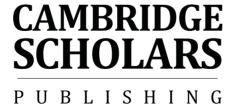# Ethics and Poetics

Ethics and Poetics:
Ethical Recognitions and Social Reconfigurations in Modern Narratives

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

For our mothers,
Þórdís and Галина

CONTENTS

Part III Ethics and Sociality

Part IV Ethics of Intermediality

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

MARGRÉT GUNNARSDÓTTIR CHAMPION AND IRINA RASMUSSEN GOLOUBEVA

IN THE EDITOR'S COLUMN of the January 2012 *PMLA* issue, Simon Gikandi reflects on the defining traits of literary aesthetics and on the challenging, never satisfactorily resolved, question whether literature has an ethical mandate, a power to transform and lead to "a path to immeasurable freedom through sometimes violent encounters" (20). Gikandi locates the power of literature in poetic language that "begs a response" rather than leaving us "speechless or inarticulate" (15).

Participating in this discussion, vitally emerging out of the turn to ethics in the 1990s and following contemporary developments in ethical criticism, this volume of essays, *Ethics and Poetics: Ethical Recognitions and Social Reconfigurations in Modern Narratives*, explores the ethico-political dimensions of literary texts through the dynamics between singular literary spaces and the social habitus of modernity. Our point of departure is the dialectical tradition of ethical thought as it has evolved in and after the Hegelian understanding of community as intersubjective co-existence. For Hegel, the community, in its global conception, is not a coercive force external to the solitary individuals it unites; rather, the community is immanent to people, emerging from their interrelatedness. Thus, ethics in the dialectical tradition proceeds from acts of mutual recognition, from how we live and relate to each other, but also from how we interpret our social responsibilities and voice our political commitments. This collection of essays probes the modalities of such acts, foregrounding how modern and postmodern narratives contest the tendencies of other discourses—historical, political, psychological—to elide difference and eclipse the very radicality of re-cognition as transformative knowledge of self and other. The authors of *Ethics and Poetics* attempt to clarify how modern

and postmodern narratives refine readers' understanding of the recursive process of recognition, thereby opening up obstructed socio-political dimensions in literature and art.

For ease of reference, the collection is divided into four sections—"Ethics of Literary Language," "Ethical Transvaluations," "Ethics and Sociality," and "Ethics of Intermediality"—with chapters in each section gathered around identifying alternative epistemologies, which can be activated from the novel acts of re-cognitions in modern and postmodern fictional modes. The sections are interrelated, and readers are encouraged to make intellectual and topical connections. Although the essays differ in their methodologies, they share an interest in the current understanding of literary ethics and in investigating how an ethical transformation might be precipitated through the processes of literary creation, reading, social impact, and circulation.

The first section, "Ethics of Literary Language," is concerned with ethical acts in fiction which involve language as a signifying phenomenon rather than concrete articulation. In a variety of ways, the three essays in this section show how the socio-political subtexts of communication in modern and postmodern narratives are activated through the intimations of affective, intuitive, and poetic understanding as well as through the skeptical aesthetics of writers such as Samuel Beckett and John Banville. The three contributions effectively suggest how ethical recognitions, emerging in José Saramago's *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, Amitav Ghosh's *A Sea of Poppies*, Marina Lewycka's *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*, and John Banville's "Art Trilogy," invite new modes of compassionate cognition. In the words of Jean-Luc Nancy, this com-passion is neither altruism nor identification but "the disturbance of violent relatedness" (xiii).

In the second section, "Ethical Transvaluations," two contributions explore how the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, through "altered readings," activates the political latency of fiction. Literary interpretations inflected with Levinasian ethics are bound to revise value systems as promulgated by Western traditions, rooted in a Christian world-view as well as in hegemonic theories of knowledge. Levinas's exposition of ethics as the first philosophy transforms hierarchical models of communication, models valuing appropriation and mastery, into responsible pluralities, into recognitions of

vulnerabilities, fragilities, suffering, and mourning. The very conception of freedom as the highest value of selfhood is interrogated by Levinas as freedom is always difficult, fraught with a sense of its arbitrariness and violent prerogatives. Thus Levinas suggests in *Totality and Infinity* that it is "the freedom that can be ashamed of itself that founds truths" (83). The chapters in this section, concerned with the fiction of Salman Rushdie and Jonathan Franzen, trace the processes by which protagonists come to understand the tension between ethical values and the moral strictures imposed by conventions of reason and of logical systems. Shame in Rushdie's *Shame* is transvalued as ethical openness itself, as the very structure and possibility of ethical consciousness; freedom in Franzen's *Freedom* is shown to be burdened with a primeval intimation of the other within the same, of community as an originary singular plurality.

The chapters in the third section of this collection, "Ethics and Sociality," analyze the way literature relates to the repressed margins of the community and society where ethical response becomes possible. Such a response resists being reduced to moral or political decisions, offering a position discontinuous with the established social codes. The authors explore how ethical recognition in literature becomes a negative figuration of "the excess that cannot be known positively within any given system of morality, the aporia that limits any attempt to collapse the good into positive knowledge" (Gibson 16). Literature as an ethical expression subjects moral causality to the disruptive power of imagination, bringing inter-subjective perspectives to the search for meaning and interpretation in modernity. It transforms modernity's cultural, political, and moral projects into a work-in-progress, merging the social dynamics with the processes of writing, reading, and interpretation. From the perspective of literary ethics, modern literature does not simply open up meaning but recognizes literary meaning's constructed disruption. The chapters in this section read Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Charles Johnson to trace the ways the writers shape literary expression in response to historical traumas and social transformations. A recurrent theme in all the contributions involves the literary imagination's search for ways of communicating a historicized perception and of pitting fragile fiction against physical, cognitive, and political violence of historical realities.

The three chapters in the final section, "Ethics of Intermediality," seek to understand and engage with ethical challenges that emerge in art forms that combine or draw on several sensory modes, evoking multiple modalities of experience, such as photography, film, political and aesthetic journalism, and the aesthetic avant-garde. The way literature mediates the conceptual possibilities of different art forms and crosses over into intermedial spaces enables an ethical exploration of the impact of media and art forms on social imagination. The writers explore theoretical and historical insights into art forms that draw on medial modalities of experience and the political manipulation of time, space, and history. Whereas one of the chapters explores how post-9/11 fiction negotiates the grey ethical realities of political terrorism through images that register its traumatic effects, a second contribution discusses how mainstream films on the Holocaust negotiate the issue of the "unshowability" of the history of the Nazi extermination camps, examining how films and the film industry walk a tight rope between survivors' testimonies and economic and genre-related and medium-specific considerations such as profit and entertainment. The final chapter of this section discusses a collaborative project of documentary modernism, Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), which sought to undo the violent erasures of geopolitics and colonial historiography. It examines the anthology's modernist strategies of cultural and artistic translation and its redrawing of the world in terms of connectivity and interdependence.

To sum up, bringing together international scholars interested in the ethics of fiction, this anthology extends the rich field of ethical literary criticism that has emerged in the last twenty years. The authors explore literariness itself as constitutive of ethical intimations about the pluralistic community and about egalitarian modes of communication. The epistemological point of departure is the ethical thought of modernity as filtered through Hegelian recognition as infinite social responsibility. The structure of the anthology reflects this anchoring as the authors investigate modalities of recognition and social regeneration via literary language, which affect the collective imaginary. The collection's overarching idea is that ethics bridges the gap between historical and fictional narratives, manifesting how both belong to the same temporality of the future, unknown, yet imaginable.

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PART I

ETHICS OF LITERARY LANGUAGE

CHAPTER ONE

FICTION'S PARADIGMATIC ALTERITY: JOSÉ SARAMAGO ON THE ETHICS OF THE LITERARY

EFRAT BLOOM

THE HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF LISBON (1989) differs from José Saramago's other works of historical fiction.[1] Unlike the earlier *Raised from the Ground* (1980), *Baltasar and Blimunda* (1982), and *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (1984), which are driven by skepticism towards the objectivity of historical discourse and the representations it produces,[2] *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* derives its momentum from the possibilities opened by the purposely fictional rewriting of official history. Raimundo Silva, a middle-aged proofreader, inserts the word *Not* into a manuscript about the 1147 (A.D.) siege of Lisbon, a landmark event in the history of autonomous Portugal and in the formation of the Portuguese nation. This *Not* changes the all-too-well-known narrative of the Portuguese capture of Lisbon from the Moors, who had ruled over it for more than 300 years: in reality, an army of crusaders helped the Portuguese king Afonso Henriques to besiege the city, whereas Raimundo's interpolation suggests that the crusaders refused to participate in the offensive. The meaning of this "deliberate mistake" (73)[3] is concealed from the proofreader, but is clear to his perceptive boss, Maria Sara: the struggle for self-expression, she understands, is the struggle for life; Raimundo's subversive act is an attempt to interrupt an existing social order so that his individual self can emerge. She thus issues a challenge to him: to write his own version of the history of the siege; and this engagement, in which he immerses himself with all seriousness, turns out to be a turning point in his life.

We tend to ascribe the transformative power of writing to the opportunity it gives to the author to claim his or her voice in history and to cast his or her life events in the meaningful form of the narrative. Such "narrative emplotment," argues Anthony Paul Kerby, "appears to yield a form of understanding of human experience, both individual and collective, that is not directly amenable to other forms of exposition or analysis" (3). Yet Raimundo does not interrupt an official history with its repressed, muted version, and neither does he engage in writing his own life story, giving rudimentary facts a structured, purposeful shape. What Raimundo does, rather, is to weave real and imaginary events into a narrative according to his fancy: his fictional history is intended to lead to the same historical results (the fall of Lisbon to the Portuguese) through a different course of events, which did not take place in reality but that could have taken. What, then, allows the fictional history to become the precursor of the dramatic personal change Raimundo undergoes in the novel, at the end of which the shy and aloof man is able to have a mature love relationship with his boss? How and why does the fictional construct gain its transformative power? And what has this transformative power, the power to turn the self into a "self-with-the-other," to do with the proofreader's engagement in writing, still, a *historical* narrative—a narrative of a past that is not immediately his own?

The present chapter attempts to answer these questions by allowing *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* to emerge as a novel about fiction as an "other-regarding mode of knowledge" (in the words of this volume's editors) for which the writing of history poses an ultimate challenge. Fiction, I suggest here, derives its force from the *dialogical model* that it offers as an alternative to history's conventional modes of discourse. This dialogical model, grounded in the presence of an attentive listener rather than in the presence of a careful observer (and named here to resonate with terms coined by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin), engages the historical "other" as nothing less than a writing consciousness whose discourse shapes the text in which it is embedded as a character. Whatever the implications of writing for the constitution of one's own subjectivity are, whatever in narrating the past allows the birth of the author's "I" in the present, these implications and this self-becoming are intimately related to the

self-other relationship constituted by fiction: to fiction's ability to respond to the individual human being in a way that ordinary history, with its gravitation towards generalization and towards alleged, imposing omniscience, fails to do. That this recognition emerges in the context of the proofreader's engagement in writing a historical narrative is not coincidental: the delicate task of narrating past lives—the lives of those who, from their place "there" and "then," are unable to defend themselves against the reader's scrutiny and are completely dependent upon this reader for their after-lives—this task, precisely, reveals fiction to be a path to the "other" and to the telling of this other's life. It is the occasion of this task that turns Saramago's novel into an account of fiction as a model of human connectedness and as the grounds for an ethics of alterity, as I wish to show in what follows.

History, Fiction, and the Languages of Siege and Liberation

> I'm always the outsider, even when I correct a printing error or some mistake made by the author, rather like someone strolling in a park who feels obliged to keep the place tidy and lifts any litter in sight, then not knowing where to put it, shoves it into his own pocket. (*The History of the Siege of Lisbon* 218)

In an article devoted to the history of the book Robert Darnton analyzes the way books come into being and are spread in society ("What Is" 67). Seeking to capture history "from below"—to bring back into the forefront of scholarly study the people who "had never made it into history books, except as the faceless 'masses'" ("What Is . . . Revisited" 496)—Darnton pays tribute to several neglected participants in the circuit of book production and distribution: compositors and pressmen, warehousemen and binders, peddlers and paper suppliers, wholesalers, retailers, and wagoners. And yet he disregards others: translators, editors, and proofreaders. These, it seems, inhabit the margins of the margins, the periphery's own periphery. The quotation above illustrates what it means to live at this neglected fringe of cultural production, where meaning is reiterated and consolidated, but is never generated. Raimundo Silva, a conscientious proofreader, is obliged to obey in his work the rules and conventions established in dictionaries, grammars, and reference

books. He is committed to somebody else's truth—the author's, who "[f]or the proofreader who knows his place . . . is infallible" (40)—and is engaged in a reproduction practice that utilizes his knowledge and skills in the service of a discourse to which he remains an outsider.

Raimundo's habitual self-denial explains the sense of pleasure, vitality, and ownership embracing the proofreader as he immerses himself in writing his version of Portugal's national history. This sense of liberation proves the central role of inflecting the *true* story in creating the *right* one, proves the power of *writing* to constitute the *subject*—the person who renders his or her own experience a primary source of insight into the world.[4] Raimundo, we understand, writes his fictional history in order to become, for the first time in his life, the main protagonist of the great drama of signification. Interpolating that *Not* into the historian's manuscript was a response to the challenge posed to him by the text: "Make me say something else, if you can" (39). Though his attempt to weave the threads of known facts into a new narrative fabric ends in recognizing his limited freedom as an author ("as if he had written the same music lowering all the notes half a tone" 226), the projection of his fictional "truth" onto the text allows Raimundo to assert his subjectivity; for subjectivity, in a world devoid of ultimate reason, means the freedom to create, through language, a world inscribed with our own image.[5]

"Make me say something else, if you can": The more insisting history is on consecrating a single version of the past, the further it increases the power of fiction, of the imaginative and the inventive, to offer itself as an egalitarian field of symbolization where individual truths can thrive; for "Only the fictional can be different," as Raimundo comes to realize (114). And not only *individual truths,* but also the *individual's truths*; for one surprising result of the proofreader's indulgence in writing is the discovery of the silenced voices within him, such as the female voice absent from his life or the voices of his alter-egos:

> Raimundo Silva thought to himself, in the manner of Fernando Pessoa, If I smoked, I should now light a cigarette, watching the river, thinking how vague and uncertain everything is, but, not smoking, I should simply think that everything is truly uncertain and vague, without a cigarette, even though the cigarette, were I to smoke it, would in itself express the uncertainty and vagueness of things, like

smoke itself, were I to smoke. The proof-reader lingers at the window, no one will call out, Come inside or you'll catch cold. (42–43)

And yet when the shy proofreader—the perennial bachelor, who has made emotional restraint his second expertise—engages in a love affair with his editor boss, the question arises of what exactly in the act of narration allows this personal transformation. If his love relationship is the culmination of the process of self-actualization (and the novel's point of ending tips the scales in favor of this assumption), then it becomes clear that fiction's power stems neither from the freedom it bestows to interrupt common discourse, nor from the access it allows to the powerful mechanism of signification, nor from its ability to reveal the polyphonic self (à-la-Pessoa) and make room for it in language; for these, first and foremost, pave the way for one's encounter *with oneself*. What renders fiction a path to a meaningful relationship *with the other* should be sought elsewhere, in a setting that can be recognized only through a careful examination of the two avenues through which Raimundo's fictional narrative mirrors the vicissitudes of his relationship with Maria Sara.

Raimundo's version of the history of Lisbon, we realize rather early, mirrors his developing romantic affair. The events he narrates are made the terms of a new language through which the proofreader gradually expands his emotional vocabulary. The siege thus becomes a metaphor of courting, and the fear of a Moorish attack a symbol of the proofreader's anxiety of his growing attachment and its unknown fortunes, and the capture of the city an expression of love fulfilled, and Moorish Lisbon the city of the body hidden behind the proofreader's walls of defense, Maria Sara's as well, waiting to be discovered. Alongside this metaphorical language Raimundo creates, however, a second "mirror" of his romantic affair when he incorporates in his narrative an imaginary romance between Mogueime, a Portuguese soldier, and Ouroana, a crusader's lonely concubine, whose relationship develops in parallel to the proofreader and his in-charge editor's. At first, Raimundo is unaware of the threads connecting the story he is writing with his changing life, but eventually he renders these connections explicit ("we are Ouroana and Mogueime" 295), consciously turning the figments of his imagination into the signifiers of his and Maria Sara's intimate discourse.

And yet these two "mirrors" of Raimundo's love differ from each other in a crucial way. Unlike the account of the siege of Lisbon, which deviates from the established historical records, a love story between a soldier and a concubine might have taken place in reality. Incorporating Mogueime and Ouroana's affair, Raimundo's fictional piece thus transcends its original purpose to explain how a different course of events could have resulted in the same historical outcomes. It comprises not only what is essential for explaining the *Not* he had introduced into the manuscript he was proofreading, but also something that is not circumstantially prescribed by the historical narrative. This difference has important implications: for if we regard Mogueime and Ouroana's relationship as a reflection of Raimundo and Maria Sara's—as a way to read the proofreader's love behind his back—we might conclude that the latter realize their love *outside the story of the siege, outside the siege as a metaphor, and independently of it.* Precisely as the soldier and the concubine's love is independent of Raimundo's *Not,* the proofreader and his editor's relationship develops and matures away from the paradigm of thought entailed by the siege warfare and the vocabulary it offers. Their love develops, I want to say, outside the siege as a model of human relationship.

For *love* cannot develop between conqueror and conquered, occupier and occupied, or any two parties who interrelate through force. To be able to love, Raimundo and Maria Sara need to disregard the hierarchy and discipline built into the employer-employee relationship and face each other as equals, for which they must renounce (especially Raimundo) the idea of love as a conquest of the beloved's heart and body: "love is the end of all sieges," Maria Sara declares (296). His engagement in writing lays the ground for the proofreader's consummation of his love not because it marks his success in composing a credible historical account of the siege of Lisbon or because of his ability to assume a military strategist's point of view and "win" the war of the few Portuguese against the numerous Moors, but rather the opposite, namely, thanks to his relinquishing his perception of life as an endless battle. Successful as it may function as a historical framework for his narrative, the paradigm of the siege cannot generate the process through which inter- and intra-subjectivity are achieved because it cannot foster genuine love and cannot represent it in any valid way. At the end of the novel,

when he brings the siege to its end in the story, Raimundo brings the siege to its end as a metaphor and a language as well. He rejects, I want to say, historical discourse as a path to the truth of another subjective life.

For the truth of the other cannot be reached as long as this other is denied voice. Raimundo's attempt to write his love in the language of warfare collapses the metaphor of the siege because this metaphor cannot sustain intimacy, mutuality, and warmth. *Metaphor*, by its nature, is a mirror reflecting back to the writer his (her) own image. *Historical discourse* thwarts the interpersonal encounter because of its disposition to turning into a siege, into a metaphor: because, that is to say, of history's inclination to write the distant in the terms of the present, the foreign in the terms of the already-known. Every metaphor is a siege because every metaphor creates a world in which otherness exists only inasmuch as it consents to dissolve into resemblance. Only outside the discourse of the siege, outside the historical narrative as such, can Raimundo be born as a subject capable of love. His self-actualization is made possible, no doubt, by his engagement in writing, but not by dint of his story's historical component. It is rather his ability to offer, through fiction, an alternative to history's conventional modes of discourse that gives birth to his subjectivity, as we shall see now.

Fiction as Alternative Aesthetics

How has the proofreader's newly-emerged subjectivity been made possible thanks to the fictional (as opposed to the historical) constituent of his imaginative piece? The answer I would like to suggest focuses on the special artistic fabric of the fictional narrative, or on its *dialogical aesthetics,* which is intimately tied up with the circumstances in which the proofreader ventures into writing. Maria Sara, as already mentioned, proposes to Raimundo to turn his subversive *Not* into a full-length account of the history of the siege of Lisbon that will follow his private, idiosyncratic logic. The proofreader accepts the challenge, wishing to not disappoint his boss; and yet it is her willingness to listen that becomes his primary motivation for writing. Maria Sara's listening, which makes room for the "other" even in the limited space of freedom permitted by historical facts,

allows Raimundo himself to listen, first to the other within him, to his hidden, silenced selves (as we have seen), then to the other without, to the characters inhabiting his invented "History of the Siege."[6] Eventually, the proofreader becomes capable of listening to the woman who had lent him an ear in the first place, to Maria Sara, whose discourse of intimacy he learns to embrace.

Fiction, then, originates in a gesture of empathy and respect and fosters a discourse into which the other, any other, is welcomed as an equal. Moreover: the same gesture of empathy that allows fiction to create intimacy also allows it to access the past. Fiction gives voice to those left silent in history not by dint of its distinctive thematic compounds or the greater liberty it permits: Raimundo's imaginative piece turns out to be, as mentioned above, bound by its own internal fatality and anyway closer to the historical truth than expected. Rather, fiction's ability to access the past stems from the interpersonal context (of invitation, response, and reciprocity) in which it is rooted and from this context's aesthetical implications. The path to the other, we learn with the proofreader, is always the same path, regardless of the time gap.

What are the unique characteristics of Raimundo Silva's invented history, stemming from its being a work of fiction? What are fiction's distinctive features as an aesthetical and discursive order? In what follows I would like to explore, more or less comprehensively according to need and significance, three attributes of Saramago's dialogical aesthetics, an aesthetics aiming at the other, at voicing the other, and unmistakably resonating with the ideas of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, to whom literary criticism owes an elaborate conception of "dialogism."[7] One question, however, needs first to be asked: how can the written text assume a dialogical position, the position of "listening"? A passage from the novel points to the heart of the problem faced by an author:

> the *Not* you slipped in that day will prove to be the most important act in your life, What do you know about my life, Nothing, . . . but what I said wasn't meant to be taken literally, these are emphatic expressions which rely on the intelligence being addressed, I'm not very intelligent, There's another emphatic expression, which I accept for what it is worth, that is, nothing. (96)

In conversation, Maria Sara knows, words' rhetorical function may be independent of their denotation. For this incongruity between signifier and signified speakers compensate by relying on external cues such as the tone of voice.[8] Intonation can turn a common expression, "As you wish," to a goodbye greeting, and an innocent question, "Do you need anything more of me," to an ironic gibe (150); and "when we are deceived . . . it is only because we did not listen sufficiently to our hearing" (30), because we were not attuned to the "semitones added or removed from a vowel, a syllable, a word" (46). Only the consummation of language as a voiced, reciprocal act can reveal a word's true meaning and redeem it from the infinite chain of signifiers into which it is doomed to turn when confined to the individual consciousness:

> I'm just connecting you, [the telephonist] said, indifferent to the destiny that makes use of her services and pays no attention to what she is saying, I'm going to connect, dial, transfer, switch through, link, contact, plug in, put you in touch, in her mind it is simply a matter of making it possible for two people to communicate, but . . . every word is a dangerous sorcerer's apprentice. (88)

Had *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* dealt exclusively with the conditions for gaining a valid representation of the past, the discussion could have easily concluded that truth is achieved through dialogue, since *valid* can only be that which is *in accord*: truth "is born *between people . . .* in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 110). This conclusion, however, fails to grasp the full meaning of Saramago's emphasis on the importance of the utterance. The stress on the spoken word's primacy over the written one is intended to foreground the need of the "I" for the other *for understanding this other's world* (rather than for concurring on reality's nature). A genuine encounter with another person's life requires that we listen to this person telling his (her) story in his (her) own voice. Like Bakhtin, Saramago sees understanding (of a certain experience), and not knowledge (of the world around us), as the true goal of the human sciences (Todorov 22). Yet unlike Bakhtin, who regards dialogism as the "search of a counter-discourse" ("a reply elicited by the initial remark," in Tzvetan Todorov's words, 22), Saramago sees listening as this active engagement through which the other person emerges as a

full, differentiated subject. Though the literary work can never tease a past utterance into existence, the fiction writer is compelled to do his or her best to read the past with the ears, in the ways I discuss in what follows.

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> [T]hese women, too, have a name, in addition to the collective title of whore by which they are known, some are called Tareja like the King's mother, or Mafalda, like the queen who came from Savoy last year, or Sancha, or Maiores, or Elvira, or Dórdia, or Enderquina, or Urraca, or Doroteia, or Leonor, and two of them have precious names, one who is called Chamoa, another known as Moninha, enough to make one feel like rescuing them from the streets. (256)

Attention to detail, a notable feature of Raimundo Silva's "History of the Siege," is the first aesthetic attribute of fiction that I would like to discuss here. It is manifested in the proofreader's stubborn insistence on the singularity of people who enter official history as its silent extras; people whom Raimundo

> would prefer to take each . . . separately, study their lives, their precedents and consequents, their loves, quarrels, the good and bad in them, . . . because who could foresee that . . . there would be another opportunity to leave some written record of who they were and what they did. (161)

Against history's edifying mission and propensity for generalization (this privilege of future generations, encountering the past from the safe distance of the written document), fiction aspires "to portray the operation of other minds in their very otherness, that is, to make us humans aware of the inner life of other humans" (Pavel 524),[9] and this aspiration is signified by the first name and the particular life story behind it. The names of the women brought to the military camp in order to serve as sex slaves seem to be lacking any textual function beyond mere reference, serving nothing more than the text's "reality effect."[10] And yet their inclusion yields a text resistant to the "generalizing effects of knowledge"[11] by which past lives become an abstraction, a token, or a mirror of the writer's life in the present.

But how can literature portray other minds, when "Nothing is more strange or foreign than the other man," as Emmanuel Levinas observes (44)? How can the other person be encountered in the text—this person, "always radically in excess of what [our] ego, cognitive powers, consciousness or intuitions would make of her or him" (Gibson 25)? These concerns call our attention to a second attribute of fiction, one that has to do more directly with dialogism as understood by Bakhtin and with the narrator's role in it. For if a word gains meaning only in the other's presence, if any writer is in essential need for the other to take part in narration—what is left for the narrator to perform in the text? The answer, I have started to suggest, is found in fiction's substitution of telling with listening, firm discipline with chaotic polyphony. The narrator in fiction withdraws from his privileged position as the exclusive source of the text's meaning and allows the characters to speak for themselves without striving, with the poetic means available for him, for stylistic hegemony. Wishing to set them free from their role as silent witnesses to history's momentous events, Raimundo thus bestows the inhabitants of his text with an opportunity to recount history in the first person, even if their perspective is incongruent with the historical evidence:

> Mogueime explained quite clearly, how he climbed on to Mem Ramires's shoulders to secure the ladder between the battlements. . . . But what Mogueime said . . . contradicts the earliest version of *The Chronicle of the Five Kings,* where . . . it is quite clear that Mogueime, obeying orders, bent over so that Mem Ramires might climb on to his shoulders . . . there can no longer be any doubt, Mogueime is a liar. (170–71)

The consequences of Raimundo's liberal approach soon manifest themselves, as the figment of his imagination turns into an autonomous entity that casts him into the position of an external observer:

> The evidence provided by most of the events that have so far constituted the main core of this narrative has convinced Raimundo Silva that it was pointless trying to impose his own point of view even when it stemmed directly, as it were, from that negative introduced. . . . He recognises that his freedom began and ended at the precise

> moment when he wrote the word *Not*, that from then on a new and
> no less imperious fatality had got under way . . . of whose [course] he
> only has the vaguest idea. (225–26)

From the moment it comes into being, the new version of the history
of the siege of Lisbon is driven by a logic no longer stipulated on
external motivation in the form of the storytelling act, but rather
stemming from the desires and aspirations of the historical figures,
who are given the freedom to act their will. Indeed, their freedom is
realized only within the framework of possibilities determined by
Raimundo. Thus, when the crusaders try to justify their decision to
retreat from the battle, their cunning excuse enrages the Portuguese
king so much that he dismisses them immediately in an irreversible
way (136–37), by that fulfilling the negation admitted by Raimundo
into the text. Still, the historical figures in the proofreader's text fulfill
their subjectivity through first-person telling, through their
independence of the author's storytelling act (by dint of which any
absentmindedness causes the narrator to miss their responses; see 180,
193), and through the attempt to change the text that documents their
own lives ("The silence was broken by the Archbishop of Braga's
voice giving an order to the scribe, You must make no mention, Fray
Rogeiro, of what the Moor said" 184), all of which Raimundo
tolerates with the utmost patience.

Raimundo, then, although "always more preoccupied with what he
believes to be the objective interests of his narrative than with the
wholly legitimate aspirations of this or that character" (213),
withdraws from the effort to force his determinism on the text. His
dialogical position, like Bakhtin's, prescribes not only the
incorporation of the fictional figures' communicative acts in his text,
but also the formation of a certain relationship between their
discourses and his own authorial discourse (Lodge 22). Partly, this is
achieved through the technique of free indirect speech, through
discourse that "belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and
compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains
mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners" (Bakhtin,
"Discourse" 304). Free indirect speech is the aesthetic expression of
the proofreader's willingness to share his authorial position with the
figures inhabiting his story. It is also where Saramago's optimistic,