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The poetics of correction in Gore Vidal's *Burr* and Saramago's *História do Cerco de Lisboa**

True history [...] is the final fiction. (Gore Vidal, *Empire*)

Tudo quanto não for vida, é literatura, A história também, A história sobretudo¹ (José Saramago, *História do Cerco de Lisboa*)

Much of what we take to be true is often seriously wrong, and the *way* that it is wrong is more often worthy of investigation than the often trivial disagreed upon facts of the case. (Gore Vidal, *Screening History*)

I

In my doctoral dissertation I developed a typology of postmodern historical fiction that comprised four categories of novel that correspond to various discursive modulations of history: the historical novel, the supra-real fiction, the uchronian novel and the historiographic metafiction.² The typology is informed by the issue of error, deformation, and correction proceeding from the awareness that all representations of the past are ideological constructs. This essay compares Gore Vidal's *Burr* (1973) and José Saramago's *História do Cerco de Lisboa* (1989) as two different types of post-modern historical fiction that rest on common preoccupations, while embodying distinct literary projects. Both novels belong to well-defined cycles within their authors' novelistic production, namely cycles of novels that reflect upon the construction of national memory in their respective countries of birth.

Before concentrating my attention on the selected *corpus*, it is necessary to present, even though in brief terms, the typology of post-modern historical fiction in order to explain the functionality of each one of its categories, since the issues of error, deformation, and correction, on the one hand, and the construction of national memory, on the other, are tackled in different ways within the framework of each category, thus producing distinct problematizing effects in the manipulation of historical accounts.

The historical novel is an ambiguous label, for it has been widely used as an all-embracing cover term for a range of categories of historical fiction, whereas I consider it to denote a single category within that range. It is characterized by its respect for the canonized version of historical discourse, and usually by its revision of the

* An abridged version of this essay was presented to the American Portuguese Studies Association (Amherst, November 2002) with the financial support of the Instituto Camões and the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, within the Lusitânia Program.

¹ 'Everything that is not life is literature, History as well, History above all'.

² The typology was initially presented in an essay published in Martins (2001); it is further developed in my doctoral dissertation of 2002 (Martins 2006) and in Martins (2004).

historiography of important historical personalities from the point of view of economic and political hegemony, and by having narrators who adopt the narrative perspective of the past.

As far as the second category of historical fiction, the supra-real, is concerned, its distinctive element is the combination in the reexamination of the past of historical data with elements characteristic of the fantastic genre. The estrangement caused by the confrontation between various worlds, whose rules do not necessarily coincide with those of the empirical world, and between which different characters may move regardless of spatial and chronological borders, allows the text to address the unstable condition of historical and fictional representations whose subject matter is history.

The third type, the uchronian novel, corresponds to Elizabeth Wesseling's 'uchronian fiction', that is, a fictional text that proposes alternative histories stemming from the belief that some historical events could have taken place when it is assumed they have not occurred. Contrary to the supra-real fiction, the uchronian novel is counterfactual and it proposes a new relation with history that rests on the assumption that the course of historical events could have been different from the historically and culturally accepted depiction.

I borrowed the term 'historiographic metafiction' from Linda Hutcheon, though like Wesseling I contest her premise that this type of novel constitutes the representative model of post-modern fiction. I maintain that Hutcheon's characterization is too all-inclusive, not taking into account novels such as, for instance, Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1981) and Gore Vidal's *Duluth* (1998), which are post-modern self-reflexive novels that challenge linguistic and literary conventions without addressing historical issues. The fourth category of my typology, thus, refers to those novels that problematize their internal structure through dialogue with various historical and literary intertexts without borrowing elements and discursive modes from the fantastic genre (as happens in the supra-real fiction) and without proposing alternative histories (as the uchronian novel does). Contrary to the historical novel, the historiographic metafiction revisits and questions the representations of the past from a present perspective that stresses the novel's metafictional component and the relevance of the fictional rewriting of history.

The typology of post-modern historical fiction translates the ways in which the fictional discourse addresses, questions, and eventually corrects the incongruities and ambiguities of historical accounts in varying degrees of depth with obvious pragmatic implications. It is worth pointing out that the categories that comprise the typology can be organized in different ways according to the perspective from which it is being analysed. One possible way of conceiving the typology is as a continuum whose opposite poles are occupied by the historical novel and the uchronian novel. In other words, the latter is the category that most radically subverts historical certainties due to its counterfactual and playful nature. It openly proposes the correction of historiography. By contrast, the historical novel is typically the category with least pragmatic impact on the examination and interrogation of the accounts of the past, due to its more conventional approach to historical discourse, keeping in mind its respect for the factual data organized into a narrative system in the canonized version

of history. The supra-real fiction can be located next to the uchronian novel. On the one hand, despite its respect for historical principles and epistemological premises, the interference of elements from the fantastic denotes doubts about the exactitude of historiographic reports. On the other hand, this kind of fictional modulation is not as vehement in its correction of history as the uchronian novel is, since it is not counterfactual. I place the historiographic metafiction between the historical novel and the supra-real fiction, for it seems to me more effective in its revision of the past than the historical novel due not only to its adoption of a contemporary perspective from which to examine the past, but also to its questioning of fiction itself, a process that highlights the manipulations of writing, whether the latter be fictional or not.

The various categories that compose the typology are revealed as being particularly operative to the analysis not only of the epistemological and ontological status of historiography, but also of the construction of national memory. However, it seems unhelpful to think in terms of a continuum when speculating on the manipulations of national memory, since the categories can be differently interpreted on the basis of the perspective adopted to address the issue. Therefore, if, on the one hand, the narrative perspective from which national memory is analysed is that of the powerful, the historical novel may seem to be the most appropriate category, since it focuses on the fabrication of myths from an official perspective, even if this will be deconstructed through the fictional text. If, on the other hand, writers place the stress on the point of view of minor players and low-status characters in historical events, who are usually marginalized or even forgotten by official discourse, as is frequent in post-modern novels, the uchronian novel and the supra-real fiction seem to be more pertinent to discussion of the handling of the public representation of memory, since, through the proposal of alternative histories and/or of the interference of the fantastic, writers are able to fill in the gaps left by authoritative representations.

Let us now return to Saramago's and Vidal's novels and both writers' interest in reflection upon the construction of national memory. One can observe significant disparities between these two authors' cycles; disparities that are closely related to their engagement with two different theories of historical causation that will condition the reconfiguration of national memory through the literary text. Vidal's novels testify to an engagement with the historiography of outstanding personalities,³ whereas Saramago's fiction derives from the Marxist thesis of class conflict and its origin in economic conditions, which explain the intellectual's acute ideological conscience.⁴

³ In order to understand Vidal's interest in the revision of history centred on important personalities it is necessary to remember he was born into a family of strong political traditions. Besides this, he was brought up by his grandfather, a Senator, in Washington D.C., thus experiencing the backstage of Washington politics from an early age, but always from the perspective of the rich and powerful. His proximity to J.F. Kennedy's circle during the latter's presidency illustrates, among many other instances, the writer's privileged knowledge about the American political world.

⁴ Saramago has always acknowledged his political allegiance to the Left in the various interviews he has given throughout his literary career. Moreover, his political conscience has undeniably been projected into his novels as a whole, and with particular emphasis on the novels about the construction of national memory, where Saramago highlights the importance of the uneducated and the poor as subjects of history and their fundamental role in the construction of the nation.

Nevertheless, the novels here analysed unequivocally articulate comparable projects of deconstructing and revising the official representation of the past and the manipulation of public memory, therefore promoting, through the fictional text, the reassessment of that national past and the symbolic rewriting of national memory. In both authors' works this is the springboard for discussion of the good and bad uses of memory, as Paul Ricoeur (2000) understands them. This essay aims first to identify and examine the similar strategies and devices by means of which Saramago and Vidal reveal and address the diverse distortions inherent in representational systems of national memory. Secondly, I will ponder the extent to which Vidal's and Saramago's post-modern historical fictions propose a poetics of correction by addressing the artificiality of the verbal representation of the empirical world.

II

Burr and *História do Cerco de Lisboa* illustrate what Matei Calinescu (1991) called 'an aesthetics of quotation'. This consists of putting the past (here understood in a very broad sense as everything that has already been written or said) between inverted commas, an action that sets up the reassessment of literary and/or non-literary representations in semantic and formal terms. In this process the focus is not on the quotation itself, but on what Antoine Compagnon (1979: 9) understands by the 'work of citation', that is, the act of quoting and the semantic and pragmatic implications thereby derived, in the light of the quoted material's dislocation and its projection into a new enunciating context.⁵ However, Vidal's and Saramago's aesthetics of quotation vary considerably, since the former writer privileges the model of the historical novel while the latter prefers the uchronian novel, as will be shown.

Compagnon's theoretical presupposition on 'the work of quotation' particularly interests me, for I consider that in *Burr* and in *História do Cerco de Lisboa* Vidal and Saramago undertake creative exercises of quotation that derive from the transformation of the past and of the writing of history into the matter of their novels. This only becomes possible because writers use different literary and historical representations of the past to examine and reassess them within another context of enunciation. This initiates a dynamic process of gloss and intergloss that becomes a true 'siege of the writing of history', producing new systems of signification that explain events.⁶

⁵ To Compagnon, the act of quoting is more important than the quotation itself. I associate the relevance of that act with the parallel that may be drawn between the process of anamnesis and 'the work of quotation'. In other words, to the cognitive aspect of the former (the image of the past that is recalled and that is already in itself a representation) corresponds in the literary text not only the writer's selection of significant moments from the past that s/he wants to recreate, but also their different representations (the process of selecting the material that will be inserted in the text of destination). To the pragmatic aspect of anamnesis (the act of remembering) correspond in the literary text the procedure of cut and paste and the semantic reassessment of the texts of departure and destination. On Compagnon's 'work of quotation' see, among others, Martins (2006: 16, 17, 42, 69–71).

⁶ I borrow the idea of 'the siege of the process of writing history' from Lourenço (1989) and Finazzi-Agrò (1999).

The gesture of quoting representations of the past in Vidal and Saramago is clearly dependent on conflicts of memories, which result in the embedding of different stories about the same topic.⁷ This calls attention to the potential multiplicity of what can be narrated that transforms the novel into a ‘machine that multiplies narratives’.⁸ The acknowledgment of that multiplicity questions the totalizing and dogmatic nature of official historiography and stresses the need to know all that has been either erased or forgotten by history. In *Burr*, the process of excavation that is related to the need to search for what has not been granted by history, or for what has not been stated, seems to be more evident, since the novel is about memories of Colonel Burr, a controversial political personality in the history of the United States.⁹ In Saramago’s novel, the reflection upon the incongruities and distortions of historical representations is subtler, since the Portuguese writer revisits the episode of Afonso Henrique’s siege of the Muslim city of Lisbon in 1147 and openly refutes the historical truth by suggesting, though in a fictional framework, that the crusaders did not help Afonso Henriques in the siege. It is important to note that both Vidal and Saramago use different examples of *mise en abîme* to approach the artificiality of historical representation, which gives a metahistorical and/or a metaliterary dimension to their novels with significant ontological, epistemological, and ideological implications. However, it is curious to note that the degree of problematization that the historical discourse as an artefact undergoes varies when each writer’s option for a specific model of historical fiction is taken into account, even if both novels may be considered ‘machines that multiply narratives’ in Calvino’s sense.

I start my reflection upon the importance of the writing of history from an *en abîme* perspective with Vidal’s novel. *Burr* presents three instances of *mise en abîme* that are articulated through the comparison of various versions of Colonel Aaron Burr’s life. These are: (i) Burr’s own first-person version, which is ingeniously embedded in Charles’s relaying of Burr’s utterances about the most relevant events of his political career, and the notes Burr wrote about the American Revolution, as well as the newspaper cuttings he has collected throughout his life; (ii) Burr’s official biography, as written by Matthew Davis, which could only be published after the Colonel’s death; and (iii) Charles’s memories, bearing in mind that the young lawyer worked with Burr and wished to become a successful writer.

The embedding of texts written in the first and third persons reveals the confrontation between the subjective tone typical of memories and the ostensibly more

⁷ I borrow the expression ‘conflicts of memories’ from Pomian (1999), who employs it to make reference to the conflicts of memories stemming from dismemberment of the former Soviet Union, thus characterizing what he called the end of an era of totalitarianisms. I defend the view that the expression embodies the process of besieging history through the literary text.

⁸ This expression was used by Calvino (1994: 142) to characterize his aims when he wrote *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (see Martins 2002: 329). *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* is another work in which Calvino puts into practice the principle of telling stories that unfold other stories. The embedding of narratives favours the siege of the writing of historical and fictional texts.

⁹ It is worth pointing out that in *Burr* various memories merge, thus unfolding and embedding various narratives from different types: Burr’s own memories, his fragmentary memoirs of key historical events in which he took part, and other characters’ memories of Burr.

neutral inflection of a biography, thus calling attention to the semantic and ideological investments made in various forms of discursive modulation. These investments have evident implications not only for Burr's fictional modelling, but also more generally for the fictional composition of historical personalities that have usually been converted into myths by official historiography and that the novel (re)interprets from a different perspective. This aspect becomes crucial when one takes into account Vidal's customary interest in the revision of political biographies, which explains, to some extent, the writer's preference for the creation of historical novels.

By giving a voice to a personality who has been unequivocally vilified by historical discourse (which might explain why it is so difficult even nowadays to obtain a bibliography on Burr) and by confronting Burr's version of facts with that of the official representation, Vidal reveals the regulatory and ideological dimension of the writing of history.¹⁰ The use of different examples of *mise en abîme* gains an additional importance when the functionality of the potential multiplicity of what can be narrated is considered in the composition of the novel.¹¹ It is instructive to consider *Burr* as a kind of fictional sequel to another controversial text about the colonel's life, namely, an essay written by William Carlos Williams in 1925 which sharply questions official historiography's transformation of Burr into a negative myth.¹² The acceptance of this hypothesis makes me believe that Vidal has in his novel updated Williams's proposition, thus making a good use of memory, contrary to the historical discourse that has painted Burr as the nation's traitor and has obliterated the importance of the colonel's role in the foundation of the United States as an independent nation.¹³ The quotation work becomes even more refined when one considers that the composition of the fictional Burr rests, on the one hand, on William's characterization of the historical personality on the basis of the combination of the historical discourse's shortage of data, and, on the other hand, on the humanized standpoint from which Williams tried to portray the polemical figure.¹⁴ In other words, by embedding various

¹⁰ Despite having been a major politician and player of history, Aaron Burr has been discredited by his fellows and by historians, a fact that explains why Vidal, so interested in the historiography of great personalities, decided to rehabilitate Burr's image, thus revising the canonical version of history.

¹¹ Vidal uses the same strategy in other novels, particularly within the framework of his historical and experimental fiction, as *Julian* and *Creation* illustrate in the former case, and *Myra Breckinridge*, *Myron*, and *Duluth* in the latter.

¹² Williams (1956). Vidal acknowledges that he had read Williams's *In the American Grain*, in which the American poet reflected upon the negative side of historiography, in Stanton & Vidal (1980: 209); even if he had not, the affinity between the texts would be worthy of remark (see Martins 2006: 155).

¹³ Vidal made good use of memory in Ricoeur's sense, for he portrayed Aaron Burr as a man and not as a myth. Moreover, his depiction is based on various sources, which consider Burr's life from different points of view, highlighting positive and negative aspects of Burr's personality. Consequently Vidal's characterization of Burr is fair, contrary to the one proposed by the historical discourse, whose emphasis was on Burr's negative aspects. This negative characterization probably derives from Jefferson's and his allies' need to neutralize Burr's potential threat to their political fame, an aspect that Vidal suggests throughout the plot when Jefferson's various attempts to vilify Burr are addressed.

¹⁴ Even though Vidal respects the historical truth when he reveals how the portraits of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson have been positively shaped by the historiography, in opposition to what happened to Burr.

versions of memories about Burr Vidal's novel, enters into dialogue with Williams's essay, thus vindicating the great American poet's belief that only literature is able to humanize history as he questions the construction of American cultural identity.¹⁵

As far as *História do Cerco de Lisboa* is concerned, I identify the potential multiplicity of what can be narrated as one of its axial principles, which results, to a great extent, in the privileged use of the *mise en abîme*. It is no exaggeration to characterize the novel itself as an illustrative instance of a *mise en abîme* of the writing of history, when the latter is understood primarily as a verbal construction, a linguistic and rhetorical artefact that needs to be dismantled.¹⁶ By choosing as the protagonist of his novel a proof-reader, who rebels against the mistakes and inaccuracies found in a book about Afonso Henriques's siege of Muslim Lisbon by introducing a 'not' into the history book he was revising, Saramago transforms his novel into a collage of multiple narratives on one of the decisive points of reference in the formation of Portuguese nationality.¹⁷

Saramago's major originality rests in the refutation of historical discourse when two key ideas that are articulated are taken into account: (i) the idea that truth exists but is unattainable, a topic already introduced in the epigraph quoted from the apocryphal *Livro dos Conselhos* (*Book of Advice*); and (ii) the notion that history is literature. It is on the basis of this belief, and stimulated by Maria Sara, that the proofreader proposes the symbolic rewriting of the Lisbon siege, embedding and confronting in his fictional narrative not only the historical discourse's privileged sources, but also the diverse perspectives historiography has not considered (such as, among other instances, reports on miracles, the Moors' beliefs, and their possible reactions to the Christians' siege of medieval Lisbon). The latter sources become credible when the writing about the siege is assumed to be an exercise in make-believe ('um exercício de fingimento'), which has a playful component (related to the proofreader's pleasure in subverting historical truth and waiting for the mistake's disclosure) and an epistemological component (which, to some extent, derives from the newly acquired knowledge about the episode, when the Moors are given voice and their attitudes are juxtaposed with those of the Christians throughout the novel, an aspect that has been considered unthinkable so far, given the assumption that history is written by the winners and not by the defeated).

If in *Burr*, despite the multiplicity of points of view in the various depictions of the most relevant aspects of Aaron Burr's life, the privileged narrative perspective remains

¹⁵ By 'humanized' and 'humanize' I mean that Williams tried to treat Aaron Burr as a human being, as someone with feelings and values and not as a traitor or an enemy. In sum, he characterized him as a man with qualities and imperfections, not as a myth; 'to humanize' is to divest historical discourse of the mythical tone usually used to characterize important personalities. In other words, the act of humanizing history implies making it trivial.

¹⁶ Huici (1996: 137) states that Saramago's use of the *mise en abîme* transforms his text into a subversive novel that constantly promotes self-reflexivity, through the almost obsessive narrator's presence and the multiplication of texts that overlap. See also Sabine (2001: 261–67).

¹⁷ I use 'collage' to refer to the miscellaneous and somewhat labyrinthine nature of representations of a specific event, which does not mean I am privileging one version over another. My aim is to stress the diversity of representations, thus acknowledging the impossibility of the total representation of history through historical or literary texts.

Burr's, in *História do Cerco de Lisboa* the work of quotation is more complex, since Saramago creates an intricate game through which temporally different (and thematically paralleled) narratives —Afonso Henrique's siege of the Moorish city, Raimundo Silva's siege of official history, Maria Sara's romantic siege of Raimundo Silva, the parallel romances of Raimundo Silva and Maria Sara and of Mogueime and Ouroana— are played out in the same spatial location, the environs of the Castelo hill in Lisbon.¹⁸ This fact allows the reader to be transported to both contemporary and medieval Lisbon, not only to listen to its inhabitants' voices, regardless of their religious beliefs or social conditions, but also to read texts from diverse generic frameworks. Raimundo Silva's fictional modelling favours this to-and-fro motion across time and space, since from the beginning the proofreader increasingly acknowledges his own subjective multiplicity and takes advantage of this insight in imagining the past from other perspectives (Sabine 2001: 292–93). If the depiction of Raimundo's visit to his usual milk bar and the consequent to-and-fro between the Lisbon of the proofreader's present and the ancient Moorish quarter of Lisbon best illustrate this game and the novel's openness to the voices of the people, both Christian and Muslim (since both are usually marginalized by historical discourse), Raimundo's heteronymic side in its turn reinforces the stress the novel puts on the perspective of alterity:

Evidentemente, a Leitaria A Graciosa, onde o revisor agora vai entrando, não se encontrava aqui no ano de mil cento e quarenta e sete em que estamos, sob este céu de junho, magnífico e cálido apesar da brisa fresca que vem do lado do mar, pela boca da barra. Uma leitaria é, desde sempre, bom lugar para saber as novidades, [...] é natural que em pouco se passe às preocupações do dia, que são várias e todas graves. A cidade está que é um coro de lamentações, com toda essa gente que vem entrando fugida, enxotada pelas tropas de Ibn Arrinque, o Galego, que Alá o fulmine e condene ao inferno profundo, e vêm em lastimoso estado os infelizes, escorrendo sangue de feridas, chorando e gritando, não poucos trazendo cotos em lugar de mãos, ou cruelmente desorelhados, ou sem nariz, é o aviso que manda adiante o rei português, E parece, diz o dono da leitaria, que vêm cruzados por mar, malditos sejam eles, corre que serão uns duzentos navios, as coisas desta vez estão feias, não há dúvida, [...] que a espada do Profeta caia sobre os assassinos, Cairá, disse um homem novo que, encostado ao balcão, bebia um copo de leite, se for a nossa mão a empunhá-la. [...]

Raimundo Silva entrou, deu os bons-dias sem reparar em quem estava, e foi sentar-se a uma mesa por trás da montra onde se exibiam as seduções da doçaria habitual [...]. O empregado [...] interrompe a limpeza duns copos e traz o café que o revisor pediu, conhece-o apesar de não ser freguês de todos os dias, só uma vez por outra, e sempre dá a ideia de cá vir para preencher um intervalo ocasional, agora parece ter-se sentado com mais descanso, abre um saco de papel de onde retira um maço grosso de páginas soltas, o empregado procura espaço para pousar a chávena e o copo de água, põe o pacote de açúcar no pires, e antes de retirar-se repete o comentário que tem feito ao longo da manhã, fala do frio que está, Felizmente que hoje não temos nevoeiro, o revisor sorri como se tivesse acabado de receber uma notícia agradável, É verdade, felizmente não temos nevoeiro, mas uma mulher gorda, [...] informa que, segundo o boletim meteorológico [...],

¹⁸ On the embedding of various sieges in *História do Cerco de Lisboa* see Seixo (1989), Sabine (2001: 263–65), and Martins (1994: 2006).

é provável que a neblina volte a aparecer ao cair da tarde, quem o diria [...]. O tempo, como a fortuna, é inconstante, disse o revisor, consciente da estupidez da frase. Não respondeu o empregado, a mulher não respondeu [...]. O empregado voltou à lavagem dos copos, a mulher ao que resta do mil-folhas, [...]. Nesta leitaria também estaria um homem novo se não tivesse morrido na guerra, e quanto ao almuadem não há mais que lembrar que íamos principiando a saber como se finou, de misericordioso susto, quando sobre ele vinha o cruzado Osberno, porém não o tal, de espada ao alto, escorrendo sangue fresco, que Alá se apiede das suas e apesar disso desgraçadas criaturas.¹⁹

In the process of creating his fictional version of the Lisbon siege Raimundo chooses Mogueime as a character, so that the soldier behaves as a kind of double for Raimundo, mainly when the siege of the Moors is discussed, and the doubt about Mogueime's possible violation of historical truth concerning his and Mem Ramires's role in the conquest of Santarém remains unclear (Martins 2006: 350). In other words, Raimundo's vacillations as far as the choice of his character is concerned (and the reader is led to believe Mogueime has not lied) cast doubt on the historical truth regarding the episode of the invasion of Santarém, which leads the proofreader to compare various historical sources that are embedded in the fictional text. That comparison allows Raimundo and the reader to draw a parallel between the characters from contemporary, and from ancient, Lisbon, in a process which attains its acme with

¹⁹ *História do Cerco de Lisboa* 61–63/tr. 53–55 'Obviously, the Café Graciosa, where the proof-reader is heading for at this moment, did not exist here in the year one thousand one hundred and forty-seven in which we find ourselves, under the June sky, magnificent and warm notwithstanding the fresh breeze coming in from the sea through the mouth of the straits. A cafe has always been the ideal place to catch up on the news, and soon moving on to the concerns of the day, which are wide-ranging and all of them serious. The city has become one great chorus of lamentations with the arrival of so many fugitives, ousted by the troops of Ibn Arrinque, the Galician, may Allah punish him and condemn him to darkest hell, and the wretched fugitives arrive in a pitiful state, the blood gushing from their wounds, crying out and weeping, many of them with stumps instead of hands, their ears or noses cut off with the most wanton cruelty, an advance warning from the Portuguese king. And it would appear, says the cafe-owner, that the crusaders are on their way by sea, damn them, rumour has it that two hundred ships are about to arrive, this time the situation is really serious, mark my words, [...] may the Prophet's sword fall on the assassins, It will, interrupted a youth who was leaning against the counter with a glass of milk in one hand, if left to us, [...] Raimundo Silva entered, said good morning to no one in particular, and sat at a table behind the showcase where the usual tempting delicacies were on display [...] The fellow behind the counter, [...] put aside the glasses he is washing and brings the coffee the proof-reader ordered, he knows him even though he does not patronize the café every day, only now and then, and he always gives the impression of whiling away the time, today he seems more relaxed, he opens a paper bag and takes out a thick bundle of loose pages, the waiter tries to find some space to deposit the cup of coffee and glass of water, he places the wrapped lump of sugar on the saucer, and before withdrawing, repeats the observation he has been making all morning that it has turned very cold, Fortunately, there isn't any fog today, the proof-reader smiles as if he had just received some good news. It is true, fortunately there is no fog, but a fat woman [...] informs him that according to the weather report [...] the mist will probably reappear by evening, who would have thought it [...] Time, like fortune, is inconstant, said the proof-reader, conscious of the banality of those words. Neither the waiter nor the woman made any reply, [...] The waiter turned back to washing glasses, the woman to what remained of her mille feuille, [...] In this same café, we would find another youth, had he not died in the war, and as for the muezzin, we need only recall that we were just about to find out how he died of merciful fright, when the crusader Osberno, but not the same Osberno, came down on him, with raised sword, spilling fresh blood, may Allah take pity on his own creatures, wretched as they are notwithstanding.'

the discussion of the love siege laid initially by Maria Sara to Raimundo and by Mogueime to Ouroana.

The aspect that attracts me the most in the fictional rewriting of the siege is the make-believe perspective, since it emphasizes the idea defended by Raimundo that history is literature, a belief that seriously questions history's ontological status, and that reminds me of Vidal's belief that history does not rest on facts, but on agreed-upon facts.²⁰ In Saramago's novel, the passage in which the Christians' persuasive attempt to convince the Moors to render Lisbon peacefully displays one of the most representative moments of the narrowing of the siege laid to the writing of history, since Friar Rogeiro, the chronicler appointed to register the negotiations, is led to (de)form historical truth when the Archbishop of Braga intervenes. The latter dictates what should be registered by the official discourse (it is worth remembering the official register has been written according to the Christians' point of view), thus silencing the intervention of the Muslim governor forever. Consider the following passages:

Disse o arcebispo, e Rogeiro logo em abreviado e taquigráfico o registou, para mais tarde deixando os aformoseamentos oratórios com que brindará aquele seu destinatário distante, Osberno chamado, lá onde quer que esteja e quem quer que tenha sido, porém já vai introduzindo redondeios de lavra própria, frutos de inspiração estimulada (*História do Cerco de Lisboa* 200/tr. 178 'As the archbishop spoke, Rogeiro summarized his words in shorthand, later adding any rhetorical flourishes before addressing them afar to Osbern, wheresoever he might be and whosoever he might have been, adding in the meantime his own embellishments, the fruit of his own vivid imagination')

Não há no céu uma nuvem, o sol brilha alto e ardente, [...]. No silêncio ouviu-se a voz do arcebispo de Braga, uma ordem dada ao escrivão, Frei Rogeiro, não fareis constância do que disse esse mouro, foram palavras lançadas ao vento e nós já não estávamos aqui, íamos descendo a encosta de Santo André, a caminho do real onde el-rei nos espera, ele verá, sacando nós as espadas e fazendo-as brilhar ao sol, que é começada a batalha, isto sim, podeis escrever. (*História do Cerco de Lisboa* 206–07/tr. 184 'There is not a cloud in the sky, the warm sun shines on high [...] 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, words thrown to the wind when we had already departed and were descending the slope of Santo André on our way to the encampment where the king awaits us, he will see, as we draw our swords and raise them to the sunlight, that battle has commenced, and that is something you can certainly write down.')

This episode highlights the invention of history, its condition of being a linguistic artefact that might be subject to social, political, and ideological constraints. When Friar Rogeiro is obliged to represent the Christians' and the Moors' transaction according to the Archbishop of Braga's standpoint, he acts in a similar way to Raimundo when the latter introduced a subversive word of negation in the historian's text. Friar Rogeiro transforms a lie (a fiction, since it derives from the archbishop's imagination) into an historical truth, thus erasing, throughout this process, any trace of a conflict of memories.

²⁰ Saramago's and Vidal's concerns about the writing of history and fiction converge when the latter is used to make conjectures about the former. Vidal's opinion stated in the third epigraph to this essay summarizes the writers' disbelief of historical representations.

It is worth returning to the importance of the epistemological component of the siege Raimundo Silva laid to the writing of history, since what is really being addressed, when the attempt to represent the agreement between those who wanted to control medieval Lisbon is portrayed, is the ideological modelling of historical discourse and its regulatory dimension. The discussion of this modelling leads me to consider the ontological status of history, as well as the role of forgetting when knowledge gaps exist. These gaps have been filled by the fictional discourse preferably through the problematization of conflicts of memory, which, in Saramago's narrative, derive not only from conjectures made about what could have taken place, but also from the emphasis put on the perspective of all those marginalized by historical discourse (in this case the defeated Moors and the soldiers, without whom Afonso Henriques would never have won).

III

Burr and *História do Cerco de Lisboa* reflect the stress that Calvino put on multiplicity. By addressing the conflict of memories and the ideological manipulation of the representation of public memory by the powerful from an *en abîme* perspective, Vidal and Saramago play with the potential multiplicity of what can be narrated through the ingenious embedding of various texts that are composed according to diverse discursive paradigms belonging to different generic categories. When the different models of historical fiction chosen by both writers are taken into account, it becomes necessary to complicate the discussion on the writing of history understood as the official representation of collective memory.

As outlined above, *Burr* illustrates the category of the historical novel whereas *História do Cerco de Lisboa* exemplifies the uchronian novel.²¹ It is misleading to think that the historical novel, since it respects the canonized version of history, addresses the bad uses of memory (silences, manipulations, distortions) in a more serious and detailed way than the uchronian novel. If it is a fact that the latter is counterfactual, which makes it acquire a playful component that cannot always be found in the historical novel, it is necessary to stress that there is a serious intent behind the ludic façade of the uchronian novel. In Saramago's case this intent reflects the writer's need to address the loss of irrecoverable data (for example, Mogueime's version of the conquest of Santarém, which could have happened despite the fact that there is no historical evidence of it), in contrast to Vidal's preoccupation in *Burr* with recovering data that has been suppressed. This subtle distinction in the manner in which these texts besiege official history proves that both Vidal and Saramago's exercises in make-believe pursue the comprehension, explanation, and dissemination of the past through different systems of signification. Moreover, it cannot be forgotten that the gestures of quotation and their resulting textual unfoldings about the various versions attributed to historical events imply different degrees of problematization as far as the amnesias of the public representation of memory are concerned.

²¹ On the uchronian novel see Wesseling (1991), and on *História do Cerco de Lisboa* as a uchronian novel Martins (2001, 2006).

Although *História do Cerco de Lisboa* is a novel in which the writing of history is openly discussed, bearing in mind Raimundo Silva's revising work and his decision to transgress the canonized history, the metahistorical comments that derive from *Burr* are curiously more extensive than those found in Saramago's novel. The difference lies in the fact that *História do Cerco de Lisboa* privileges Raimundo Silva's creative labour, since the new version of the siege is fictional. Saramago's novel, as a result, has a metafictional component which is much more evident than that which is found in *Burr*. As Raimundo writes his counterfactual version of the siege, the novel analyses itself, thus privileging an approximation between the writing of fiction and the writing of history, an aspect that reinforces the proofreader's opinion that history is literature. In Saramago the metafictional component emphasizes the metahistorical component, since the proofreader agrees to writing a version of the siege, which foregrounds the viewpoints of those who are usually marginalized by historiography. This attention paid to the excluded does not happen in Vidal, whose work addresses the composition of the American national memory from the perspective of those who were considered powerful.²² If it is a fact that Vidal considers the official history from a perspective different to Saramago's, and if the uchronian novel gives the Portuguese writer the necessary margin to introduce the vision of the disadvantaged to the discussion on the manipulations of memory, both novels propose the reassessment not only of the various forms of knowledge about history, but also their consequent representation. In other words, Vidal and Saramago illustrate that both the historical fiction and the historical discourse, understood as semantic systems about the past, imply different types of modelling of the empirical world.

In sum, when the writers articulate modellings that are referential (the most immediate representation of the empirical world), ideological (the preference for a specific viewpoint in the representation of the real), aesthetic (the symbolic representation of the real and its articulation with the rhetorical component of the discursive process), and intertextual (the assumption that every representation of the real is dependent on other verbal representations that are reassessed whenever a new modelling operation takes place), Vidal and Saramago acknowledge that public memory, insofar as it is officially constructed, must be permanently revised. Both authors propose through their novels a new discursive modality of historical representation, which is primarily a critical view of the practice of historical representation itself and definitely a good use of memory that embodies a poetics of correction.

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²² The historical discourse transformed Burr into an outcast, but it is undeniable that he belonged to the highest circles of American politics.

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