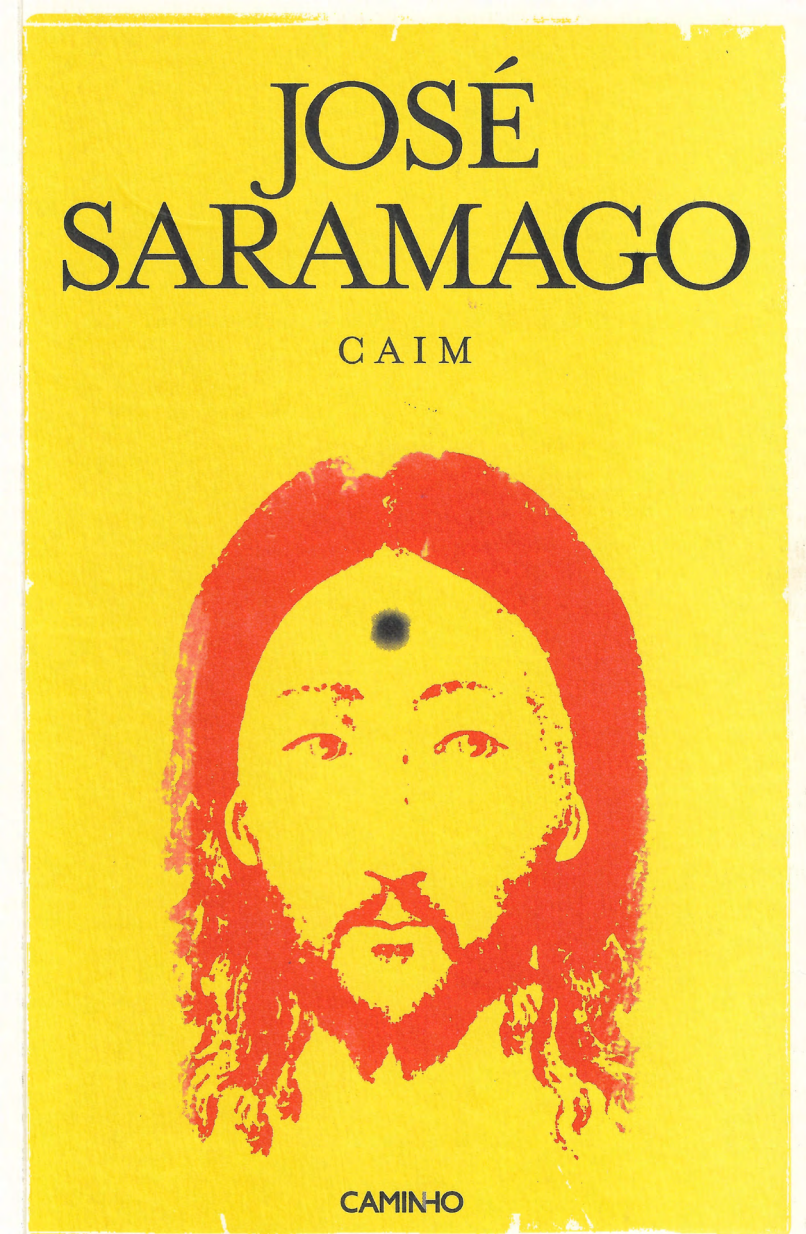
Towards the end of his literary work, José Saramago returns to themes from "time of the statue". "We are our own memory", he states, after publishing the account with which he evokes his childhood, in search of reinventing himself (*Small Memories*, 2006).

After this, José Saramago published *The Elephant's Journey* (2008) and *Cain* (2009). In these final titles, History and God reappear, fundamental elements of an important part of his previous work. Bearing the signature of the first, the episode of the elephant that travelled from Lisbon to the court of the Archduke of Austria at the time of King John III, is fictionally reconstructed; in *Cain*, the figure modelled in the Old Testament with sinister features is refigured as a victim of God's discretion, vindicating a freedom mutilated by its creator.

When José Saramago died on the 18th June 2010, he had only just begun *Alabardas, Alabardas, Espingardas, Espingardas*. In 2011, *Skylight* was published, a novel that has remained unedited.

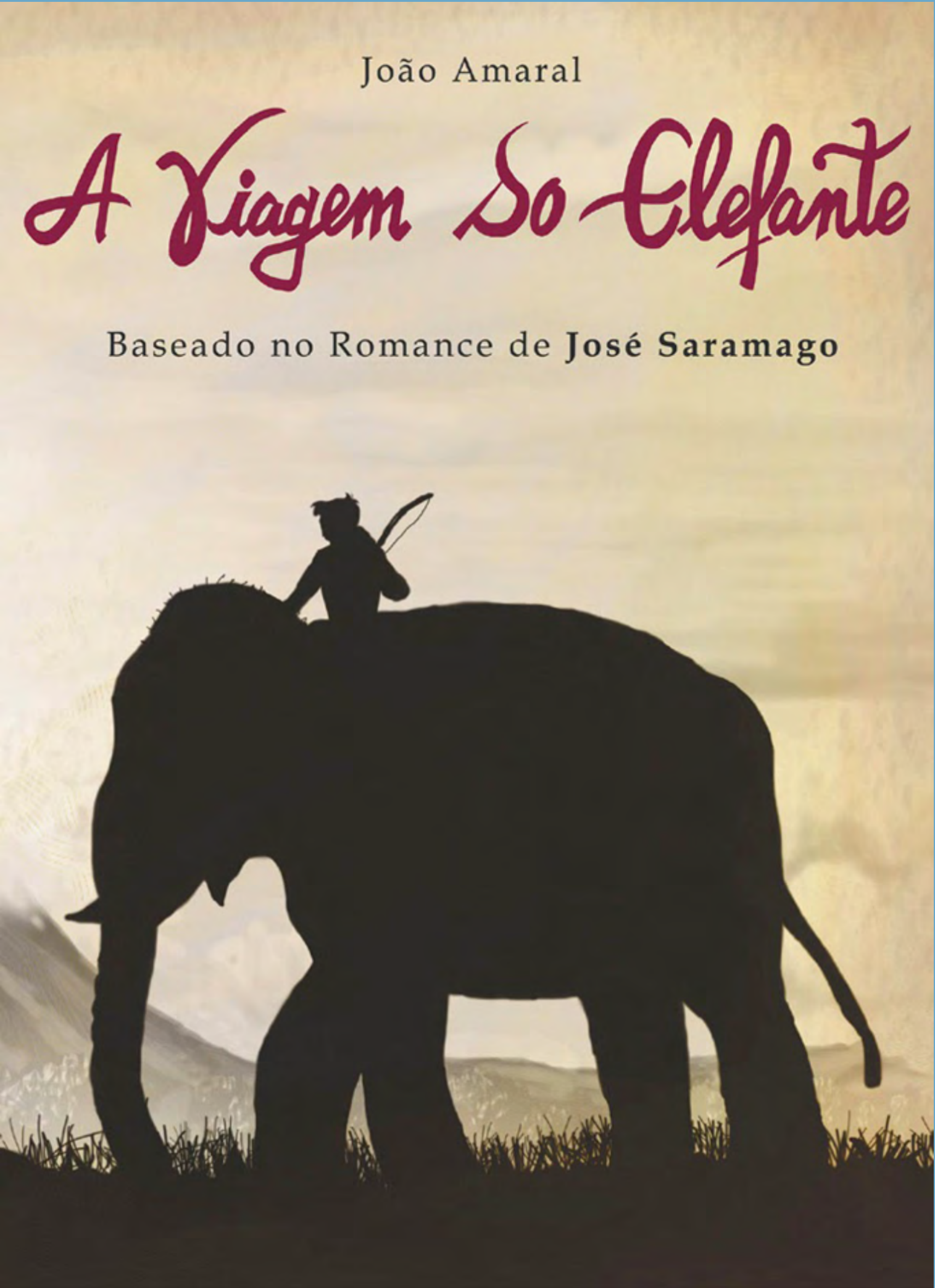


ABOVE, *SKYLIGHT*, BY A BARRACA THEATRE COMPANY. BESIDE IT, THE COVER OF THE FIRST EDITION OF *CAIN*.



«Strange though it may seem to anyone unaware of the importance of the marital bed in the efficient workings of public administrations, regardless of whether that bed has been blessed by church or state or no one at all, the first step of the elephant's extraordinary journey of an elephant to austria, which we propose to describe hereafter, took place in the royal apartments of the portuguese court, more or less at bedtime.»

THE ELEPHANT'S JOURNEY



COVER OF THE COMIC STRIP ALBUM WITH AN ADAPTATION OF THE ELEPHANT'S JOURNEY BY JOÃO AMARAL.

«There was a great silence. Then cain said, Now you can kill me, No, I can't, the word of god cannot be taken back, you will die a natural death on the empty earth, and carrion birds will devour your flesh, Yes, once you have devoured my spirit.»

CAIN

SARAMAGO, A UNIVERSAL WRITER

*I have never been
too concerned
about being
anything other
than what I am.*

Throughout his literary life, José Saramago addressed, in interaction with his literary work, social, ethical and political issues. The growing relevance of these issues in the writer's career explains these words: "I am less and less interested in talking about literature".

Following the example of his grandfather Jerónimo Melrinho, Saramago became a "wise man". In this way, his work gained a dimension of universality that transcends borders and denounces contradictions, that affect human societies in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. The human being at the centre of the writer's concerns is not abstract: he takes concrete form in situations of oppression, abandonment, and social exclusion, in different parts of the world.

Finally, Saramago's social and ethical commitment manifests itself in his call to move from demanding rights to the affirmation of human duties.



JORGE AMADO WITH JOSÉ SARAMAGO.



JOSÉ SARAMAGO SPEAKING AT THE NOBEL AWARD CEREMONY.

«Nobody performs her or his duties. Governments do not, because they do not know, they are not able or they do not wish, or because they are not permitted by those who effectively govern the world: The multinational and pluricontinental companies whose power — absolutely non-democratic — reduce to next to nothing what is left of the ideal of democracy. (...) Let us comon citizens therefore speak up. With the same vehemence as when we demanded our rights, let us demand responsibility over our duties. Perhaps the world could turn a little better.»

SPEECH IN STOCKHOLM (1998).



TERRA, THE PHOTOGRAPHIC BOOK BY SEBASTIÃO SALGADO, PORTRAYING MARGINALIZED AND DISPOSSESSED GROUPS IN BRAZIL, WITH A PREFACE BY JOSÉ SARAMAGO.

SARAMAGO, A UNIVERSAL WRITER

*The human being
is the subject
of my work.*

JOSÉ SARAMAGO
AND PILAR DEL RÍO,
IN *JOSÉ AND PILAR*,
BY MIGUEL
GONÇALVES
MENDES.



The legacy of a writer is made up of the works he leaves to posterity and by his thoughts, especially when, as in the case of José Saramago, those thoughts point to the future.

Saramago's work is alive, first of all, in the minds of his countless readers, in many languages, all over the world. Furthermore, it has given rise to countless artistic manifestations which adapt Saramagian texts and, in other languages, articulate his greater meanings.

In cinema, theatre, television, comics, opera and ballet, as well as in various exhibitions, the Saramagian message remains current and active. Also, in the places where the writer lived and where he left his collection: the José Saramago Foundation, in Lisbon and in Azinhaga, as well as in Lanzarote, the house where he spent the last years of his life.



JOSÉ SARAMAGO FOUNDATION.

«Converted into an apotheosis of light and color between space and the sea, we are, human beings, this bright, shimmering white foam, which has a brief life, which fires a brief glow, generations and generations that are succeeding each other transported by the sea that is time. (...) That is why I prefer to talk more about life than literature, without forgetting that literature is in life and that we will always have before us the ambition to make literature life»

THE STATUE AND THE STONE



EXHIBITION OS PONTOS E A VISTA, BY MARCELLO DANTAS.

«Being a fully-fledged citizen, or the best one can be, to assume one's own responsibility, one's duties and one's rights ... Takes a lot of work.»

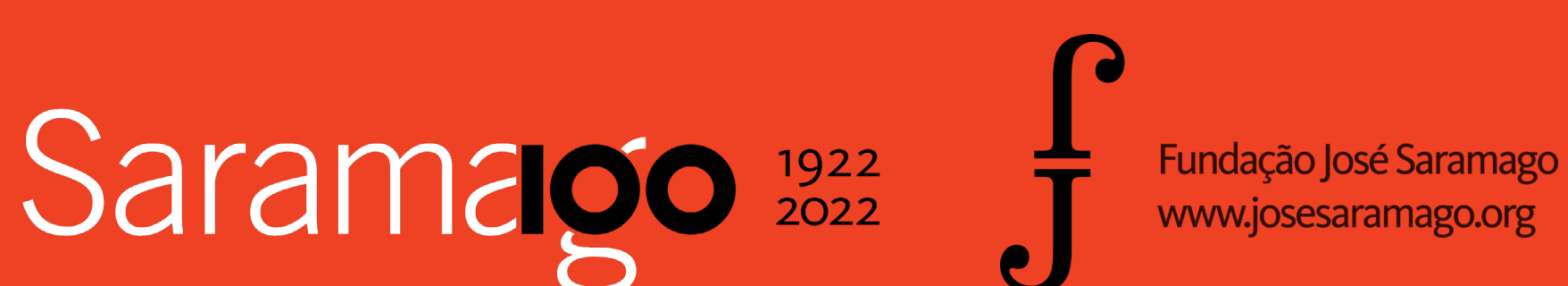
IN JORGE HALPERÍN, CONVERSACIONES CON SARAMAGO.

«That this civilization – and I am not just referring to what we call western in a simplistic way – is coming to an end seems to be an indisputable issue for the whole world.»

THE LAST LANZAROTE NOTEBOOK

RETRACING THE STEPS THAT WERE TAKEN JOSÉ SARAMAGO 1922—2022

Exhibition conceived as part of the commemorations
of the Centenary of José Saramago



Commissioner for the José Saramago Centennial: Carlos Reis
Text selection and composition: Carlos Reis e Fernanda Costa
Design: André Letria
Revision: Fernanda Costa
Translation: Rachel Collingwood-Smith

The photographs used in this exhibition
are from the José Saramago Foundation archive.



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