

Intelligence, Creativity and Fantasy in *Baltasar and Blimunda*, by José Saramago

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Abstract

In *Baltasar and Blimunda*, by José Saramago, intelligence, creativity and fantasy are present in two ways: 1) in the creation of the novel, visible in the way of telling, in style, in the wide range of knowledge presented, in the plot, in the situations and the most powerful characters; 2) in the content of the novel, through reflection, action, especially the construction of the Passarola and the construction of the Convent, and characters, like Bartolomeu Lourenço and Domenico Scarlatti.

However, according to historiographic metafiction and postmodern historical fiction, Saramago adds to the presence of these faculties and the results they produce in the novel a questioning in the way of Brecht's poem "Questions From a Worker Who Reads", bringing to the forefront the anonymous workers.

Keywords: *Baltasar and Blimunda*, Creativity, Fantasy, Intelligence, José Saramago.

1. Introduction

As we know, intelligence, creativity and fantasy maintain among themselves a close relationship. The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio considers that any of these faculties is dependent on consciousness (2010, p. 21-22) and the correlative existence of an I (2010, p. 31), a Self where feelings also play a fundamental role (2017, p. 195).

Regarding intelligence, Damasio defines it as "the ability to manipulate the knowledge so that new solutions can be planned and executed", which is based on what he calls "Extended Consciousness, enlarged consciousness or autobiographical", "dominated both by the past lived and the future anticipated" (2010, p. 213).

About human creativity, Damasio believes that this is based on the life and on the fact that this "comes equipped with a precise order: resist and project itself to the future" (2017, p. 50). In this sense, he defines it as "the ability to create new ideas and new things" (2000, p. 359), but he considers that, in addition to consciousness, creativity "Requires an abundant memory of facts and skills, abundant memory work, high-capacity for reasoning, language" (2000, p. 359).

However, he stresses that "consciousness is always present in the creative process", guiding it with its revelations (2000, p. 358). In his view, it is these that inspire all inventions made by Man in all areas. We should also add that Damasio (2017) includes subjectivity and integrated experience in consciousness (p. 204), and it must be emphasised that this experience includes "our past and future memories" (p. 141), an essential material for the imaginative process.

About this process, indispensable for the creation of fantasy, Damasio tells us that it "consists in the recollection of images and its later manipulation (2010, p. 190). In another book, he reminds us that

"remembering past images is essential to the process of imagination, which is the playground of creativity" (2017, p. 140). But he also warns us that "much of what we memorise is not about the past, but about the anticipated future, and that "The creative process is being recorded for the possible and practical future" (2017, p. 141). However, the creative process goes further, especially in Literature and in the Arts, for they not only create possible worlds but create impossible worlds too, which we may call Fantasy, meaning here "the faculty or activity of imagining impossible or improbable things".

In the field of literature but also film, television, video and computer games, such a classification applies to cultural artefacts that fall into the category of possible and impossible worlds, whose features raise logical and ontological issues, according to the definition of Françoise Lavocat (2016):

A possible fictional world is an alternative state of things, stipulated by linguistic constructions, still or moving images or playful interactions (pos.7794, our translation);

and

Impossible worlds, from the logical point of view and from the physical and physiological laws that govern them, they seem to suffer from an ontological deficit, which affects the characters' bodies in particular (pos. 9096).

2. Baltasar and Blimunda

In our opinion, José Saramago's *Baltasar and Blimunda* mobilises intelligence, creativity and fantasy, in two ways: firstly, this presence is revealed in the creation of the novel, which necessarily involves at least two of these characteristics, visible in the form of storytelling, in the style, in the wide range of knowledge presented, in the plot, in the situations and in the

very powerful characters, most marginalized, chosen among "God's favourites", because "God has a weakness for madmen, the disabled, and eccentrics" (Saramago, p. 185). Secondly, the content of the novel institutes them as a theme, through action, characters and reflection.

But Saramago goes far beyond the representation of these faculties, for, according to historiographic metafiction and postmodern historical fiction, and in the way of Brecht's poem "Questions From a Worker Who Reads", he comes to question and prove that individual intelligence, creativity and fantasy are not enough to do most of the artefacts whose conception and execution take place in the novel.

So, the novel implies questions like: Who is in charge? Who pays? Who conceives? Who knows? Who performs? How is it executed? Who contemplates? Who is in History?

3. Intelligence and creativity in the creation of the novel

In announcing the award of The Nobel Prize in Literature 1998 to José Saramago, the Swedish Academy recognises and rewards the role of the imagination in Saramago's work, therefore, his creativity and, by this way, also his intelligence and fantasy, present in all his work, endowing it with indisputable originality.

In *Baltasar and Blimunda*, this originality manifests itself in many ways, but in our analysis, we will highlight the plot, the characters, and the full range of knowledge presented.

Concerning the plot and the emplotment process, we consider as Ricoeur (1989, p. 25) and Kukkonen (2014), that

The term plot designates the ways in which the events and characters' actions in a story are arranged and how this arrangement in turn facilitates identification of their motivations and consequences.

However, extending this concept in order to integrate already the theory of possible worlds, according to which plot is "the complex network of relations between the factual and the nonfactual, the actual and the virtual (Ryan, 2013).

In fact, in the novel, as the quotation from Marguerite Yourcenar in the epigraphs announces, the content will not be limited to the real and the plausible, but it must surpass this border, already if floating, and prowess probably the worlds produced by the fantasy, fact that the reading will confirm.

Indeed, the subjects chosen for the plot refer to the historical reality, the possible and the impossible. But also the emplotment is undoubtedly one of the essential points of the author's work, which shows his intelligence and creativity, and, together with the narrator's attitude, allows the construction of ideological messages, which must be decoded by

the reader.

Composed of several narrative threads, factual and fictional, the emplotment establishes between these and its characters contrasts that illuminate each one of them. In this way, the story of the pair King / Queen contrasts with that of Baltasar / Blimunda; the Convent's construction contrasts with the Passarola's construction. It is the Baltasar / Blimunda pair that establishes unity among all these threads.

In our opinion, this plot installs a dark-light set similar to baroque art and it could fit the notion of "negative plotting" proposed by Susan Lanser (2011), which, according to Kukkonen (2014), "outlines how competing plots, "one shadowing the other," become meaningful in their mutual contrast, negotiate different narrative perspectives and broker the struggle for interpretive dominance".

In fact, in *Baltasar and Blimunda*, the contrast established between narrative threads and the characters themselves forms a mirror effect, in which each story or character is constituted as the negative of the other, also producing an effect similar to that of a "counterfactual" narrative, stimulating the reader to formulate hypotheses on the alternatives that answer the question "What if ...". However, in this novel, an alternative is already held in the opposite narrative thread. Moreover, the flight of Bartolomeu de Gusmão is, in fact, counterfactual, because it did not happen in historical reality.

In her studies on Coincidence and Counterfactuality, Hilary Dannenberg considers that "counterfactuality is a principle of divergence that makes visible a vast horizon of alternative stories" (Ryan, 2013). To the same author,

In alternative history (i.e., narrative ascribing a different life to historical figures), counterfactuality invites the reader to make a comparison between the fictional world and the actual world that precludes total immersion in the fictional world, since the reader must keep an eye on actual history (apud Ryan, 2013),

and

In realist narrative, it appears as the "what if" reasoning through which the narrator or the characters themselves evaluate situations or ponder the future (Ryan, 2013).

In *Baltasar and Blimunda*, if stories and events are not mostly historically counterfactual, in our view, the way the plot is constructed produces a similar effect, inevitably leading the reader to compare the various worlds of fiction among themselves, but also these worlds and his actual world.

In this sense, if we consider the various types of plot systematized by Kukkonen (2014), "(1) Plot as a fixed, global structure; (2a) Plot as progressive structuration; (2b) Plot as part of the authorial

design”, we would say that this Saramago’s novel combines above all the last two models, but with a predominance of the latter.

In fact, the construction of the plot is oriented, preferably, to the control of reception, in order to direct the reader’s emotional reactions and interpretative movements, in a clear ideological perspective, visible, for example, in the order of narration of events and in the quantity and quality of data provided to the reader on each of the narrative threads.

The wish to control reception becomes very clear in the paratextual elements, which vary in different languages and editions, both in the novel’s titles and in the covers’ image, which clearly suit the target audience (see Yuste Frías, “Paratranslation”). On the subject chosen, it is known that Saramago seeks it out of History, but to this, he adds totally or partly fictitious events and characters, a fact that establishes immediately the question of the relation and crossing between truth and fiction, to which the novel adds still another dichotomy: verisimilitude and unlikelihood.

Having been admitted by the author himself that this is a historical novel, this does not prevent that the real world, possible and impossible worlds, referential and fictional or hybrid characters interact throughout the novel, and that, in certain cases, historical truth is overcome and altered by fiction, such as the case of the Passarola flight.

As far as facts and historical figures are concerned, they are re-evaluated here and subjected to a new analysis to which the reader is invited to contribute, in an attitude informed by the New History, well-known to the author, especially through his translations of Georges Duby, but also by the Poetics of Postmodernism. Regarding the first and Duby, Saramago wrote in his Diary of December 3, 1996, that without them “perhaps *Baltasar and Blimunda* (...) did not exist” (1997, p. 262, apud Flores, 2010, p. 50).

On this subject, Saramago himself clarifies this question by attributing to the novelist the function of “correcting History” by replacing “what was for what it could have been” (Saramago, 1990, p. 18, apud Figueiredo, 2014, p. 16). The Convent of Mafra’s construction and the Padre Bartolomeu Lourenço’s researches for the construction of the Passarola are indeed historical facts. D. João V, his wife and children, Padre Bartolomeu and Domenico Scarlatti are referential and historical characters, playing thematic roles at certain moments.

However, if this is a constraint on the author’s inventiveness, he easily surpasses it by creating wholly or partly fictitious events and figures that interact with the real ones, and through metaleptic procedures, effecting a blurring of boundaries between these different worlds (cf. Lavocat, 2016, pos. 7802).

With regard to events, the ideological positioning of the author and his narrator leads them, for example, to give a great textual highlight to the flight of the Passarola, a counterfactual event, allowing and promoting an attitude of empathy of the reader, while the Convent of Mafra, event and historical monument, is never shown, in order to prevent his empathy and to create an attitude of distancing (Brecht), in favour of a rational analysis of the facts. In the Convent’s case, the reader is exposed to the greatness of the effort expended by the workers and never to the result of this work, thus exalting the one who makes and minimising the one who remained in History, thus promoting a new reading of History.

In the same sense, the figure of the mighty king D. João V, playing here above all the thematic role of King (Figueiredo, 2014, p. 32), is subjected to a parody view, which deprives him of his glory and majesty, operating a practice of carnivalization, in Bakhtin’s way, and thus preventing an attitude of identification on the part of the reader.

In both cases, Saramago exalts the power of fiction and decreases the power of reality.

This summons the distinction between reference types in fiction, which Lavocat systematised in three different ways: The extra-fictional reference (the denotation), the inter-fictional reference and the intra-fictional reference (2016, pos. 7884).

In this perspective, despite the mixture between historical facts and fictitious events and the interaction between historical and fictional characters in the novel, the difference of status and ontology remains, according to Lavocat, to whom fiction has privileges compared to the real world (2016, pos. 8101)

In the case of this novel, the fictional characters Baltasar and Blimunda (this one not entirely fictitious) assume a preponderant role in the novel, overlapping in relief to the royal couple, whose power and importance History registered.

Regarding the character’s narrative category, we remember what Helena Kaufman (1991) says about the Saramago’s characters, considering that they are atypical, “defective, ugly, rough, violent” (p. 130) and they are “ex-centric”,

because they are marginalized by historical account, bringing a new view of events, and because they are particularly different from most of their milieu (p. 129).

In the novel, Padre Bartolomeu Lourenço with his heresies and his wish to fly, Baltasar Mateus one-handed and Blimunda with her supernatural powers, fall into this description.

Concerning Blimunda, whose powers are applied in the construction of the Passarola and in the collection of Baltasar’s will at the end of the novel, Kaufman considers that she introduces the implausible and the wonderful in the novel and

combines the "realism of a popular protagonist with the fantastic and the fictional (1991, p. 130). The choice of the novel's subject and the temporal location of the action, Portugal of the eighteenth century, allowed the author to expose a broad panorama that involves vast knowledge in several areas: History, Religion, Society, Economics, Science, Arts. The narrator manipulates it, obeying the author's interests in questioning History and the way historians told it. By doing so, they compel the reader in varying his reading model, alternating between the top/down, bottom/up and interactive models, in order to adapt his reading process to the requirements of a text that continually surprises his expectations and requires his cooperation. The Religion, in particular, offers the author the possibility of setting events of great spectacular and theatrical effect consistent with the Baroque splendour, such as processions and the autos-da-fé, but submitting them to the critical and caustic view of the narrator, who triggers his sharp criticism on public and participants, putting in analysis authenticity and hypocrisy in religious practices.

4. Intelligence, creativity and fantasy in the content of the novel

Intelligence, creativity and fantasy are part of the content of the novel through the presence of science and various arts, as well as the thematic role assigned to some characters.

In fact, it could be said that the novel illustrates Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, due to the variety of intelligence application areas it promotes, such as Science, Music, Architecture, Sculpture, seen on the side of creation and reception.

In terms of plot, the great highlight goes to Science and Architecture, because each one forms a narrative thread, the Passarola's construction and the Convent's building, but the first one is also associated with Music and the second with Sculpture. Each one is also associated with some characters.

However, as we said, the treatment given to each of these narrative threads is entirely different. In the first case, the invention, design, execution and obtained result are given equal prominence, while in the second case the first two and the last steps are totally or partly ignored, giving great prominence to the execution process by anonymous workers and some highlight to the King's order to build the Convent, especially to criticize the monarch's arrogance, megalomania and vanity.

What is concerned is the questioning of who conceives, who does, in what way and who stays in History. The two narrative threads mentioned above show who does, as we shall see later, but also different models of the relationship between

the various actors, confronting a cooperation's model in the case of Passarola and a repression's model in the case of the Convent.

The first one brings Science and Technology into the novel, putting into practice the three faculties in the analysis, gathering dream, work, study, and the madness necessary to accomplish the impossible, which also characterises Humanity, and also the courage to challenge the Inquisition.

The project leader, Padre Bartolomeu Lourenço de Gusmão, known by the nickname "the Flying Man" and mocked in society, plays a double thematic role, priest and scientist / inventor, a contradictory situation for the time, given the repressive power exercised by the Inquisition, which associates science with practices of magic and witchcraft, which puts the character in imminent and permanent danger, despite the royal protection. This danger is increased by the collaboration of Blimunda with her supernatural powers.

Having a factual and historical basis, the studies and scientific works of Padre Bartolomeu Lourenço, this narrative thread goes far beyond the facts and, through the fantasy, introduces in the novel the wonderful, the utopia and the uchronia, seen as the mobile that made humanity advance, in the conviction of Bartolomeu de Gusmão, for whom "A man stumbles at first, then walks, then runs, and eventually flies" (Saramago, p. 52), then this character in particular works with his memories of future.

This character's beliefs are proved in his flight attempts already made with balloons, some successfully, proven by History. Affected by an ontological hybridism (real and fictitious), this character benefits from an "existential path, mixing truth and Fantasy" (Marinho, 2009, p. 93), and presents himself in the novel as the "Builder of a Dream" (Marinho, 2009, p. 93), agglutinating desires and wills, which, to come true, will join Baltasar, Blimunda and later Scarlatti.

In fact, Bartolomeu Lourenço, in his thematic role of inventor scientist, materialises the conviction of the narrator, that "it is dreams that keep the world in orbit" (Saramago, p. 107). So, he is the concrete example that

the world itself is like a water wheel, and it is men who by treading it pull it and make it go, and (...) if there are no men, the world comes to a standstill (Saramago, p. 55),

one of the ideological messages of the novel.

On the other hand, the collaboration of Blimunda, gathering the human wills necessary for the machine's flight, with the help of her special powers, introduces the fantastic and the wonderful in the realisation of the project, as well as a correlative allegorical interpretation, that corroborates this ideological message.

With the flight of the machine, Saramago sets up a

counterfactual event, an alternative world, impossible for the time and the form of operation in its construction strongly contrasts with what happens in the construction of the Convent.

In fact, if it is evident that without the work and the intense study of the inventor to fulfil his dream this would not materialise, it is also clear that this achievement is only possible with the help of others. In this case, without the manual work of Baltasar and the magic of Blimunda, the Passarola would not fly. The three forms what the Father calls "an earthly trinity" that, through a model of cooperation, put the machine to fly (twice in the novel), leaving the credits of the feat to all of them. Domenico Scarlatti will join this Trinity with his music, forming a quartet, with number four to assume its symbolic value of the Earth, thus becoming the science, crafts, magic and art gathered in the success of the Passarola, which approximates the earth to Heaven, because when it flies "three of them were up there in the skies together" (Saramago, p. 184).

With this partnership, Saramago establishes an equivalence between art and science, assuming Music as the most prominent art in the novel. Scarlatti is the referential character who represents it, with the thematic role of musician, artist.

Disconnected from any pragmatic and diegetic function, Scarlatti's music brings to the novel the assumption of art as a human creation, that "can elevate human beings to the highest summits of thought and of feeling" (Damasio, 2010, p. 362).

According to Damasio (2010), "arts like music, dance and painting" will have appeared before the language, fulfilling multiple functions, among which "a homeostatic compensation" (p. 361). In this perspective, since art in general "is a means of inducing comforting emotions and feelings" (p. 362), in fulfilling this function, music, in particular, has "proved unsurpassed throughout the ages" (p. 362).

In the novel, Scarlatti's music fulfils this role, becoming a source of enchantment and pleasure for him and all who hear it, revealing a rare universality, as confirmed by the emotional reaction of Pe Bartolomeu Lourenço to the improvisation of the musician in the King's Palace, described through portentous visual images.

For this privileged listener, music is "a profane rosary of sounds" (Saramago, p. 150). Thus it is heavenly made terrestrial, a profane sacred, a heaven on earth, therefore fulfilling, incidentally, the author's desire of everything to stick to immanence and deny transcendence.

So, it is this enchanting power of music, which elevates man from the terrestrial to the celestial without losing his earthly condition, which brings together Scarlatti and Gusmao, music and science, because, for the former, "only music is aerial"

(Saramago, p. 155), but the second knows that his invention also should carry the man to the air, performing the "impossible".

Scarlatti would be associated with the secret and, when he sees the machine, he also thinks if it will happen, "then nothing was impossible for man" (Saramago, p. 157). Moreover, fictionally, it did happen.

By his will, the musician brings to the estate the pleasure and blessing of music, thus associating himself with the "earthly trinity".

And therefore, with this partnership, as we said before, Saramago equates these two forms of human creation, an idea that will be corroborated by Blimunda, when she says "Once the machine starts to fly, the heavens will be filled with music" (Saramago, p. 165), but also by Scarlatti, who wishes to take part in the flight and play in the sky. However, his music has yet another beneficial effect, recovering Blimunda from her sickness. In this case, music retakes one of the original functions of art, its therapeutic role (Damasio, 2010, p. 239).

Scarlatti will see the Passarola "rising into the sky" (Saramago, p. 185) and flying, but he will not be the only one since the Mafra's population also contemplated the "miracle" and interpreted it like being the Holy Spirit, to which she dedicated a procession in thanksgiving.

In the case of the construction of the Convent, which brings Architecture to the novel, the work of the architect Johann Friedrich Ludwig does not deserve great prominence.

Saramago and his narrator do not emphasise the architect's creativity, preferring to concentrate on denouncing the arrogance of a king with absolute power and the dimension of the work required by the monument. The narrator is also responsible for reducing the king to the dimension of the ordinary human being, showing his fragilities.

The entire construction process of the Convent is subject to several criticisms, and it is primarily the work factor that is exalted in the novel, reaching genuinely epic proportions. The highlight goes to the number of workers (40 000, says the novel, 52 000, says the official history) and animals involved, the effort and suffering required, the miserable conditions in which they live and the ruthless repression to which they are subject. Two events of great magnitude fulfil this epic character: the transport of the stone (Benedicção), which lasts eight days, and the procession of statues of saints arrived from Italy, between Fanhões and Mafra.

The first one occupies the Chapter 19, where the narrator shows in detail the whole epic saga, the transport of the stone, which measures 7m, 3m, 64cm and weighs 31020 Kg, carried out by 600 men and 400 oxen. The hard work developed in the middle of the summer, suffering and even death

deserve narration and detailed description and ripped compliments of the narrator. The epic dimensions of the event lead the narrator to identify the transport car with a ship of the Discoveries and to take advantage of the opportunity to fulfil the promise announced in Portuguese novel's title, by erecting a Memorial to all those involved in the construction of the monument by registering names initiated by all the letters of the alphabet.

The other mentioned event, the transport of the statues, is narrated in Chapter 23, giving visibility to the Sculpture. Smaller than the previous one, as the narrator emphasises, this event replicates the form of a procession and combines art and religion. The sculptures of the great Italian masters follow lying in procession for a long journey, during which they are the target of curiosity and festivities of the people, which mixes religiosity and admiration against this "sacred pantheon" (Saramago, p. 323), which follows the interminable "procession of bells, more than a hundred" (Saramago, p. 323), which occurred weeks earlier. However, the most touching moment is even when in the ground and arranged in a circle the statues receive the visit of Baltasar and Blimunda, on a moonlit night.

A result of Saramago's imagination, this episode is a tribute to art, Sculpture and Baroque art in particular, in which the author works as a theatre director, who organises objects in space and manipulates instruments of lighting technology, producing a spectacle of rare beauty. Displaying a baroque light-dark contrast, this show exhibits a game of light-shadow oppositions. Subjected to the gaze, the touch and the interpellations of Blimunda, the statues are an example of Man's confrontation with the enigma of Art, his own creation, as the episode itself suggests, by remitting these creatures to the shadow projected by a "solitary cloud", returning them to the report prior to the action of the artist's creativity, being again "blocks of marble before they take shape under the sculptor's chisel" (Saramago, p. 316), diffuse presences, "as diffuse in their solidity as that of the man and woman in their midst who dissolves in the shadows" (Saramago, p. 317).

The life and vitality of art are once again reaffirmed, when "Blimunda looked back", saw "The statues glistened like crystallised salt" (Saramago, p. 317) and listened to their conversation.

The ineffable beauty of this episode shows the condition of art as life, which manifests itself in every change undergone in the interaction with the context and the spectator, but also in the dialogue that it establishes with him, even under apparent dumbness. In fact, this episode states that art speaks, depending only on the attitude of the interlocutor.

Regarding the control of reception, this episode

strongly contrasts with the narrator's refusal to show the reader the splendour of the finished Monument, for ideological reasons. An attitude that contrasts with that of Lord Byron, who did not resist the marvel produced by the monumental complex of Mafra, bowing before the pomp and magnificence of the monument in Childe Harold's *Pilgrimage*.

5. Conclusion

In *Baltasar and Blimunda*, Saramago gathers the three faculties in title, giving us a fresco of the century of Lights, of the eighteenth-century Portuguese society, but, as he says himself, "seen in the light of the time in which he is, (...) with the eyes of today", therefore, giving us "his own interpretation of the world". In this case, he draws a dark-light portrait of Portugal, uniting "a desire for fiction and a desire for history, as a symptom of crisis and gesture of criticism, as fear of barbarism and the desire for another future" (Gusmão, 2012, p. 23).

The other historical facts that gave D. João V the name of Magnanimous are not in this book.

Acknowledgement:

This chapter had the support of CHAM (NOVA FCSH/UAC), through the strategic project sponsored by FCT (UID/HIS/04666/2019)

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Accepted Manuscript