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Allegory as a form of Communication

between writers and readers:

Plato's Cave and Saramago's *Blindness*

by

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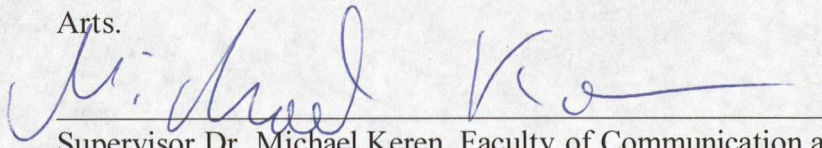
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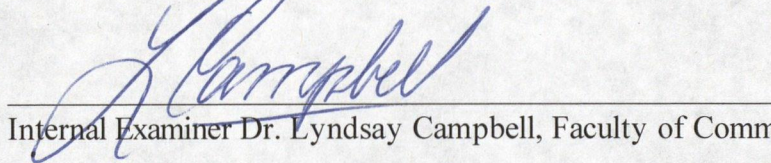
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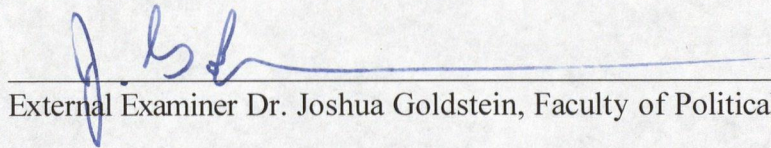
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ABSTRACT

The paper comprises an exploration of Plato's Allegory of the Cave and its structural and thematic relevance in José Saramago's *Blindness*. Hermeneutics and its contemporary cousin, intertextuality, provide a theoretical base for the thesis, while an in-depth comparison of metaphor and allegory in cognitive theory and literature respectively support the methodology chapter. The concluding sections of the paper argue that Saramago's figurative approach in *Blindness* is at once respectful and revisionary of Plato's allegory, and that the novelist's activity constitutes a critical re-reading of the original trope. This assertion challenges earlier critiques of allegory, which generally denounce the literary figure as retrograde and didactic.

DEDICATION

To Meggie, Squeaker, Bunny and especially my Didds, who never lost his patience or his temper.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Allegory is such a ubiquitous and venerable communications device that to properly describe its origins, one could well begin with scrutiny of Man's earliest cave paintings at Lascaux. Twentieth-century scholars of allegory (and there are many) are particularly aware of this issue, so much so that a significant number devote their studies to developing historic maps of allegory's functions in philosophy and ethics, literature, education, political science and psychology. Edward A. Bloom's concise "The Allegorical Principle" (1951) provides an early exploration of this holistic approach; Harry Berger Jr.'s *The Allegorical Temper* (1957), Edward Honig's *Dark Conceit: the Making of Allegory* (1959), Angus Fletcher's *Allegory: the Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964), and Maureen Quilligan's *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (1979) more completely excavate the agenda. While Northrop Frye's formidable *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) describes the broad landscape of literary criticism, its subtext continuously indicates the prevalence of allegory in literature: the author notes almost in passing that "all commentary is allegorical interpretation" (Frye, p. 89). For the record, allegory in literature and philosophy may be traced as far back as the Classical period (viz., in the works of Plato and in the later rhetoric of Quintilian and Cicero) through to the Middle Ages (with Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*) to the

era of early modern and modern literature (Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the poetry of William Blake, C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, Albert Camus's *The Plague*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*).

Defining allegory is another protean endeavour. In its simplest connotation, allegory occurs when a communications act, either in speech or writing, presents one narrative (the primary mode) yet means another (the secondary mode): an etymological definition derives allegory from *allos* + *agoreuein* (*other* + *speak openly, speak in the assembly or market*) (Fletcher, p. 2). Further, Edward Bloom notes that connotation of the secondary narrative depends "for clarity and interpretation upon the primary meaning" and that if an allegory is worth its salt, it must evoke "a twofold response from the pictorial imagination and the rational intellect" (Bloom, 1951, pp. 164-165). Allegory is thus a multi-voiced communicative act that compels its listeners/readers to engage in interpretive or hermeneutic activity so as to discover the deeper meaning posed by the superficial narrative.

While a more thorough definition of allegory is to follow, producing a rejuvenated overview of allegory is not the mandate of this paper. To adequately describe allegory's communicative function in Jose Saramago's 1995 novel *Blindness* – in fact the focus of this paper – it *is* however essential to look as far back as antiquity, specifically to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Positioned within the seventh book of *The Republic's* seventh part, this luminous trope remains one of the most well known parables of philosophy or literature. Briefly, here is a recap of the ancient allegory:

The Cave is filled with prisoners whose limbs are shackled and heads

immobilized so all they can see is a wall before them. Behind the prisoners is a walkway where other men hold up objects; behind this walkway is a great fire whose light allows the objects to cast shadows on the wall before the prisoners. Because the prisoners have been held in the cave since childhood, this flickering of shadows on the wall is the only reality they know, and in fact, they play a game among themselves to name the source of these shadows. As is the case in any game, some prisoners are better than others at playing it, and a hierarchy is quickly established based on this apparent facility in naming.

If one of the prisoners should somehow escape his bonds, stand up and turn around, his eyes will be blinded by the fire and he will see the objects even less clearly than their shadows. Eventually, however, his eyes will adjust and he will realize that the shadows he has seen so far are only shadows – illusions – and not the real objects themselves. If he should be dragged up and out of the Cave, his eyes will be even more overwhelmed by the brightness of the sun, but later, he will acclimatize and see the greater reality of life all around him. The freed prisoner's final act of realization will be to stare directly into the sun, which he will eventually realize is the source of all light and understanding.

Once the prisoner has made this journey of understanding, he is compelled to return to the Cave to free his fellow bondsmen. But there is a problem with this heroic decision: once the freed prisoner returns underground, his eyes are overwhelmed by the darkness of the Cave, and he cannot see even the shadows on the wall. For a time, it seems that he is completely blind. His fellow prisoners are aware of his disability and

they laugh at him; they refuse to accompany him to the surface for fear of losing their own eyesight. Indeed, if the freed prisoner insists upon dragging his more reticent bondsmen from the cave, he is in grave danger and risks being murdered.

Socrates explains his allegory in simple terms: the region revealed through sight is the prison,

and the light of the fire in it (is) the power of the sun. And if you assume the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise...[M]y dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason... (Plato, p. 751).

The philosopher summarizes this part of the conversation with Plato's older brother Glaucon (to whom he has been telling the story) by suggesting that the freed and now enlightened prisoner must not linger under the sun but return to the Cave to "take charge of the other citizens and be their guardians" (Plato). As one of these emancipated prisoners, Glaucon is now responsible for the enlightenment of his fellow bondsmen.

Down you must go then, each in his turn, to the habituation of the others and accustom yourselves to the observation of the obscure

things there. For once habituated you will discern them infinitely better than the dwellers there, and you will know what each of the 'idols' is and whereof it is a semblance, because you have seen the reality of the beautiful, the just and the good (Plato, p. 752).

One note: Socrates' tale deserves a thorough explication here not merely because it introduces a foundation for this thesis. While at one level hand memorable and simple to relate in broad strokes, the complete Allegory is on another plane a complex tale with numerous characters types and motivations, plot points and contingencies. Re-acquaintance with these details here should remove the need to revisit Plato's allegory at each juncture of the paper.

This paper will argue that *Blindness* adopts Plato's Allegory of the Cave to envision a newly emerging fictional society in which a female guardian leads a group of slaves out of their underground cave and into the light of Truth. It is a process whereby a self-selected guardian leads her blind companions through a series of fearful episodes and past any number of foes (including the other slaves who refuse to leave and the guards who watch the cave) with the aid of a particularly Platonic form of dialectic. The woman chosen to lead her people to a better life does so because she is analytical and supremely intelligent (one of Plato's requirements for his guardians); she is able to argue her way through almost any difficulty and, when unsuccessful in argument, she is clever enough to choose silence or violence to advance her goals.

Beneath this explication is a larger agenda: to reveal how Plato's allegory instructs its listeners in the qualities of leadership in treacherous times and how

Saramago's novel re-acquaints 20th-century readers with these enduring lessons. I suggest that the purpose of both the Allegory and *Blindness* is to teach (a not uncommon aim for antique philosophers although not the usual focus for contemporary novelists) and, by teaching, to communicate the qualities that comprise moral excellence. Allegory works particularly well in this case because, as Angus Fletcher notes, it provides a fresh narrative or "illustration" for traditional and often tired world views (Fletcher, 1964, p. 120), and creates a new pictorial map of a concept that may be more easily held in the mind and recalled when appropriate. Consider the fable (which in this case functions in a manner similar to that of allegory): to most poignantly describe the havoc that telling falsehoods may play with an individual's integrity, a student may simply tell the story of The Boy Who Cried Wolf.

One cautionary note: Plato's educational philosophy is not typical didactic fare. After relating the Allegory of the Cave to Glaucon, Socrates emphasizes that his purpose in relating the story is not to insert moral lessons into a student's mind but to guide the individual in such a way that she may recognize this *a priori* moral knowledge for herself:

...(O)ur argument indicates that this is a capacity which is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at

reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good (Plato, p. 754).

However, students who are thus guided must not be left to interpret this new light of knowledge by themselves. The didactic process still requires the teacher to help ground this new information and strengthen its foundation through communicative action, namely dialectic. By way of discussion, disagreement or confusion may be resolved, and the search for truth facilitated. Socrates furthers the point by reminding Glaucon that once these students – former citizens of the Cave – have faced the light of truth and been enlightened, they owe it to their community to return underground, live again with their comrades in the cave “and get used to seeing in the dark; once you get used to it you will see a thousand times better than they do and will distinguish the various shadows and know what they are shadows of, because you have seen the truth about things admirable” (Plato, p. 755).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Five scholars on *Blindness*

Because this literature review deals with a late work in José Saramago's prodigious collection of written material, it should be helpful to position *Blindness* within that *oeuvre* and to thus provide the reader with an evolutionary approach to his work. A very brief biography may help facilitate this process.

Born in 1922 to a family of landless farmers in a village north of Lisbon, Saramago left high school to earn a living as a mechanic. An unsatisfying career in the Portuguese civil service followed, then a number of positions in the publishing and newspaper business. In 1969, he joined the Communist Party, illegal during an era of military dictatorship in Portugal; since that time, he has retained a close although critical relationship with the Party. In 1975, Saramago began to work as a translator but simultaneously launched his career as a novelist; in 1982, his *Baltasar and Blimunda* received international recognition and he began to focus more intensely on his literary writing.

According to biographers, Saramago has written over 30 works of literature, including three books of poetry (*Os poemas possíveis* (1966), *Provavelmente alegria* (1970), *O ano de 1993* (1975)), seven books of essays (*Deste mundo e do outro* (1971), *A bagagem do viajante: crónicas* (1973), *As opiniões que o DL teve* (1974), *Os apontamentos: crónicas políticas* (1976), *Viagem a Portugal. Círculo de Leitores* 1981

(1984), *Folhas políticas : 1976-1998* (1999) and *Discursos de Estocolmo* (1999)), one published diary (*Cadernos de Lanzarote : diário. Vol. 1 – 5* (1994-1998) and six dramas (*A noite* (1979), *Que farei com este livro?* (1980), *A segunda vida de Francisco de Assis* (1987), *In nomine Dei* (1993), *Don Giovanni ou O dissoluto absolvido : [teatro]* (2005), and *Don Giovanni ou O dissoluto absolvido: teatro* (2005)). Saramago's works of prose include: *Manual de Pintura e Caligrafia: romance* (1977); *Objecto quase* (1978), *Levantado do Chão: romance* (1980), *Memorial do Convento: romance* (1982), *O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis: romance* (1984), *A jangada de pedra: romance* (1986), *História do cerco de Lisboa: romance* (1989), *O evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo: romance* (1991), *Ensaio sobre a cegueira: romance* (1995; translated from Portuguese into English as *Blindness* in 1997), *Todos os nomes: romance* (1997), *Terra do Pêcado: romance* (1997), *O conto da Ilha Desconhecida* (1997), *A caverna: romance* (2000), *O homem duplicado: romance* (2002), *Ensaio sobre a Lucidez: romance* (2004), *As intermitências da morte: romance* (2005), and *A Viagem do Elefante* (2008). At the date of this writing, at least 15 of Saramago's works have been translated into English: these include (with English titles): *Baltasar and Blimunda*, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy: A Novel*, *The Stone Raft*, *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, *Blindness*, *All the Names*, *The Tale of the Unknown Island*, *Journey to Portugal: In Pursuit of Portugal's History and Culture*, *The Cave*, *The Double*, *Seeing*, *Death with Interruptions*, and *The Trip of the Elephant*.

Discussion of a few of the translated novels may shed additional light on the evolution of Saramago's literary approach. Set in 18th-century Portugal against the

backdrop of Malta's Franciscan friary, *Baltasar and Blimunda* is a tale of two unconventional lovers: the war-weary one-handed Baltasar and the radiant Blimunda, whose psychic gifts provide a note of magic realism in an otherwise 'historical' novel. The text establishes Saramago's characteristic style and literary themes: namely, his intense interest in the historic makings of his country, his unique unpunctuated paragraphs and ironic tone. *The Stone Raft* continues with the same highly ironic and mystical voice: in the novel, five characters join forces as the Iberian Peninsula breaks free from the European continent and journeys into the Atlantic Ocean. However, a new ahistoric note is struck in this work: the journal of both characters and the newly freed island makes no obvious reference to past events, as does *Baltasar and Blimunda*. Is the story of a conjoined Portugal/Spain that drifts into the sea an allegory? a veiled reference to Iberia's new status in the emerging European Union?

The novels following the publication of *Blindness* tend to shift from one of these positions to another: *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* radically revises the popular conception of God as a forgiving father and Christ his entirely obedient child, while at the same time playing with yet remaining firmly in an historic approach, whereas *The Cave* explores the plight of an aging craftsman – an Everyman – as he and his family are forced to leave their rural home and live in a monstrous Mall. Following that allegorical mode, *Seeing* and *All the Names* focus upon characters who are either nameless or, in the latter case, bear the most ubiquitous of names (i.e., Senor José). The various goals and activities of these protagonists seem without historic precedent and therefore referential in a more illusory way: *All the Names'* Senor José relentlessly pursues an unknown

woman through his clerical work in a Central Registry; *Seeing's* Superintendent attempts to discover the connection between his country's refusal to vote with the protagonist of *Blindness* – that is, the doctor's wife.

But whereas most readers of Saramago's work recognize the pull between historic documentation and allusion in his many novels, reviewers of *Blindness* refer almost universally to the book's allegorical mode of representation. For some, the novel constitutes a "satire" and "more than a simple parable" (Ursula K. Le Guin, 2006); a "haunting folklore, (a) ghost story" and a "fable so unsettling, so limitlessly allegorical...that it seems infinite" (*Salon's* Sarah Goldstein, 2006). Other reviewers are less enthusiastic: "there may be "a political allegory in there somewhere, but the storytelling is so hazy that it's hard to see the point" (*Entertainment Weekly*, 2006); "(it's) allegorical blindness/sight framework is weak and obvious" (*Powell's Books*, 2006).

Scholarly commentators tend to be as bewildered by Saramago's methods as populist commentators. Literary scholar Randy Boyagoda bemoans the political allegory of the book, calling the characters "cutouts" and "pawns for his (Saramago's) own ideological predilections" (Boyagoda, 2006, p. 90). Werner von Koppenfels considers the ending of *Blindness* to be "a curiously pat conclusion to a powerful parable" (von Koppenfels, 2004) but later acknowledges the importance of a deeper referent in the writer's novels with mention of Saramago's "allegorical cast of mind."

Of those academics who review Saramago's companion novels, it is New Zealand sociology scholar Ian Carter who most thoroughly examines the roots of allegory,

although not in *Blindness*, but in Saramago's *The Cave* (2002). He begins with a synopsis of the novel's plot: a rural father-daughter work together to save their family pottery business by re-inventing their product as a series of pottery figurines. The tactic fails. The pair leaves their home and ruined business to live with the daughter's husband at The Centre, a mammoth shopping mall/apartment complex in the city. As the novel ends, foundations are being dug for another extension to The Centre and the workers find a cave "complete with a bench near a wall, shackles, and evidence of a burned-out fire" (Carter, 2005). What Carter fails to add here is that Saramago's cave is actually a tomb:

The tremulous light from the torch swept slowly over the white stone, caught some bits of dark cloth, then moved upward to reveal a human body sitting there. Beside it, covered in the same dark fabric, were five other bodies, all sitting as erect as if a metal spike had been put through their skulls to keep them fixed to the stone (Saramago, 2002, pp. 291-92).

A simple allegorical interpretation of this passage would suggest that the bodies represent those of the aging potter, his daughter, his son-in-law, his lover and his son-in-law's parents; the underground tomb is the cave described within Plato's *Republic*. Unlike the fortunate souls led from the cave by Plato's guardians, these humble citizens perish beneath the toxic hegemonic fumes of capitalism's greatest accomplishment: the Mall. "That this formally unlettered man could build his novel around an intensely academic trope like (Plato's) Cave is impressive," Carter notes (in my opinion, a rather condescending comment to make about the mature work of a Nobel Prize winner.)

While he does not attempt to further explicate or develop the role of allegory in Saramago's writing, it nonetheless must be acknowledged that Carter is the only one of his surveyed colleagues to pursue the roots of allegory in *The Cave*. Consider in particular the critic who suggests that Saramago's allegorical framework is "weak and obvious": this may in fact be the case but if it is true, we would expect this commentator not only to indicate the original referent for said allegorical framework but to explain how it is that Saramago's allegorical technique is so particularly clumsy.

It should be noted that many comparative literature academics writing on Saramago are at least bilingual (i.e., Portuguese and English), if not tri-lingual; and increasingly, they are writing some of their original work in English (see Martins & Sabine's comparative literature volume, *In Dialogue with Saramago*). Also, translation of several key Portuguese articles has recently provided a glimpse into the perspectives of the novelist's scholarly countrymen and -women (namely, a variety of essays in a special edition of the 2001 *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*). Finally, two major English-language volumes on Saramago have recently been published: Harold Bloom's *José Saramago* (2005) and David Frier's *The Novels of José Saramago* (2007).

As noted above, almost every scholar writing in English comments at some point upon the "allegorical" nature of Saramago's writing; many of these writers remark in the next breath that his novels contain much "symbolism" and metonymic language. This tendency is so ubiquitous that it would be more efficient here to indicate which scholars *do not* comment upon Saramago's figurative style versus the inverse. Worse, what is almost universal amongst these commentators is their apparent desire not to a) devote any

time to discussing the fine points of difference between allegory and symbol, nor to b) violate the unspoken pact of contemporary scholars to resist interpretation of said allegories in literary texts when they appear – or seem to appear. Because my interest in this essay is to focus upon the use of allegory in Saramago's *Blindness*, I will therefore concentrate my efforts here on critical essays that meet at this crossroads: viz., those that contain more than a passing mention of his figurative style, and that scrutinize the one novel in particular.

If Saramago's allegorical tendencies are as ubiquitous as many critics seem to believe, should one not comment upon this general tilt by examining all critical writing on each one of his books? This would be an important objection were it not for the curious turn Saramago takes with *Blindness*, which is his move to use allegory in a markedly more distilled form. British scholar David Frier points out the "radical break" represented with this iconic novel, suggesting that "with elimination of specific references to time, place and name, the reader's attention is drawn explicitly and immediately to considerations that are more universal in character than those prompted by works set in specific historical moments" (Frier, 2001, p. 98). However, he posits this move is not a thematic but a stylistic one:

...(T)he "radical break" that he (Saramago) mentions in an interview immediately after the publication of *Blindness* refers to the harrowing nature of the subject-matter of this novel and not necessarily...to the mentality that produced it... I would argue that the change that the author's works have undergone during recent

years should be seen as occurring more in style and emphasis than in underlying direction. (Frier, 2001, p. 97.)

Frier's reading provides us with a clue as to the relative dearth of critical essays on this particular novel, for it is certainly true that the scholars who previously pegged him as a magic realist or political satirist are now faced with a mysterious new Saramago, a grim allegorist whose *Blindness* lacks the avuncular, chatty asides of *Baltasar and Blimunda*, *The Stone Raft* or even *The Cave*.

Krabbenhoft

Kenneth Krabbenhoft's "Saramago, Cognitive Estrangement, and Original Sin?" applies two theoretical approaches to *O Ano de 1993* (henceforth *The Year 1993*) and *Blindness* to reveal how the novelist strips away narrative detail to reveal the extremities of good and evil in the human spirit. The first approach – cognitive estrangement – provides insight into how Saramago defamiliarizes or "makes strange" with the elements of everyday experience, while the second – original sin – gives the reader a moral lens through which to view the events of both texts. Krabbenhoft cites science fiction scholar Darko Suvin, who defines science fiction as a genre that distorts common experiences and environments in such a way to "make the familiar seem unfamiliar" (Krabbenhoft, 2001, p. 124); the artifice thus creates a sort of distancing alienation that provides the reader with fresh insights into ordinary life. Cognitive estrangement frequently introduces notes of symbolism and social criticism into the novel: in *The Year 1993*, for example, mechanical wolves and eagles stand in for the attack dogs of Nazi Germany and the 1960s American Civil Rights movement, while the book's transparent prisons bear an

uncanny resemblance to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon.

Blindness performs in a similarly disruptive manner. First, the novel's characters are nameless, which renders them "universalized;" it is a stylistic device that creates a queasy depersonalization of the novel's various characters, says Krabbenhoft. This same disjunctive device is extended to include the novel's time and place: because the reader cannot place *Blindness*'s plot in a specific country or historical setting, s/he may more easily extrapolate its events to a war-torn nation of her/his choice. (As Saramago himself notes about the 1995 novel, "All of the horrible things that I am describing and which will surely upset the reader...are happening right now in the building next door, on the next street over, somewhere" (Krabbenhoft, 2001, p. 130)).

As for original sin, St. Augustine's concept saturates both *The Year 1993* and *Blindness*: Saramago suggests that evil is not the consequence of an unjust society but inherent in mankind itself, and that our "fallenness" must be taken seriously if we are to redeem ourselves.

Krabbenhoft's essay is traditionally (viz., Romantically) interpretive in its approach. Although the writer references a considerable number of other novels and critics (a typically intertextual approach, as we shall see), he more frequently substantiates his positions with direct quotes from interviews with Saramago or cites other scholarly works that directly quote the novelist (no fewer than four different interviews with Saramago are referenced in this paper alone.) The author's perceived intentions weigh heavily in the balance, a problem at one point in particular when Krabbenhoft is defending his application of original sin to *Blindness* and supports it with

a Saramagoan quote on rationality:

In this book I intend to question myself and the reader about our rationality, if we are in effect rational. And if this thing we call 'reason' in fact deserves the name. And if it does deserve it, whether we use reason rationally, in the proper sense of the word, as a defense of life (Krabbenhof, 2001, p. 133-134, citing Baptista-Bastos, 1996).

If St. Augustine includes defense of life and/or rationality as part of his definition of original sin, this connection is not made – indeed, the essayist does not provide any substantial description of Augustine's concept beyond a two-sentence note, and the relationship of virtue and rationality is unclear.

And where many scholars have acknowledged the presence of allegory in *Blindness*, Krabbenhof focuses on the notion of cognitive estrangement – but perhaps the two notions are not so dissimilar. Craig Owens points out that the impulse to interpret a strange world is fundamental to allegory, and that this impulse is common to psychoanalysis and to the work of Walter Benjamin:

Allegory first emerged in response to a similar sense of estrangement from tradition; throughout its history it has functioned in the gap between a present and a past which, without allegorical reinterpretation, might have remained foreclosed. A conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present – these are its two most fundamental impulses. (Owens, 1980, p. 68.)

It is odd in this case to attribute a literary strategy describing the future (viz., cognitive estrangement) to a trope responsible for rediscovering the past (that is, allegory), but perhaps the stretch is not that great. Indeed, many science fiction films and novels take a similar tact: Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and his *A Clockwork Orange*, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and George Orwell's *1984*. These 20th-century masterworks are commonly regarded as cautionary allegories that warn of the dangers of turning one's back on history (in the sense that those who ignore the past are doomed to repeat it.) That Saramago's novel provides cognitive estrangement in an allegorical form is an interpretation few scholars would likely deny.

Von Koppelfels

Where Krabbenhoft brings a dual approach to his reading of *Blindness*, Werner von Koppelfels and his "'These irritant bodies': Blinding and Blindness in Dystopia" focuses on one – and it is less a theoretical approach than the identification of the novel as an example of a multiform genre. Along with Cyrano de Bergerac's *L'Autre Monde*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, H.G. Wells' 'Country of the Blind' and *In the Days of the Comet*, and John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, Saramago's *Blindness* is, he posits, a Menippean satire. This form he describes as:

...a serio-comic genre of fantastic realism that frequently puts the conventions of the novel to ironic use in order to camouflage its basic metaphorical bent. Its protagonists are personae or mouthpieces for mental attitudes, posing as individual characters. It

stages paradoxical inversions of normalcy by establishing a heteropia...from which to cast a fresh and disillusioned eye on the state of the world (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 156).

Saramago introduces the reader to one of the archetypal characteristics of Menippean satire within the first paragraph of his novel – viz., magic realism, which occurs when *Blindness*'s first character suddenly becomes blind while waiting for a traffic light to change. This abrupt and unlikely turn of events is echoed at the novel's end, when the milky blindness erases itself as mysteriously as it came on; the writer notes this framing device ensures that readers will read the novel as an atypical genre, and that the move "emphasizes the nature of the narrative as an experiment in fantasy" (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 169).

Further proof of the text as Menippean satire is offered as von Koppelfels points out that point-of-view in the book is not handled in conventional ways: the doctor's wife, through whose eyes the events of the novel progresses, is self-conscious and reflexive about her ability to observe *Blindness*'s events. Although she can see, she ruminates frequently on the idea that she is herself blind to aspects of moral life (i.e., after killing the leader of the thugs, she proclaims, "Perhaps I am the blindest of all" (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 171). This reflexive point of view illustrates one of the basic rules of Menippean satire, says von Koppelfels: "that we have to watch the utopian, or rather dystopian, worlds through the eyes of an outsider" (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 170).

Finally, the essayist notes the significance in this form of satire of an ironic authorial or implied narrator's voice: "In Saramago, this voice, dry, sarcastic, full of

black humour, is prominent...(and the speaker is) the moralist disguised as an ironist” (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 171). There is however one prominent break with this ironic tone, and it comes at the novel’s end when the doctor’s wife suggests that humankind is universally blind: “Blind people who can see but do not see.” This conclusion breaks with the generic conventions of Menippean satire, he notes, and it makes a “curiously pat conclusion to a powerful parable” (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 172).

The von Koppelfels essay is not unlike the Krabbenhof in its hermeneutic approach: both writers seek to divine the true mindset of Saramago as authorial commentator, and both seek to prove up their assertions by pointing to established theories or genres to which the novelist might subscribe. Von Koppelfels goes so far as to claim that Saramago “clearly amalgamated both Wells’s and Wyndham’s plots in mapping out his novel *Blindness*” – an assertion he does not further substantiate.

What is most curious about von Koppelfel’s argument, however, is not his claim that *Blindness* is a Menippean satire – indeed, from certain angles, the argument appears sound. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye defines Menippean satire as a) not told as a first-person narrative (certainly true in the case of *Blindness*); b) characteristically stylized instead of naturalistic (also true for this novel) and c) presenting people as the “mouthpieces of the ideas they represent” (Frye, 1957, p. 309) (again, if we are to follow the hermeneutic quest to understand the beliefs of Saramago, also true).

But at least two essential components of Menippean satire are not evident in *Blindness*: the first is the genre’s delight in satirizing social posturing and high-class folly. According to genre specifications, a couple like the novel’s ophthalmologist and his

wife should be portrayed as ignorant bourgeois snobs, but such is not the case in *Blindness*. If there is in fact a hero or heroine in the novel, most readers would likely concede that it is the doctor's wife.

Further, although *Blindness* arguably functions as a work of social commentary, what Frye calls the "ironic erudition" of Menippean satire is for the most part absent from the novel. The novel is filled with the writer's usual stream-of-dialogic-consciousness conversations, but the discussions are generally held in the spirit of honest problem-solving or consensus-building. Saramago's often garrulous and good-tempered conversational voice (what British reviewer Julian Evans calls his "prolix, wiseacre tone" (Evans, 2006)), and the puns and plays on words in which the novelist so clearly delights (and which his translator, Margaret Jull Costa, finds so challenging to translate (Costa, 1998)) are both curiously subdued or absent in *Blindness*. Indeed, the entire tone of sarcasm and witty scorn, essential elements in the genre of Menippean satire, are for the most part lacking in the book. Irony and satire may be in the eye of the reader/beholder, but when one compares the chillingly flat, observational tone of *Blindness* with the broad humour and sly social commentary of the first half of *Seeing*, for example, the critical reader must question the decision to comfortably classify the 1995 work as a satire at all.

Even more curious about von Koppelfel's argument is his admittance that *Blindness* displays allegorical tendencies:

(Saramago) is that figure familiar from Swift and Wells, the moralist disguised as an ironist. The perspectives of the controlling intelligence, the 'enlightened blind', and the narrator converge to state the

‘allegorical’ meaning of the epidemic of blindness, adding, in the Menippean manner, the essayistic and philosophical reflection to the story proper (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 171.)

The acknowledgement is not for the writer a happy one: *Blindness* suffers, insist von Koppelfels, from a moralistic ending proper to allegory but deadly to irony:

At the end, we are being told, in so many words, that willful blindness leading to barbarism has become universal in the contemporary world. It is a verdict one may not wish to quarrel with but its break with the Menippean mode of irony makes it a curiously pat conclusion to a powerful parable (von Koppelfels, 2004, p. 172.)

Two notes here: first, it is good academic policy to ensure that if one is interpreting a work as an exemplar of a genre but at some point the work fails to comply to that formula, one should at that stage question whether the interpretation is at fault – not the primary text. Second, allegory and satire are not as interchangeable as von Koppelfels might hope, for while their techniques may be similar, their ends are very different.

Gerald Bruns points out that:

The allegorist will claim that allegory is a certain way sacred things have of appearing, and some will acknowledge that dissimulation is the natural mode of every supernatural presence, including the Real Presence, which appears in an allegory of Bread, Wine, and a Meal. (Whereas) the satirist never hesitates. He is the agent of demystifying desire, scourge of appearances, connoisseur of absence, our Nietzsche

and our perfect man. (Bruns, 1979, pp. 126-127.)

Frier

David Frier's "Righting Wrongs, Re-Writing Meaning and Reclaiming the City in Saramago's *Blindness* and *All the Names*" begins by acknowledging the "radical break" made in Saramago's writing with the publication of *Blindness* (Frier, 2001, p. 97).

Furthering this argument, he suggests that both novels contain a common mythic structure: namely, the symbolic descent of their characters into the underworld, with all the profound changes and discovery of meaning that go with it. The essayist structures the rest of his article around this allegory, focusing on the displacement of characters plunged into alien otherworlds, and the problematic nature of morality when human beings find themselves radically displaced.

Further, Saramago's novels expose the many shades of gray on the moral continuum. *Blindness* in particular puts both protagonists and its more deeply flawed characters through a nightmarish series of tests, which most fail not completely but by degrees. Its actors are typically not as evil as *Blindness*'s thugs who demand treasure and then women for the group's hijacked food, but they are wicked by their opportunism (consider the man who steals the car of the first man to go blind), by their callousness (i.e., the man who suggests that the asylum's women should submit to rape as the price to be paid for the community's survival), by their inertia. One of the most frightening aspects of *Blindness*, says Frier, "lies not in the brutal crimes that the reader sees perpetrated within the asylum, nor in the total degradation into which the city has fallen

when the inmates escape from it, but in the passivity of their response to these horrors”

(Frier, 2001, p. 110):

“Say to a blind man, you’re free, open the door that was separating him from the world, Go, you are free, we tell him once more, and he does not go, he has remained motionless there in the middle of the road, he and the others, they are terrified, they do not know where to go” (Frier, 2001, p. 110, quoting Saramago, 1995, p. 195).

The propensity of individuals to accept their fate and behave in cowardly, covert or dishonest ways is a more common, more insidious moral issue than is the aggressive behaviour of the asylum’s hoodlums.

But if *Blindness* examines the grey scale of wickedness, it also reveals the many shades of goodness. The girl with the dark glasses, who Frier suggests is in fact a prostitute, also shows a virtuous side: she is sincerely apologetic for wounding the car thief who had accosted her, she adopts the young boy with the squint, and eventually becomes a loving mate to the old man with the eye patch. On the flip side, the excellent nature of the doctor’s wife does not remain untinted: she has a terrifying moment of doubt and almost loses her faith in her abilities while descending into the underground supermarket storeroom to find food for the group. It is not a major sin, but one that could compromise the well-being of her small community, if she were to let it. Frier quotes Saramago critic Maria Alzira Seixo, who writes,

What Saramago does not do is tell an allegorical story where he implicitly suggests what is wrong and how that wrong can be put

right; rather, Saramago warns us of a danger, the danger of not seeing, of not noticing (Frier, 2001, p. 102, quoting Seixo, “Os espelhos virados para dentro,” 196).

This then is the only true moral of *Blindness*’s allegory: that “the struggle for democracy and the exercise of moral values in public life must be a continual one, and one in which we all have our parts to play” (Frier, 2001, p. 117).

On one level, Frier’s appears traditionally hermeneutic: several of its major points are supported with quotes from interviews with Saramago, and the writer seeks through the course of the paper to interpret the two novels in question in the light of biographical notes and Saramago’s evolving opus. On another level, however, the article also seeks to compare *Blindness* and *All the Names* to one another, and to Saramago’s earlier and more historical novels – an intratextual interpretive reading, which lends extra weight to his argument. In fact, over the relatively short span on this paper, he makes reference to 24 different works by José Saramago – certainly an advanced scholarly effort to locate the two novels in an expanded context.

Perhaps Frier’s greatest contribution with this article is his deep appreciation of the complexity of moral life in *Blindness*. Just as he chronicles the spectrum of texts and influences in this essay, so too does he distinguish a vast array of human reactions, both overt and covert, to any given event. One situation already named – that is, the discussion amongst the group when the hoodlums first demand women – receives further expurgation from Frier, as he points out that not only do some of the men expect that the women will do “what’s best” for the group, but that the first blind man reacts to this idea

with different and simultaneous objections. His wife should not prostitute herself for food first because she is his wife and should not be soiled (which proves his selfishness), and second because he believes she is not equipped to make her own moral decision about the matter (which proves his chauvinism). That one character should have at the same time two such despicable reactions (reactions that would be humorous in another context) is something another writer might have spent an entire novel exploring; Saramago economically reports them within a few sentences and moves on to document the remainder of human foibles.

Keren

Michael Keren's "The Original Position in José Saramago's *Blindness*" offers the political theory of John Rawls as one lens through which to read the novel. He begins with a brief gloss of Rawls's "original position," noting that parties in this fictional situation operate behind a veil of ignorance (which includes ignorance of their "social, economic and intellectual status", their generation and their own psychology (Keren, 2007, p. 448), but also understand via a form of Kant's synthetic *a priori* the rules of politics, economics, social organization and human psychology. Under these conditions, groups of individuals seeking justice will eventually agree upon two principles: the first is the liberty principle ("in which equal liberty is assured") and the second is the difference principle ("in which inequality in the allocation of resources is accepted as long as the least advantaged are also benefiting" (Keren, 2007, p. 447)).

Blindness, with its society unsituated "in any specific time or place," works as an

insightful illustration of Rawls' original position. The novel's primary actors are blind to their colleagues, but also to themselves and their previous lives (i.e., their histories, their social positions, their personalities); at the same time they lose their identities, they begin to jockey for resources and position. While Rawls might never have imagined a scene in which two blind men fight over a hospital bed, the scene illustrates vividly the contingencies through which parties in the original position might be forced to navigate. As for equal distribution of food amongst the blind, *Blindness*'s characters propose an intelligent but potentially faulty scheme: like others in the original position, they must fall back on trusting each other because they have no other choice – and they're hungry.

The concept of maximin (the agreement of a group to tolerate inequality if the minimum gain is maximized) is discussed. While a comparatively optimistic Rawls deals quickly with the notion that evil individuals might seek to exploit maximin, Saramago "presents ongoing evil as a major force to consider in any model of social relations" (Keren, 2007, p. 455.) Rawls delineates three evildoers: the unjust, the bad and the evil, the last of whom has a particular love for injustice but thankfully is a deviant; Saramago on the other hand suggests that given chaotic circumstances, most individuals can turn to bad or even evil ways. For the novelist, trust in these circumstances is always in short supply and bargaining with desperate individuals has little chance of success.

The hypothetical nature of Rawls' argument has received strong criticism in the past, as "hypothetical contracts do not supply an independent argument for the fairness of enforcing their terms" (Ronald Dworkin quoted in Keren, 2007, p. 458). But again, *Blindness* counters the purely imaginative scope of Rawls' thesis by providing us with

fictional examples of how the theorist's original position might play out. In a new situation (viz., after the asylum burns and the novel's characters find themselves wandering the streets), a new social contract must be established as old agreements no longer hold. Keren provides an example: a prostitute sobs for a wound she unintentionally inflicted and worries for her parents; observing these changes in her colleague, the doctor's wife explains that the girl's new feelings must guide her in a new world. The suggestion is made that in the young woman's "previous life," she may not have extended such tender feelings toward her fellow human beings. Keren notes that both Saramago and Rawls settle on the idea that even though blind or operating behind a veil of ignorance, rational human beings will eventually work toward a positive social contract. An unidentifiable force – moral conscience – directs all rational beings, because "although the parties in the original position take no interest in each other's interests, they know that in society they need to be assured by the esteem of their associates" (Keren, 2007, p. 460-461, quoting Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 297).

It is ironic that, given his apparent conviction that mankind is perfectly capable of doing evil deeds in certain circumstances, Saramago takes the notion of social harmony one step past Rawls' theory. Along with rationality, compassion, personified in the doctor's wife, says Keren, is that additional element:

When she invites a group of poor and hungry blind people to her home, the scene is described as a pilgrimage into paradise because the "small favours and courtesies" she is involved in are accompanied by tenderness (Keren, 2007, p. 461).

This deeply moralistic form of love – agapé – facilitates the group’s cohesion and allows it to accept its “radical interdependence.” And while the doctor’s wife is not a queen, she is nonetheless an exemplar who can help form a new society under disastrous circumstances.

The scholar here is careful not to attempt to divine neither Rawls’ nor Saramago’s intentions, nor does he overwork the comparison of *Blindness* and the original position. The essay springs instead from the notion that theory may come to life when described in literature, or perhaps the inverse:

Literature comes to our aid in its depiction of human situations that may be complex, varied and colourful but often devoid of specific political content (Keren, 2007, p. 449).

That is, the claim is not that Saramago is channeling Rawls but that examining the two in tandem is fruitful because such a comparison teases out new insights into both texts.

Although he is careful not to suggest that Saramago has written his novel with Rawls’ work as a model, Keren situates *Blindness* firmly within the genre of political allegory, offering passages of the theory alongside *Blindness* as readings that provide new insights into both texts. Indeed, the novel even fills the occasional gap: it is “helpful in highlighting the missing theoretical link between agreements reached in (Rawls’) original position and the obligation to abide by them” (Keren, 2007, p. 458.) The disputed weakness of Rawls’ natural duty is argued convincingly in *Blindness*, as Saramago establishes how individuals in a new environment forge “new feelings instructing them who they are” and further base these emotions in a sustainable rationality:

Saramago, the Portuguese Communist, is not putting his faith for survival of the human race in saints but in rational persons with practical interests who are, nevertheless, endowed with a degree of compassion needed for the initiation and maintenance of the social contract (Keren, 2007, p. 462).

Ornelas

José N. Ornelas's comparative "Convergences and divergences in Saramago's *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* and Camus's *The Plague*" establishes *Blindness* as an allegory or "plague narrative" from the outset. He posits that Saramago and Albert Camus "hold that all citizens of the world are always infected with some sort of disease," and that the white blindness and the plague are both "used as metaphors or signposts of evil and irrationality, which are permanently the bane of all human beings" (Ornelas, 2006, p. 121). The writer then sets out to prove his point by pointing to biographical proof: an interview with Camus discussing *The Plague*:

The Plague, which I wanted to be read on a number of levels, nevertheless has as its obvious content the struggle of the European resistance movements against Nazism. The proof of this is that although the specific enemy is nowhere named, everyone in every European country recognized it. Let me add that a long extract from *The Plague* appeared during the Occupation, in a collection of underground texts... (Ornelas, 2006, p. 123, quoting Camus, in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 339).

Saramago is comparatively coy about his intentions in *Blindness*, says Ornelas. While he declines to answer questions about the novel's dominant metaphor or allegory, the novelist will make one authorial pronouncement:

With this book, I intend to question myself and my readers about our rationality, if we are, in effect, rational. And if what we call reason deserves, in fact, that name. And it is deserves it, if we really use our reason rationally, in an exact sense, as protection of life...how is it that in a given situation, reason is so profoundly shaken that it makes us all behave in an irrational way (Ornelas, 2006, p. 123, quoting Saramago, in *José Saramago: Aproximação a Um Retrato*, p. 339).

Ornelas goes on to explicate the literary history of the plague narrative, from its allegorical appearances as Fascism, ethnic cleansing and the concentration camps, AIDS, homophobia and classism. Because plagues of one description or another have dogged civilizations of every era, the genre is a populous one: it spans the scope of world literature, with classics including Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1349-1351), Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924), Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1988), and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1993).

Plague narratives share a set of common elements, notes Ornelas: perhaps the most prominent is the conviction that human beings bring the plague upon themselves, usually by turning away from God or by inflicting harm upon their fellow creatures. Also in every plague narrative is a described path of salvation, "albeit in a secular and not religious manner" (Ornelas, 2006, p. 128). Another common element is the narrative's

plot structure, which includes a group that is stricken with the plague and another that is not yet contaminated; the tension usually creates new barriers and conflict in the text's structure.

Blindness contains elements of all these plague-narrative commonalities, although Saramago's novel is far more complex than most in the genre. For example, in the first case, the novelist does not position the blindness as divine intervention but Man's inherent instability: "...Saramago has suggested more than once that it is the blind forces of nature that infect all characters...a metaphor for irrationality and a lack of human understanding" (Ornelas, 2006, p. 129). The third factor noted here is also somewhat anomalous in *Blindness*: the group of seven individuals are not "indifferent to the plight" of the city's newly blinded population, "even though occasionally they cave in to behavioural lapses that call into question their humanity and dignity, lapses that still mark them as good human beings" (Ornelas, 2006, p. 136). As the lone individual who has not contracted the blindness, the doctor's wife struggles to understand why she still sees, but comes to the realization at last that she is the only one equipped to exact justice (viz., when she is forced to kill the leader of the thugs). Her isolation from the remainder of the city marks her as a leader who must take responsibility for the others, not only to protect them from evil but also to nurse them back to health.

Finally, salvation for the novel's characters comes in a two-step process: first the ordeal in the asylum and then the journey into the outside world. Ornelas notes, however, that Part Two of the journey is no better than the first: "As they step into the outside world, they literally and figuratively exchange one form of prison for another" (Ornelas,

2006, p. 129). Further, salvation is by no means assured for the small group or for the city: although the blind finally begin to regain their sight, the book ends “with an indefinite resolution and an ambiguous message...(that) the plague is only temporarily in retreat” (Ornelas, 2006, p. 137). Nonetheless, the writer concludes that *The Plague* and *Blindness* must be read as “testaments and construed as monuments to humanity” since both novels bear witness to the horrors that plague humanity, and both assert that there is more good in man than evil (Ornelas, 2006, p. 138).

This last essay is one of the few that focuses on the moral aspects of *Blindness*, and on the position of the doctor’s wife as leader of her small group. Whereas Keren brings together the novel and John Rawls theory as mutually enlightening, however, Ornelas concludes that Saramago has intentionally written a text in a particular tradition. Like Kenneth Krabbenhoft and Werner von Koppelfels, he defines each movement of the novel as conforming to the general outlines of the selected genre – albeit with some subtle differences, as Saramago is too idiosyncratic as to comply completely to any preordained structure.

It would seem that, as they seek answers to the very large and amorphous questions generated by *Blindness* (which include but are not limited to: What is the genre that guides this apocalyptic vision? Who are the people in the book: are they characterizations of public figures or political ideologies?), most Saramagoan critics still prefer a Romantic hermeneutic approach – that is, to go directly to the author of the work for the text’s “truth.” Indeed, despite a half-century of general consensus on the matter,

questions around the relationship of *authority* and *authorship* continue to float in communication and literary theory circles – viz., to what degree should we privilege the author’s interpretation of her own text? And does the writer’s opinion ‘count’?

While in 1968 Roland Barthes effectively dispatched the author with one seminal essay, “The Death of the Author,” Michel Foucault (in 1969’s “What is an Author?”) promptly granted the figure a partial resurrection by replacing it with the “author-function” and asserting the author was in truth an initiator of discursive practices, while not the “fundamental” originator of a particular text (Wilson, 2004, p. 340). Even the comparatively conservative philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer suggested that interpreters hoping to establish some ultimate ‘truth’ in a text should not look to the author, since that individual is not always available to confirm said interpretation. Hermeneutics must never forget, he says, that the author/poet as interpreter “has no automatic authority over the person who is simply receiving his work” (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 191-193).

But even after decades of discussion of the author’s role in literature, academics continue to look to the writer for confirmation of their interpretations; indeed, whenever an interpreter claims that within any given work, “X suggests” or “Y insists”, that scholar is not only tripping over the Intentional Fallacy, but committing the most gullible *faux pas* of Romantic hermeneutics. We still instinctively (or at least habitually) want to include the writer as a seminal figure in the life of the text.

No wonder Barthes was so keen to kill the Author. “The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end...the voice of a single person, the author ‘confiding’ in us” (Barthes, 1977, p. 160):

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash (Barthes, 1977, p 146).

The act of interpretation is not a guessing-game in which we try to read the writer's mind, but an odyssey in which our recollections of myth, film, poetry and personal history cross paths with those of the author and a million other authors before her. Expectations of 'validity' in interpretation become moot once the text becomes autonomous in the world: even when we do have great interest in the author's reading of his own book, it should not and usually does not invalidate our own reading.

But as a writer, it surely is not an easy thing to do – to share the meaning of one's own novel and to admit that another's interpretation might be just as deep or even more significant than one's own. It is an experience akin to a mother 'sharing' a child with the external world – another allegory, but one made by no less a team of literary luminaries than W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley:

The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946, p. 335).

This much is true, but how many authors can be so generous as to dissociate themselves entirely from the text – to support the idea that they have *nothing* to do with their books, no claim at all to protest another interpretation or assert one's own?

Ironically, the notion of authority – of who has the best arguments, the deepest insights and therefore the ultimate right to determine the meaning of a text – also lies deep at the heart of scholarship. Barthes for one asks us to abandon our claims to authority in interpretation of both scholarly and literary material, not simply because this hermeneutic quest is old-fashioned but because it is destructively normative, controlling and, most of all, unrealistic. Yet, as authors, readers and scholars, how do we begin to change our old ways – let our voices not compete but simply join the choir?

CHAPTER THREE: THEORY

From intention to intertextuality

One of the great advantages of working in a relatively new discipline like communications is that its students may legitimately take their inspiration – and their theories – from virtually any field of academic endeavor. While preparing to write this paper, I seriously considered and subsequently dismissed a number of potentially fruitful working theories: viz., actor-network theory (particularly as it is employed by Bruno Latour and his work on the scientific tool as agent); negative dialectics (namely as this approach relates to Saramago's relentless critique of contemporary society vis-à-vis *Blindness's* journeying characters); and genre theory (especially as it relates to the author's provocative use of language and the way he plays with readers' expectations around mythic structure).

Of the scrutinized theories, two major approaches struck me as offering the most profitable inroads into *Blindness*: the broad field of interpretation or philosophical hermeneutics (under which I will include the related fields of the New Criticism and intertextuality), and the study of allegory. Because I will ultimately propose a slight re-orientation to the first of these as the best way to approach Saramago's novel, it is important to survey the evolution of interpretive studies; and because I posit that allegory provides an inroad into understanding the structure of *Blindness*, this area of literary study will also receive attention as a potential methodology for this paper.

Before proceeding with a brief survey of hermeneutics and its related fields, however, it will be helpful to review the underlying theoretical preoccupation of this paper: viz., that while hermeneutics deals with a broad range of theoretical and methodological questions, one of its central (or at least traditional) concerns centers on the fact that writers and their eras pass away while their books are left to represent them. This ‘double whammy’ of the silenced author plus the extinguished milieu directs many scholars (traditionally Biblical scholars) back to historical texts, where accounts of the writer’s biography and historic context are consulted on every point, and subtle linguistic discrepancies are debated at each stage of interpretive progress.

Beneath this valiant effort to relive the life and times of the author, however, is the usually unspoken desire to divine the writer’s ‘true’ meaning in writing. Two major literary preoccupations arrive for us at this point: the first is known as *intention* or intentionality; the other, which arises from the first, is *influence*. As we shall see later in this paper, W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley focus much of their scholarly careers upon the notion of the “intentional fallacy,” a deeply subversive reaction to Romantic hermeneutics. Armed only with objective standards of evaluation and public ownership of the text, they posit that any reader should be equipped to discern the complete meaning of a written work.

Intention and Influence

But for some, the idea of *intention* provokes mainly a reverent genuflection in the writer’s direction: there is no “intention” for these scholars beyond the author’s intention.

It is a normative response that leads directly, I think, to the notion of authorial influence – arguably a more pernicious and elitist idea in literary studies than that of intentionality.

Influence suggests a model of communication and to some degree, control:

Strictly, influence should refer to relations built on dyads of transmission from one unity (author, work, tradition) to another. More broadly, however, influence studies often stray into portraits of intellectual background, context, and the other partners of influence... (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p. 3).

Influence here becomes a synonym for ‘genius’: the reader taking in the words of the godly writer who comes before her/him is intimidated into slavish adoration and imitation, or (in the worst cases), silence/wordlessness. What is the point of reading another book when the one in the reader’s hands exemplifies the one true work of genius? One is reminded of the influence of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*; it is a text that has cowed many generations of academics and authors behind it. What was there to write after the self-conscious, psychological, encyclopedic, satiric, brilliant, ravishing *Ulysses*? Despite Joyce’s famous claim that his book would spark generations of scholarly comment, one wonders if in the end it silenced as much commentary as it encouraged.

The Clayton and Rothstein definition also suggests that it is not just the readers of the original genius/writer, but also authors who follow that bear the burden of influence. American literary scholar Harold Bloom focuses on this idea when he explores the propensity of the poet to become enraptured with a predecessor, only to become bitterly

resentful when she/he concludes that the earlier writer has said/written everything worth saying/writing (Bloom, 1977). *The Anxiety of Influence* takes a psychological approach to examine how writers break away from their first influences to forge their own authorial identities.

The discussion of *intention* and *influence* is relevant to the larger concerns of this paper, as it is important to acknowledge these largely psychological undercurrents in literary scholarship of the early and mid 20th century, and as they set the stage for a comprehensive comparison of hermeneutic, New Critical and intertextual analyses.

The roots of hermeneutics

To resume: hermeneutics is a venerable branch of philosophical inquiry that addresses the interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic texts. Derived from the verb *hermeneuein*, which means ‘to say’ or ‘interpret,’ hermeneutics is traditionally personified as the ancient Greek god Hermes. Patron of roads and boundaries, notorious thief and trickster, and the fleet-footed son of Zeus, Hermes is responsible for transmitting/interpreting the gods’ often cryptic messages to humankind. Those studying hermeneutics often reflect upon this mischievous quality when they acknowledge the inherent ambiguity of both spoken and written word.

It is not only the storytellers but also the philosophers of ancient Greece who discuss hermeneutics: Plato compares hermeneutic knowledge (which addresses that which has been said or revealed) to *sophia* (which involves knowing the truth of that which is said) (Ramsberg, 2005), while Aristotle’s treatise, *On Interpretation*, establishes

the primacy of logic in language and the truth/non-truth of utterances. The Stoics note that interpretation of myth presents the reader with certain methodological problems in understanding texts; and Philo of Alexandria reflects upon the allegorical nature of the Old Testament, suggesting that the literal meaning of a work may conceal deeper subtext that may only be revealed through systematic interpretation (Ramsberg, 2005).

The theologian Saint Augustine echoes Aristotle in his attention to the intimate connection of language to interpretation, noting that scriptural interpretation requires deep self-understanding and that a speaker may never express everything within. Later still, Martin Luther suggests that authoritative interpretation of the Bible prevents believers from studying religious texts on their own; in fact, it is the responsibility of every reader to stake out his/her own path to the potential meaning and truth of the text (Ramsberg, 2005). It is ironic, given the enormous influence Luther had upon interpretation in religious studies, that he does not attempt a more comprehensive theory of hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher and Dilthey

Although attention to hermeneutics hardly languishes over the ensuing period, it receives increased scrutiny during the 19th century, when Friederich Schleiermacher delivers it from its traditional ties to Biblical studies by opening it up to a larger linguistic context. The greatest challenge presented in interpretation, this philosopher suggests, is the ever-present challenge of understanding (“an unending task” (Schleiermacher, 1992, p. 9)), which is constructed and expressed through linguistic acts. Then there is the issue

of misunderstanding (by which he means misunderstanding of the author's intention) that may occur on at least two levels: the grammatical and the psychological. Possibilities for grammatical errors are numerous, and can include the confusion of one part of speech with another, or dislocation of an expression's reference (Schleiermacher, 1992, p. 82). The potential for misunderstanding of the author's *psychological* state of mind/intention is equally challenging, especially given the task to "understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author":

Since we have no direct knowledge of what was in the author's mind, we must try to become aware of many things of which he himself may have been unconscious, except insofar as he reflects on his own work and becomes his own reader (Schleiermacher, 1992, p. 83).

He dryly observes that the task of interpretation now becomes "infinite, because in a statement we want to trace a past and a future which stretch into infinity... (But) the question of how far and in which directions interpretation will be pressed must be decided in each case on practical grounds" (Schleiermacher, 1992, p. 83.) To curtail this infinite digression, he suggests the interpreter put him/herself into the position of the author, which requires a) "knowing the language as the author knew it" and b) "knowing the inner and outer aspects of the author's life" (Schleiermacher, 1992, pp. 83-84.)

Further, for Schleiermacher, the hermeneutic circle (i.e., the notion that one cannot understand the text as a whole without reference to its parts, but that one also cannot understand its parts without reference to the whole text) takes on additional

intentional meaning: he notes that the author's environment and vocabulary themselves form a whole "from which his writings must be understood as a part, and vice versa" (Schleiermacher, 1992, p. 84). This means in part that texts may not be grasped within a single reading (unless they are "insignificant") but must be read several times within numerous contexts relating to the author's life and intentions; only then will the student equip her/himself for interpretation of that writer's texts.

Schleiermacher's follower and biographer Wilhelm Dilthey spent much of his career explicating his predecessor's lecture notes and elaborating upon the German Romantic notion of the author as protagonist, but at a latter point makes a radical shift in his definition of interpretation: rather than dwell upon the linguistic model of hermeneutics, he expands his conception to consider interpretation as a "category of life." By this he means that each level of human understanding – from the least complex to the most difficult of intellectual processes – must be 'lived' in a real-life situation, or there will be no proper understanding of human experiences. Further, Dilthey is careful to distinguish the human sciences from the natural sciences, arguing that in the latter, we explain models by using cause-and-effect analysis; by comparison, in the former, we understand by continuously engaging the hermeneutic circle – that is, by repeatedly moving between comprehension of the whole and the part.

Neither Schleiermacher nor Dilthey dwell for any great length of time upon the notion of the author as authority in 19th-century hermeneutics, no doubt because that figure was considered *de facto* the primary focus of the interpretive process. Dilthey goes so far as to applaud Schleiermacher for his "bold assertion that one has to understand an

author better than he understood himself” (Dilthey, 1992, p. 162).

Twentieth-century hermeneutics

During the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger transforms the discipline of hermeneutics by debunking the notion of historical truth within texts and establishing the role of the subject in interpretation. Hermeneutics becomes not simply a matter of interpretation but the fundamental condition of man’s being in the world; the hermeneutic circle, originally described by Schleiermacher as the mutual relationship of the text and its parts, opens up to become the complex interaction of self-understanding and world-understanding.

Heidegger’s colleague, Hans-Georg Gadamer, accepts this turn but combines it with a backward gaze into tradition – the concept of *Bildung*, or education in culture. The reader must actively enter into a dialogical relationship with historical texts, and actively work toward a “fusion of horizons” that is the fundamental activity in understanding them and their authority. He suggests that with this fusion, we better learn to understand both these alien texts and ourselves (Ramsberg, 2005).

Criticism of Gadamer’s approach is swiftly levelled: traditionalist Eric D. Hirsch insists that without an objective system of validation (that is, knowledge), a “fused horizon” is meaningless, because no one act of interpretation is any more authoritative than another. By way of contrast, Jürgen Habermas does not quarrel so much with this philosophical system as he does with its conservatism: he argues that Gadamer bows too low to the authority of tradition when in fact he should be evaluating, questioning it.

Only by critically examining history may we liberate ourselves from the controlling influences of the past (Ramsberg, 2005).

Although the discussion of hermeneutics among contemporary academics continues (notably with the work of Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Donald Davidson), it is here that we will leave this short survey of hermeneutics, for it is Habermas's argument that influences my decision to select the theory of intertextuality as the most productive approach for this thesis. To explain this decision, however, we must move from the arena of philosophy into the somewhat more diffuse and interdisciplinary sphere of communications theory, where intertextuality is lodged.

The evolution of intertextuality: Bakhtin, Kristeva, Barthes

Because Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) spent periods of his life exiled or intimidated by a repressive Soviet regime, there is still some mystery surrounding the exact chronology of much of his early writing in literary theory. However, many biographers (including Craig Brandist and Simon Dentith) agree that one of his most provocative and characteristic essays, "The problem of speech genres," was likely written during the early 1950s. Although the word 'intertextuality' is never seen in this piece, Bakhtin's focus is very much upon the social construction of language and the innumerable heterogeneous influences and voices within it. Substitute Bakhtin's "utterance" for intertextuality's "text," and the reader is literally left with a new manifesto for the later theory.

He opens the essay by noting the "speech genres" (by which he means "each

sphere in which language...develops its own relatively stable types of utterances"; p. 98), are so heterogeneous and varied that their problematic nature has never before been raised (presumably because it would be so massive an undertaking to study them). This is to our detriment, of course, as to "ignore the nature of the utterance,

or to fail to consider the peculiarities of generic subcategories of speech in any area of linguistic study leads to perfunctoriness and excessive abstractness, distorts the historicity of the research, and weakens the link between language and life (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 99).

Some forms of utterance are more expressive of the individual's style than others, he suggests: artistic literature is probably the most individualistic of all, while standard business, industry and military communications exhibit the fewest idiosyncratic characteristics.

Similarly, the written sentence, with its defined beginning and end, and its ability to impart a distinctive style, best represents the individual writer, while the spoken utterance, which anticipates an answer from a respondent, is dialogic and represents the socially constructed nature of the speech genre. Contrary to expectation, speech genres allow few personal expressions to be made, a "problem" that should send the scholar back to history for elucidation. Indeed, Bakhtin observes that certain forms of speech are the "drive belts" in human history: not one new phenomenon in language could have taken place without excessive testing within that socially mitigated sphere.

This last set of points requires some explanation: Bakhtin is adamant that utterances are not standalone activities but dialogic acts, shaped entirely by historic

forces. An utterance responds not only to the speech act/speaker that came before it, but to the social dynamics that shaped it; similarly, the response/responding listener takes part in a pre-choreographed dance that requires a certain conformity if the dance is to continue. Every utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, he says, and

(e)ach speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 107).

When Bulgarian philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva introduced the notion of intertextuality to the French academy in 1966, it seems her goal was not so much to win a personal audience as to bring Bakhtin to the attention of her new colleagues in the openly ideological *Tel Quel* group. First in “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (1966) and later in “The Bounded Text” (1966-67), she identifies him as an agent of linguistic change who recognizes the inherent dialogism of any given word. He insists (she says) that because a single linguistic unit is constantly informed by conflicting usages, it can never be examined in isolation:

...(A)ny text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity... (Kristeva, 1969, p. 37).

Further, Bakhtin’s “minimal textual unit” acts as an active mediator that links the language to history and culture, and as a three-dimensional (subject-addressee-context) agent that functions to create ambivalency. Therefore, any use of a word within a given text requires a “translinguistic procedure” that will question the authority of normative

literary genres and contemplate the endless relationships that exist between the word and larger linguistic units – namely sentences, dialogues, etc. (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37).

It is not just individual words and sentences that receive this revolutionary treatment: Kristeva adds the reader (or “addressee”) as an active agent in the discursive process, labeling him as “discourse” that fuses with “this other discourse, this other book, in relation to which the writer has written his own text” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). Further, the reader functions as a sort of axis that intersects with a text axis; at the point of contact is an individual unit – either a word or a text – that must be read from the points of view of these two distinct axes. Bakhtin calls these two axes *dialogue* and *ambivalence*, she notes (although she also points out that he does not label them as axes *per se*. This spatial metaphor would thus appear to be Kristeva’s unique contribution to the concept.)

The writer in Kristeva’s universe thus becomes a sort of blithe amalgamator who is unaware of the linguistic transformations s/he creates as s/he writes. A literary genre like the novel is particularly malleable because it contains so much subtext and a comparatively large number of different sentence types (viz., dialogue, questions and answers, exposition, etc.) As the writer proceeds, then, these “unconscious exterioriz(ed)” linguistic changes begin to work upon the literary genre and automatically evolve it into a new form.

Kristeva floats this fundamentally critical approach within the first two pages of her essay, using the rest of her paper to discuss Bakhtin’s distinctions between dialogue and monologue, the carnival in Rabelais, Swift, Kafka and others, and ending it with the disintegration of the writer. The inherent dialogism of writing, she insists, means the

author must become a mere 'signifier', a non-entity:

He becomes an anonymity, an absence, a blank space, thus permitting the structure to exist as such. At the very origin of narration, at the very moment when the writer appears, we experience nothingness.

...(T)he author is structured as a signifier and the text as a dialogue of two discourses (Kristeva, 1986, pp. 57-58).

So the author is anonymous and "nothingness" – but is he quite dead? And the reader is an axis, a discourse unto her/himself – so is s/he the only significant agent in the literary process? Kristeva does not pursue these ideas beyond this brief introduction, although 20 years after the publication of her influential essay, she had more to say.

Despite its vagaries (or perhaps because of them), "Word, Dialogue and Novel" had a galvanizing effect upon French scholars who during the anti-imperialist atmosphere of the mid-60s were ripe for change: they seized upon the notion of intertextuality before Kristeva herself had the chance to advance it. The most influential of these scholars was Roland Barthes, who upon meeting her invited Kristeva to make a presentation on Bakhtin to one of his seminar classes in Paris (M. Waller, personal communication, 1985). Two years later, the professor himself produced "The Death of the Author," which took the concept of intertextuality to a new place.

Barthes opens his infamous essay with an ambiguous sentence from Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine*: "This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility" (Barthes, 1977, p. 142). Who is making this unintentionally ironic comment,

he asks: the lovestruck and seemingly ignorant protagonist? a “universal” reader, a Romantic reader? Balzac himself? The question is irrelevant, plus “we can never know” because writing defies a single perspective, it is the “destruction of every voice, of every point of origin” (Barthes, 1977, p. 142.)

It is a provocative opener, and in his typical fashion, Barthes does not clarify his position immediately. He continues by pointing out that in “ethnographic” (by which we assume he means tribal) societies, mediators or shamanic figures channel narratives for their listeners; that message belongs not to the mediator but to a larger spiritual world. Admiring the mediator for his talent in translating that message makes sense in this case, says Barthes, but worshipping him for his genius does not, as the message never belonged to the shaman in the first place. By comparison, we idolize the author, focusing “tyrannically” on his life, his tastes, his madness, always confusing the writing with the writer her/himself.

For the most part, French writers have avoided this error: Stéphane Mallarmé was the first to allow the language to speak instead of his own personal voice; Paul Valéry, while encumbered with notions of psychology, also leaned more toward a preoccupation with the language and not with the authorial self; and Marcel Proust himself worked constantly to “desacralize” the author by blurring the relationship between himself and his characters, and by basing his life upon the model provided by his books, not the reverse.

And while Romantic notions of the novelist suggest that the writer is the past of her/his book, nourishing it from the time of its inception, Barthes insists that the modern

writer is born *with* her/his book:

The fact is (or, it follows) that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates what linguists...call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content...than the act by which it is uttered... (Barthes, 1977, p. 146).

The modern writer becomes the performing shaman, a talented puppet channeling the intentions of a much larger god – Language.

Now that the author is revealed as the conduit but not the originator of the message, the reader is no longer compelled to seek meaning through that individual. Now there is no secret meaning beneath the words of the book to be deciphered; there is only language to be "disentangled" and the enlightened reader is only one to make that happen. She/he is both the destination and the meaning of the book, "that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes, 1977, 148). The "arrogant" normative power of the author is thereby extinguished, and the rise of the autonomous reader inevitable.

Objections and summary

It is a short walk from the death of the author, then, to the birth of intertextuality: with the novel rooted not in the individual personality of the writer but within the two-

dimensional tissue of language, the book becomes a single but equal thread in a vast skein of “textile,” weaving through and touching upon innumerable other texts in its life. Like Bakhtin’s heterogeneous utterances and Kristeva’s dialogue of discourses, Barthes’ textual fabric is created within an infinite linguistic sphere that existed long before (and will live long after) the writer arrived to offer her/his interpretation.

Not everyone has been comfortable with this cool dispatch of the author. Although written slightly in advance of Barthes’ essay but generally in response to the New Criticism and the idea of semantic autonomy expressed by Martin Heidegger and Karl Jung, E.D. Hirsch Jr.’s “In Defense of the Author” anticipates the funeral and objects to it mightily. “(M)eaning is an affair of consciousness, not of words,” he insists:

A word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it. There is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness (Hirsch, 1967, p. 89).

For her part, Julia Kristeva looked back 20 years later upon the “banal” adoption of her term, and suggested it be reconceived as “inter-textuality” and as “a transposition of one (or several) sign systems into another” (Friedman, 1991, p. 152).

Despite these and numerous other objections, the notion of intertextuality in its Barthean form became the ruling literary theory for 20th century critics, including Jacques Derrida and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Michel Foucault, among numerous others. Today, intertextuality is still the most *au courant* of literary theories but also the most compelling, given its controversial beginnings and sweeping scope. In particular, many

feminist and queer theorists find its anti-normative stance maps well onto their own critical studies, while in the social sciences, identity theorists and linguists draw parallels between ideas of social construction and intertextuality.

And while I am not always convinced that the Academy's ruling ideology is the correct choice for contemporary scholarly work, it should soon be clear that the theory of intertextuality is indeed the most appropriate guide as I discuss Plato's Allegory of the Cave and its relationship to Saramago's *Blindness*. But what of a methodology? Does intertextuality constitute its own methodology as well as theory? Or does a more methodical related choice – allegorical analysis, for example – offer a more concrete route? This question will form the basis of the chapter to follow.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Allegorical or Metaphorical Analysis?

It is not surprising that allegorical interpretation – and, as we have seen, hermeneutics along with it – has fallen out of academic fashion. Literary theorist Gerald L. Bruns suggests that while in recent years “it has been possible to rehabilitate allegory as an art of writing, no one has thought to defend the legitimacy of allegorical integration”:

Indeed, it would not be too much to say that allegorical interpretation is what gives allegorical writing its bad name, so if you want to make a claim in allegory’s behalf, you need to rescue it from the disreputability of hermeneutics... “(B)eyond hermeneutics” is the watchword of the day (Bruns, p. 384).

For many literary philosophers, any gaps created by the dismissal of allegorical interpretation may be more satisfyingly filled with a study of metaphor. Since at least the mid 1950s, metaphor has been lifted from its place in rhetoric and hermeneutics to new heights in cognitive science and the philosophy of language, which assert that metaphor has a fundamental function in linguistic creativity. The contributions of analytic philosopher and mathematician Max Black, followed by significant discussions in the work of Donald Davidson, Umberto Eco and Paul Ricoeur, posit that metaphor is no longer a simple decoration of speech but the creation of new insight through the interaction of two heretofore-unrelated terms.

In particular, it is usually the constructive activity of metaphor that is emphasized: viz., it is metaphor's action that creates similarity versus some previously existing relationship recognized through the bringing together of two unrelated terms (although I would not want to suggest that this very simplistic definition sums up the remarkably complex and voluminous writing in the field, particularly when it comes to Ricoeur's work.)

It should be pointed out that intertextuality shares metaphor's constructive orientation: as does the trope, intertextuality brings together two otherwise unrelated texts to create new situations of meaning. There is none of Barthes' "deciphering" of the author's intention in intertextuality, but, again, only the disentanglement of threads that run "at every point and at every level, (with) nothing beneath; the space of writing it to be ranged over, not pierced" (Barthes, 1967, p. 147).

Could it be posited then that Saramago's *Blindness* would more profitably benefit from explication through a theory of metaphor? Or does a revised version of allegorical interpretation hold as much promise? The goal of my work in this chapter will be to explore these alternate theories with the view to choosing – or re-shaping – one of them for application to *Blindness*.

Ancient traditions of allegorical and hermetic analysis

To begin with a brief history of the exegetical role of allegory in literature, it might help to start (as almost every survey of the sort seems compelled to do) with a look

at its etymology. In this case, the exercise is not entirely helpful, although it does convey from the outset the word's rhetorical heritage: *allegory* derives from the Greek "other" + "to speak in public". The common use of the word departs somewhat from this connotation, suggesting *a genre of fictional representation that conveys one or more meaning(s) other than the literal* (Harper, 2001).

Classical rhetoric does not rush to sort out this discrepancy: for the most part, scholars of ancient Greece tended to combine allegory with a variety of other ornamental tropes (viz., metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, etc.) Despite his creation of one of western civilization's most famous allegories, Plato does not distinguish the trope from other terms for comparison or likeness, although he does use the word *eikon* to refer specifically to metaphor.

Indeed, he seems to feel the same way about allegory as he does about poets and Sophists – that is, the fewer of them, the better.

For Plato, 'image' and reality are different in important respects, and the reality or truth (that which is primary) is always and in all cases superior to the image (that which is secondary or derived). The extended allegory of the cave in the Republic shows that Plato...considered images very much the inferiors of the realities they reflect or represent. As Richard Robinson observes, "Plato's whole theoretical philosophy is largely a condemnation of images and a struggle to get away from them" (Pender, 2003, p. 60).

This observation offers an account of why the philosopher follows his allegory of the

cave with complete exegesis: while he understands the pedagogical and rhetorical power of allegory, Plato is not about to leave it vulnerable to those who might misinterpret it. In all cases, “the ideas and suggestions provided by imagery have to be supported by the conclusions of dialectic before they can be accepted as knowledge” (Pender, 2003, p. 62).

Not all allegory of the period was so methodically or functionally employed. Predating Plato, a Greek term for allegorical meaning – *hyponoia* (“under” + “thought”) – described a mysterious meaning hidden well beneath the literal. The reader’s task in this case was to puzzle through the text’s surface layer to reach a “realm of mystic knowledge” (Fletcher, 1973/74, p. 42). Classicist Morton Bloomfield attributes this trend in allegory to Pythagoras “and possibly beyond, which we may call the hermetic tradition”:

It is probably true that some great spirits taught in their writings an esoteric doctrine to which only the wise could penetrate. ...Certain subjects or aspects of subjects are not for the profane, for the general, or for the masses. The words written down are for the wise and able (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 305).

He further distinguishes hermetic allegory from the usual classical and biblical classical categories of allegory, noting that the former is always deliberately obscure in its rendering. While classical and biblical readings may present two or more possible allegorical possibilities, the finitude of these possibilities is always understood, while “(w)ith hermetic allegory, one can never be sure” (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 306).

The hermetic tradition – that is, interpretation as the decoding of secrets by those

in the know – was passed on to subsequent practitioners of allegory. Writing to his lifelong friend and confidant Atticus at a time when his life was increasingly at risk, the Roman statesman and orator Cicero noted that if he needed to write again, he would obscure his reference in allegories (Levis, online version.) As for Greek historian and biographer Plutarch, hermetic allegory captured the essential element of secrecy in both philosophy and religion:

The right sort of philosophical understanding is necessary in order to decipher the gods' self-revelation in ciphered forms in myth. ...The true way of interpreting myth was to assimilate myth to the mysteries (McDonigill, 2005).

Hermetic allegory's enigmatic caste was not always considered constructive. A century after Cicero, the rhetorician Quintilian broke down the term into a variety of sub-groups, including *illusio* (i.e., sarcasm, wit and proverbs) extended metaphor, historical allegory, and commonplace expressions, which include the subcategories of *exemplum* and *aenigma*. He cautioned against the latter "inferior" category, calling *aenigma* "allegory that is too obscure...(and which is) a blemish" (Levis, 1993, p. 3).

This urge to catalogue the functions of allegory (and to demonize certain elements of the catalogue) does not end with classical rhetoric and Quintilian but re-emerges periodically during intensive periods of Biblical, Koranic and Kabbalistic study, when scholars map out their multi-layered views of scriptural exegesis. Because space is limited, I will describe only a few of these schemata in the new few pages – suffice it to say that the history of allegorical theory is as methodically systematized as any in science

or philosophy.

By the Hellenistic period, Greek allegorical methods were being adapted to Jewish scripture and again later to the Christian bible, providing commentators of these periods an entry point into biblical exegesis and a method for rationalizing the discrepancies between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Interpretation at this stage attempted to explain to early Christians everything from the rationale for Jewish kosher laws to the methodical exegesis of pagan mythological references (i.e., *from the stork who feeds her offspring with the blood from her own plucked breast to the story of Christ, who nourishes his followers with his own blood sacrifice*.) While application of allegory at other junctures could lead to the devaluing of the literal meaning of a text, interpreters of this era sought to preserve the writerly layer of allegory, seeing it as “historical and foundational” (Whitman, 2000, p. 10).

Personification in allegory took hold of the scholarly imagination through late antiquity and the early medieval era, and was employed to typify either an historical personage or the personification of an event or abstraction. Written around 400 A.D. by Prudentius, *Psychomachia* systematized personified allegory by representing in female form the human vices (Pride, Wrath, Paganism, Avarice, etc.) Perhaps the most influential work of personified allegory during this general period was Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (524 AD), which introduces Lady Philosophy and the imprisoned philosopher’s dialectic ‘conversation’ with the embodied figure.

Allegory in the Middle Ages to the modern period

By the Middle Ages, scholars developed a four-part system of allegory: the first stage examines the *literal* interpretation of the story without further reference to any underlying meanings; the second or *typological* actively references Old Testament events so as to explain the redemption story of Christ; the third or *moral* interpretation examines the conversion of the soul to grace, and; the fourth or *anagogical* deals in prophecies and the future events of Christian history and the delivery of the soul to grace. In Islamic circles, efforts were being made to interpret allegory in Koranic passages in tandem with a systematic reading of the human progression of consciousness to truth; in Judaism, allegorical exegesis faced opposition by scholars who insisted divinity resided not on a symbolic level but in the “very words and letters of the scriptural text” (Whitman, 2000, p. 11).

From the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, the study of allegory takes up a renewed emphasis on rationality, introducing an early historicist approach to mythology and encouraging critical theorists to “seek the organizing principles of imaginative plots not in ‘allegory’ but in ‘credibility’ (Whitman, 2000, p. 12). Hermeneutic scholars suggest this increasing swing to a more literal view of the text was spurred in part by the infamous *Donation of Constantine*, a forged document of Emperor Constantine the Great that argued that the pope and the Roman Church deserved the same wealth and privilege as the emperor. Science led the attack on allegory from another front:

During and after the Renaissance, new methods arise for the analysis and exploration of the origins of things, along with their progressive development away from those origins. The text of the Bible is one

such object of study but the physical universe and the historical world of men are more important (Fletcher, 1973/74).

Although still vital during the Renaissance, the currency of the ahistorical and predictive qualities of allegory loses ground against the likes of Descartes' scientific revolution and Luther's theological reformation.

The Romantic period led to a new series of cognitive and aesthetic attacks on the concept of allegory. As we have already seen, Schleiermacher regarded the nature of understanding not simply in the traditional sense of deciphering sacred texts but in all human texts and modes of communication. His theory posits that historically embedded interpreters use 'understanding' and 'interpretation', which combine individual-psychological and social-historical description and analysis to gain a greater knowledge of texts and authors in their contexts.

Taking his cue from Thomas Babington Macaulay, who considered allegorical interpretation a tedious puzzle, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) advocates an end to allegory, and he creates a distinction between it and symbol, with a clear preference for the latter:

An allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a symbol... always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a

living part in that unity of which it is the representative (quoted in Fletcher, 1964).

This argument – that allegory is abstract and arbitrary while the symbol is real and determined – emerges from the poet’s assertion that the symbol (very like synecdoche) represents a part of the thing it represents, whereas the allegory has no such “natural” relationship. In this way, the symbol becomes part of a hierarchical worldview in which smaller entities play a natural role within a larger being. Although it is an argument that has been praised for its rhetorical power but not always for its clarity of thought (Romantic literary theorists often point to the fact that *The Ancient Mariner* is in fact an extended allegory), Coleridge’s disparagement of allegory influenced thinkers and writers in the centuries to come.

Twentieth-century study of allegory is dominated by Martin Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, by the fragmented writing of Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, the conservative but influential work of literary categorization of Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), and the comprehensive survey of allegory by literary theorist Morton Bloomfield. I will not attempt an interpretation of Heidegger’s work here, but will complete this section with a brief survey of the last three contributors to a contemporary study of allegory.

Benjamin’s study takes as its point of departure the German mourning play, a Baroque invention that recognizes in the loss of religious order (he refers to it as “transcendence”) the finite timeline of human life. He examines the Platonic conception of truth as a transcendent reality, observing that allegory by its very form ensures that the

truth resides elsewhere and not in its literal self. If a transcendent truth was available to human beings, he argues, if we were not exiled from truth, we would not need allegory but could attain truth directly, easily.

So confirmation that truth exists is the first condition for allegory; the second is the recognition of its absence. Allegory would not exist if truth were available; allegory exists because we are exiled from the truth we seek (which can be explained in myths of the Fall and exile.) But most importantly, truth is not the content but the form; representation then is not valuable for its end but for its process. In this way, Benjamin's work is intrinsically hermeneutic; esoteric and difficult academic style (for example) is essential because of the need "to represent faithfully the experience of truth." But the architectural ruins and the death's head in Baroque emblems are significant, he notes, for they express "the achievement of history at the total expense of nature." The *deadness* of these images reveals the limits of allegory but also its triumph, for death is itself an allegory for resurrection.

Northrop Frye's most famous work is frequently referenced as the 20th century's definitive work on literary allegory, so it is ironic that allegory figures less as an identified scope of study here than a diffuse and all-pervasive theme. Very like Gadamer, who observes "the fundamental metaphoricity of language" (quoted in Vedder; 2002, p. 196), the Canadian scholar notes that "all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery" (Frye, 1957, p. 89):

The instant that any critic permits himself to make a genuine comment about a poem,...he has begun to allegorize. Commentary thus looks at

literature as, in its formal phase, a potential allegory of events and ideas (Frye, 1957, pp. 89-90).

Frye is pragmatic in his identification of allegory in literature: he insists it is a structure of ideas, not of “disguised ideas” (dispensing with hermetic allegory in one fell sentence), and he plainly identifies the role of naïve allegory or allegory-as-spectacle as a form of discursive writing which “...belongs chiefly to education literature on an elementary level: schoolroom moralities, devotional exempla, local pageants, and the like” (Frye, 1957, p. 90)).

We may be grateful to Northrop Frye for no other reason than he demystifies the irritation many post-Romantic literary theorists still have for allegory. He suggests that most critics begrudge the trope without knowing exactly why, but that this irrational dislike restricts the freedom of allegory to take its place in literature. And why do they hate it so? Because the interpretive move of allegory competes directly with the critic’s own work: “Hence he often urges us to read Spenser and Bunyan, for example, for the story alone and let the allegory go, meaning by that that he regards his own type of commentary as more interesting” (Frye, 1957, p. 90).

Morton Bloomfield takes as a given that all commentary is a form of allegorical interpretation. Indeed, he sees the problem of interpretation or hermeneutics as the problem of allegory, and looks, like Gadamer, unapologetically backward in his discussion of its function:

Allegory is...that which conquers time, that which perpetually renews the written word. The age that does not need, or thinks it does not

need, the past does not need this kind of allegory... The allegorical or historical interpretative mind is continually telling us that the past is relevant and the quotations of the past apply today. When the past is not listened to, allegory declines (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 302).

At the same time, he insists that looking backwards to the lessons of the past “makes or keeps modern” those traditional texts that had relevance in earlier times: the words of Christ “break our lonely isolation” by insisting upon the constant relevance (“at least in theory”) of the past (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 302).

But this is not the great accomplishment of a work of allegorical literature, he insists. It is in fact the construction of the “skin” of a text that is the real achievement, as it is the work’s artistic success that allows any reader to enter the text from any point in history. Any particular signification of the text is unchanging, but expansion forward of signification means returning to the work’s literal sense. “A work of art is not only what it says, but also what it is” (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 317).

Contemporary American scholar Robert Hariman transfers allegory back from the study of literature into rhetoric, where he suggests the trope has a natural home. But where early rhetoricians like Cicero might have emphasized the enigmatic and secretive nature of allegory, Hariman posits a social construction of the trope: allegory is, he says, “a figural presentation that organizes multiple interpretations regarding collective experience” (Hariman, 2002, p. 267). The shared meaning of a doubled narrative is what reverberates within the “common folk”: it is (as Edwin Honig suggests) “a twice-told tale using figural language about a vital belief” (Hariman, 2002, p. 272).

Further, it is a trope that flourishes when civilizations are moving through times of expansion and the resulting chaos:

Allegory arises when Greek rationality overpowers archaic myth, when Christendom engulfs pagan culture, when early modern thought displaces Christian hegemony, when modernization destroys traditional social order, when late-modern technocracy colonizes the lifeworld (Hariman, 2002, p. 268).

We seem to be positioned within one of these disintegrating/reintegrating epochs with its flood of disjunctive allegories, all of them posed intertextually and without either a “consistent scheme of interpretation” or “didactic intention” (Hariman, 2002, p. 269). It is this excess of allegorization that troubles the hermeneutic soul: how does one find meaning in contemporary narrative when contemporary narrative is merely a *pastiche* of imagery without structure or message?

Metaphor in cognitive theory

Because the question of metaphor is at times neglected and at other times foundational in the history of ideas, it is somewhat more difficult to present as neat and cohesive a timeline for this trope as it may have been for the subject of allegory. There is the other unfortunate fact that in the literature, metaphor and allegory are either considered a) to be synonymous or b) to be unequivalent in the general catalogue of tropes (viz., metaphor sometimes stands in as a general category under which allegory,

parable, synecdoche, etc., all fall). Comparison of the two then becomes sticky, not to mention confusing. Whereas I found a brief history of the gradual demonization of allegory to be instructive for my purposes, I choose now to outline metaphor more carefully in its most recent incarnation – as a form of cognitive theory.

But it is always helpful to begin with Aristotle, the grandest cataloguer of them all. Lodging his definition of metaphor within his work on poetics (a telling placement), he suggests that metaphor “consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the grounds of analogy” (Aristotle, p. 1476); in his discussion immediately preceding this definition, he uses the word “strange” to describe the difference between nouns that are common to a people, and nouns that may be used in Cyprus, for example. The implication is that while the first word in a metaphor (known in some circles as the subject or ‘tenor’) is one that is known to us, the second word (the object or ‘vehicle’) is strange. Aristotle’s definition, which still resonates, thus suggests that metaphor is a simple transposition of meaning from one word to another.

Against that classical definition of metaphor is the relatively recent view (from 1954) based on assumptions developed by the American mathematician and philosopher Max Black: these constitute the interaction theory of metaphor, which redefines the features of metaphor in the following way:

1. Metaphor is a discursive phenomenon that moves through a process of argumentation to its conclusion, and it does so in a procedural way;
2. Metaphor is not simply a decoration of speech but an authentic way to

express ideas that cannot be expressed in any other way.

The idea of words estranged one from the other does not appear in Black's schemata: he sees the relationship as *interactive*:

(5) In the context of a particular metaphorical statement, the two subjects "interact" in the following ways: (i) the presence of the primary subject incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties; and (ii) invites him to construct a parallel 'implicative complex' that can fit the primary subject; and (iii) reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject (Black, 1977, p. 442).

The process described here allows the meaning associated with the components of metaphors to interact so that some of them are transfigured as they are switched from the contexts of one term to another. The result of these changes is a cognitive divination. This transformation leads Black to suggest that the meaning of an "interesting" metaphor is new and creative, and further, that it creates the similarity it suggests rather than refers back to some precedent existing in the language.

The implications of Black's argument have been felt to reverberate through not only the cognitive sciences but within philosophy of every possible stripe – an outline of these implications would fill a number of texts. Because our interest here is in the creative interpretive elements of metaphor, we will focus not so much on his geometrical figures and syllogisms as upon his assertion that metaphors are creative.

Black acknowledges that the production of a new metaphorical statement introduces “some small change” into a world that includes statements and the thoughts they express, but he is dismissive on this score: “That metaphors should be ‘creative’ in this boring way is hardly worth mentioning except for the sake of contrast” (Black, 1977, p. 451). Where he does find a strong creativity thesis is in the last of several examples he provides on the creativity of metaphor. It is the equivalent of the If-a-Tree-Falls-in-the-Forest question: “Did the slow motion appearance of a galloping horse exist before the invention of cinematography?” (Black, 1977, p. 454).

This last example comes the closest to what I originally had in mind by the ‘strong creativity thesis.’ If some metaphors are what might be called ‘cognitive instruments,’ indispensable for perceiving connections that, once perceived, are *then* truly present, the case for the thesis would be made out (Black, 1977, p. 454).

The implications here are that some metaphors allow us to see aspects of reality that the metaphor’s production helps to create. This is not a surprise for Black, who believes that the world is socially constructed – or “under a certain description,” as he puts it.

Ricoeur on metaphor

Paul Ricoeur’s work on metaphor (or what he calls the “boundless field of metaphor” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 143)) brings Black’s notions on the transformative nature of metaphor to literary theory. For the French philosopher, “live” metaphors provide a

fresh way to survey both referents in the sentence – they are not merely rhetorical decorations but generative of new meanings in their own right.

But more importantly, Ricoeur proposes to take metaphor from its purely informative basis and show that “the kind of theory of metaphor initiated by I.A. Richards,...Max Black, Beardsley, Berggren and others cannot achieve its own goal without including imagining and feeling – that is, without assigning a semantic function to what seems to be mere psychological features and without, therefore, concerning itself with some accompanying factors extrinsic to the informative kernel of metaphor” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 144).

He respectfully describes but then dispenses with some necessary definitions and qualifications around metaphor (viz., Aristotle’s pictorial dimension of metaphor, the idea of the figure of speech as it relates to the human body, the idea of metaphor as a ‘meta’ or reflexive concept (that is, that the word metaphor must stand in for the metaphor itself)), but then moves on to place metaphor back in the arena of rhetoric and aesthetics. It is the *maker* (or “craftsman with verbal skill”) of metaphor who becomes the most significant factor in the process – this individual dictates the semantic innovation “thanks to which a new pertinence, a new congruence, is established in such a way that the utterance ‘makes sense’ as a whole” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 146).

The maker of metaphor moves through three steps: the first of which provides the insight into Aristotle’s “likeness”: this insight, says Ricoeur, is both a thinking and a seeing, and it implicates a peculiar tension that unveils the conflict between an immediate incompatibility (in which the reader may experience confusion or a sort of disorientation

provoked by the strange juxtaposition of the tenor and vehicle) and the new compatibility. “To see the like is to see the same in spite of and through the different,” note Ricoeur. “This tension between sameness and difference characterizes the logical structure of likeness” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 148).

The second step in the metaphoric process is to incorporate a pictorial dimension – a distinction outlined by I.A. Richards but not entirely understood by Max Black, he suggests. The act of imagining, he posits, is the act of displaying relations in a depicting mode: they induce the reader to dream the metaphor, to “possess magically the absent thing, body or person” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 150). But he puts boundaries on this imagery, saying that it ranges from full-blown to “wild” pictures, and that the images most relevant for a semantics of a poetic image are those that fall somewhere in between those two extremes – the “intermediate” range of the scale.

The third step in Ricoeur’s metaphoric process calls upon a suspension or a “moment of negativity” brought by the metaphoric image. This negativity he means not in the usual sense but as a sort of suspension of reality: suspension in this case suggests the destruction of the usual reference attached to descriptive language. Recalling Walter Benjamin, perhaps, he suggests that this suspension is “only the negative condition of a second-order reference, of an indirect reference built on the ruins of the direct reference” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 153).

He leaves his most powerful argument on metaphor to the end, where he suggests that the feelings that spring from a poetic metaphor work in a second-order structure: that is, to feel means that one makes something one’s own by putting it at a distance through

thought (the *alienating distanciation* of Ricoeur's hermeneutic work). Feelings, therefore, move through a very complicated process that fabricates them not merely as inner states "but interiorized thoughts... Feelings, furthermore, accompany and complete imagination as picturing relationships" (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 157), such as those created by the poetic metaphor.

The burden of my argument is that the notion of poetic image and of poetic feeling has to be construed in accordance with the cognitive component, understood itself as a tension between congruence and incongruence at the level of sense, between *epoché* and commitment at the level of reference (Ricoeur, 1978, pp. 158-159).

A review of metaphor

I propose at this stage to offer my own thoughts on the discrepant nature and distinct characteristics of both allegory and metaphor. It is my intention to look at each trope from the point of view (as it were) of the other – to bring a critical perspective to each's functionality in literature, and thereby to decide which is most relevant to a discussion of Saramago's novel.

Let me begin with a "critique" of metaphor. The first and most obvious difference any reader will note in a brief comparison of the tropes is their discrepancy in length. Metaphor in the strictest sense is bound within the framework of a single sentence; allegory is generally considered a narrative of no specific length, generally longer than a single sentence but usually no more expansive than the length of a complete text.

Metaphor's great strength is its economy; in its most distilled form, it can be reduced to three words – x is y – and in this condensation create a new world of thought.

But metaphor's economy is also its weakness from a narrative standpoint. The positioning of noun plus verb plus noun – “Man” plus “is a” plus “wolf” – is equivalent to an image but nothing more (says Allegory), unless the phrase is expanded into a narrative. Of course, with expansion, metaphor acquires another function and by definition becomes – an allegory.

None of this is to say that metaphor is not or cannot be generative in its latent talents: it can only be imagined how many works of visual art have turned on the rather thin coin of metaphor, or how much literature has been launched from this same site. But a launch is not the same as a sequence, and a single image is not the same as a larger system of meaning with its movement through a boundaried imaginary universe.

This matter of length and narrative gives allegory the advantage over metaphor in any claim to purely structural relevance to literature: allegory, if nothing else, describes the narrative and character arcs of story with the same moves (if not the same purpose or tone) of conventional literature. It would be an entirely new project to create a narrative from Max Black's “Man is a wolf” but a very simple matter to build an allegorical text from the simple allegorical/fairytale story of Little Red Riding Hood, in which Woman is a child, Man is a wolf, and the story of their confrontation over family and inheritance (personified by Grandmama) creates a narrative with powerful potential for literature. It is as if the simple one-dimensionality of metaphor – the line of x to y – takes on three, four, ten additional dimensions in allegory – plot, characterization, tone, etc. – with the

result of the latter being a fully realized work with moral and artistic implications.

The second review of metaphor is as deceptively simple, even tautological, as the first. Metaphor's double-faced strength/weakness is its novelty – its categorical drive to create something new, a fresh world for itself and its readers:

...(M)etaphor attains a world of reference that is not restricted to “what is” in any objective sense. In fact, metaphor, to the extent that it is live or absolute, should be conceived of always as inventing its own world and object rather than as referring to things that already exist without it. Absolute metaphors ...create a new reality, a new synthesis that has never before existed (Franke, 2000, p. 138).

Novelty in the case of metaphor has both a liberating and anarchic effect: it can create new ways of thinking or it can create confusion and discontinuity. To conjoin two words in the phrase “Man is a wolf” is an exercise generating at least one comprehensive image with provocative and productive overtones (although perhaps it is too comprehensive: any number of popular cartoons and expressions build upon this metaphor of man as wolf, but we'll discuss these ramifications of metaphor shortly). In this case, Man becomes variously a sexual predator, a stalker, an animal that hunts in packs, etc.

However, while “Man is a jar of hand cream” is certainly a novel and unusual adjoining of two disparate subjects, the sentence does not necessarily lead to any particular insights, nor does it provoke any predictably unified response. How should the reader interpret this sentence? Does it mean that Man is no more important than a jar of

hand cream? Full one minute and empty the next, ready for disposal? Or does it mean that Man is a soothing application to heal Woman? A portable product that comes in handy from time to time? There is (arguably) little in this metaphor to resonate with any individual reader, nor would it be likely to evoke shared meaning in any larger group of readers. This then is the gamble of metaphor: not every new roll of the metaphorical dice produces a winner.

Aristotle comments upon this aspect of success (or lack thereof) in metaphor, defining a “good metaphor” as one that “implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars” (Harries, p. 73). His implication is that metaphors reflect reality in some sense, and that the perceptive poet or writer helps us to better see reality through giving it an ‘improper name.’ How then to practically judge whether or not a metaphor has cognitive or literary resonance? Given the fact that normal thought processes may not add anything of value to this question (that is, that the metaphor of Man is a jar of hand cream is not likely to produce any sort of shared meaning, and so is unlikely to be highly valued as a metaphor), we may be forced like Aristotle to resort to aesthetic criteria to answer it: viz., does the metaphor have beauty (or clarity, resonance, etc.)? Does it tell us something new about the artistic process (beyond the fact that it can sometimes fail?) or the relationship between reader and writer/artist?

This same question has of course been posed and answered by 20th century artists, including Dadaists and Surrealists (consider the metaphor posed by Marcel Duchamp’s urinal as ‘fountain’); certainly we have learned well from our modernist instructors that art can be ‘anti-art’ and committed to anarchic goals as well as to the normative aesthetic

ideals. But does a Dadaist interpretation of the metaphor Man is a jar of hand cream lead us anywhere productive? Does it have resonance beyond its jarring self-referential qualities? While the point made by Dadaism and Surrealism (“Ceci n’est pas une pipe”) arguably had to be made at some point in the history of art, the answer here should be a cautious *No*. “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” has reflexive implications beyond its literal meaning, but our metaphor, “Man is a jar of hand cream” is more likely a non-starter.

Further, it is not always the case that the act of metaphor is new or original. Much has been written in both literary and cognitive theory about the “dead metaphor” – that is, the figure of speech so overused that it loses its ability to surprise the reader. The sense of a transferred image in a dead metaphor is no longer present in this form, nor (generally) is the verb or action originally relating the two nouns (i.e., “table leg”, “tail lights” or “wolf whistle”). Of course, the issue of dead metaphor raises immediately that of live metaphor (discussed most meaningfully in Ricoeur’s *The Rule of Metaphor*) and the “token of genius” (Aristotle’s words) involved in the creation of live metaphor – but we could chase definitions and meanings of metaphor forever.

Our point is that for those cognitive scientists examining the creative virtues of metaphor, aesthetic issues concerning metaphor may seem irrelevant, but if these same analysts insist on bringing their discussion into the arena of art, they must understand that the rules of order are somewhat different. Novelty and creation are indeed powerful forces of the human mind, and it is practically self-evident today that metaphor (pace Max Black) has a fundamental role in linguistic creativity, but the question of quality in the new toy inevitably surfaces. Will it immediately break, or will it bore or confuse? Or

will the gadget bring us a deeper understanding of the human experience?

The third critique brought to metaphor by allegory is again a question of dimension, this one in time: that is, metaphor, by virtue of its definitively creative role in language, addresses only the present and the future of its own pronouncement. Metaphor begins at the moment its sentence ends, and projects itself forward in our cognition from that point. It is a line traveling solely in one direction – unless it is a dead metaphor, in which case it does not ‘travel’ anywhere.

This point requires further explication. To return to the two metaphors posed earlier in this paper – viz., Man is a wolf and Man is a jar of hand cream – we may now see how the latter of these expressions bears out this notion. The idea of man as a jar of hand cream causes us to more closely examine both the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor, then the sentence in its present context, in an attempt to puzzle through its purely abstract qualities. After a brief check into our memories (so brief a check that it barely registers), we understand that this particular metaphor contains no discernible references to historical or cultural texts that would allow us to interpret it in any profitable way. So we must project our comprehension of this metaphor forward: we must search for some possible meaning that we may create from this novel conjunction, and to find it must follow the lead of the metaphor’s creator. Searching in this way means we take interpretation into some future or unexplored territory. For some engaged in this reverse-hermeneutic exercise, the exercise will be fruitful, and the concept of man as a jar of hand cream will render shocking new insights. For others, the projection will end almost as quickly as it begins (I would be one of those ‘others.’) When there is no

success, as Aristotle suggests, in intuitively perceiving the similarity in dissimilars, the reader quickly loses interest, and the metaphor loses credibility.

The metaphor Man is a wolf is a different matter. As we have noted earlier, Max Black's favorite exemplar has long since entered our common vocabulary of metaphors, so much so that it has arguably become a dead metaphor (consider the adverb "wolfishly" the verb "wolfed" (as in "wolfed down his food"), the ubiquitous "wolf whistle.") As noted, there is little to no interpretive travel associated with such a metaphor: we find little to gain in looking backward to decipher it, as the metaphor has no clear mythology or significance to which it refers. Some wag at some point made the comparison of man to wolf, but it's not immediately discernible *who* or *why*, nor does reference deeper into the language seem to matter. The metaphor is stale and, because it is stale, dwelling upon it in any way or projecting it forward in our imaginations seems a pointless exercise. This is not to say that the concept of man as a wolf is without its uses – just that an interpretive exercise in this case would bear little fruit.

A review of allegory

Generally, the first contemporary review of allegory is the well-worn accusation that it is a normative and irrelevant trope (Habermas's critique of Gadamer's hermeneutics springs to mind) in which too much emphasis is placed on the authority of tradition, leaving no room for critical judgment. As we have already seen, when reason (or the creative act) is denied the security of a critical, distanced objectivity, rigidity ensues.

A second and related critique in metaphor's salvo draws upon a theory famous in the annals of literary criticism: this is the accusation that arises when interpretation of any kind commits the sin of the intentional fallacy. We have already quoted the two princes of the New Criticism, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, concerning the intentional fallacy, but it is worth revisiting their points again here. As noted, these critics attack the assumption that the meaning intended by the author of a literary work is of primary importance to its interpretation. According to their essay, "The intentional fallacy," "...the design or intention is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art":

The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it.) The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946, p. 335).

Like the critics who seek only to divine the purpose of the writer in his/her work, the allegorical interpretationist seeks to discover internal, external and contextual evidence that might prove his/her reading of the work (internal evidence constituting the genre or form of the work under study, external evidence being statements or lectures made by the writer or artist regarding the work, and contextual evidence being the relationship of the

text to others written by the same artist.) While internal evidence may have a bearing on the interpretation or judgment of a work of art (Wimsatt and Beardsley give grudging acceptance to this idea), preoccupation with this approach ultimately leads away from a more pure reading of the text as text.

It is a short walk to apply the intentional fallacy to the act of allegorical interpretation. A critic who insists upon reading the text as a line-for-line translation of another “deeper” meaning is in grave danger of losing track of the most significant aspect of the work – its literal sense (as Bloomfield insists).

The achievement of great literary works obviously lies in their being put together in the way they are. It is the manipulation of words in a certain order which is their accomplishment. The literary artist, in whatever form, will not forget the symbolic role of his words... He makes the referential words lose some of their referentiability so that we can appreciate them as words. For this alone, which creates the very basis of the verbal art, we must be grateful for the literal sense (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 312).

This leads us to a third critique of allegory, which is that it is selectively exclusionary insofar as it may remove an entire level of meaning for those who may not be “in the know.” To study a work like Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* without contextualizing its satiric references or its parodist look at the genre of travel writing is to miss an important dimension of the novel. Yet why should the reader of any novel be forced to consult reference texts or historical documentation to savour the full flavour of

the work?

To conclude this section, I wish to make two suppositions: the first would be to suggest that allegory (and allegorical interpretation) brings an enlightening body of theory to a study of *Blindness*, if for no other reason than it proposes a narrative structure. We have discussed the extra-dimensionality of allegory vs. metaphor earlier in this paper; we have also discussed the idea that the forward motion of metaphor, while intriguing, does not adequately capture the full dimensionality of allegory, especially as it is applied to a narrative, nor does it pay homage to the history of an idea as exemplified in text form.

As for my second point: it may be time to question the notion that metaphor provides us with the best and, indeed, the only true model of the New. For the writer, the act of creating a new work based upon an old model (a form of metacommentary, to be sure, and not the same as allegoric interpretation) is itself metaphoric: it posits that its tenor (the first or previous work) is the same as the vehicle (the second or new work). Except for a case in which a “writer” might copy word for word the text of one novel and call it her own (and perhaps there is an argument there as well on the most esoteric of plains), even the most conservative rendering of a novel as allegory is still a new work.

And if this is the case, is it not then also true that the interpreter of this newly coined metaphor must similarly create a new world in his or her mind through the translation of the novel work? Even if either the reader or writer insists upon the most conservative translation/reading of the new work, is there nonetheless not a moment of Ricoeur’s alienating distancing in which the individual, either writer or reader, stands

apart from him- or herself and experiences both the tension and the feeling (as Ricoeur defines it) of the new?

For this reason alone, I would suggest that metaphor's claim as preferred heir to The New is weak and that, as Bloomfield suggests, its proponents reflect a literary epoch that does not value the past but seeks only to create that which it considers novel. We should then be able to adopt allegorical analysis without the nagging feeling that we are exercising a methodology that is embarrassingly out of touch with contemporary analysis. If, as Frye suggests, allegory saturates every aspect of our language, there is no reason to reject it out of hand.

So, with this analysis complete for now, we are free to appreciate the backward glance of allegory and the forward movement of the creating metaphor. Saramago's story enjoys fresh interpretation when it is seen to channel Plato's Allegory of the Cave, thus becoming a sort of 'translative' allegory of an allegory. The guardian of *Blindness* personifies the righteous guardian of Plato's ancient allegory and at the same time becomes a new symbol of hope for a just society.

CHAPTER FIVE: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Bringing *Blindness* into The Cave

The first objective of this section will be to closely examine the abiding allegory of Plato's cave as it is offered in the first of Saramago's companion novels, *Blindness*. (A similar agenda could easily be developed for the second of these novels – *Seeing* – but not within the limited confines of this paper.) It will be important here to contextualize Plato's allegory within its originating document, as my agenda here is not simply to revisit the cave allegory but to open it up within the context of Plato's great achievement in political theory – *The Republic*. Just as Socrates' philosopher leaves the Cave and its shadow puppets for an upward ascent towards truth, so do the protagonists of *Blindness* alternately struggle to regain their eyesight and some revelation of reality.

Literary influences and extended allegory

According to Socrates, guardians comprise one of three groups in the ideal Republic: the first productive group comprises the workers (merchants, farmers, labourers, etc.) of the city; the second protective group constitutes the city's adventurous and courageous military personnel; and the third and smallest of the groups contain the intelligent and rational lovers of wisdom, viz., the guardians of the city.

Plato begins his discussion of the guardian class early in *The Republic*. In Chapter Two, he describes the qualities of this rare sort of individual as a brave and spirited

person who is ferocious with his enemies and gentle with his friends (in this way very much like “a well-bred hound” that is able to distinguish a friendly from a hostile face “by nothing but his apprehension of the one and his failure to recognize the other”):

How, I ask you, can the love of learning be denied to a creature whose criterion of the friendly and the alien is intelligence and ignorance?

(Plato, p. 623).

Guardians comprise a formidable class of intellectuals: these individuals hate lies, have good memories and mathematical talents, grasp and deploy the power of dialectic, and unfailingly seek to know the truth in whatever circumstance they may find themselves. When tested, the true guardian emerges from the test “pure and intact, like gold tried in the fire” (Plato, p. 738).

Further, guardians of the Republic may be either male or female – a caveat scrutinized in some detail (and with some surprise, I suspect) by feminist classical scholars. Christine Garside Allen suggests that while Plato notes female and male bodies have different purposes, he also posits that these characteristics do not indicate differences in nature: “The soul has a separate and distinct identity” (Allen, 1975, p. 135). And although Woman is weaker than Man and more inclined to “craft and secrecy” in her doings, she is nonetheless entitled to the same opportunity to achieved the vision of the good and to become a member in good standing of the guardian class (Allen, 1975, p. 135).

Classicist Michael S. Kochin describes the work and education of women guardians in *The Republic*, noting that guardians must be trained not only in philosophy

but in warfare: “(I)t is necessary for the women among the guardians...to share in war and in the rest of the guarding concerning the city” (Kochin, 1999, p. 416). Indeed,

(w)omen are fit to be warriors because war itself ought to be human rather than manly, more concerned with the activities of nurture, rearing and reproduction... By bringing women into the city’s army, Socrates breaks the connection between the manly activity of war and actual men: the warrior’s life will no longer seem overwhelmingly appealing because it is no longer the exclusive sphere of the valorized gender. War is less noble if women can do it too (Kochin, 1999, pp. 420-421).

Female guardians belong to the same class as male guardians, and must marry within this class to ensure the maintenance of guardian stock: “Women of this kind, then, must be selected to cohabit with men of this kind and to serve with them as guardians since they are capable of it and akin by nature” (Plato, p. 695).

Finally, male and female guardians must relinquish the usual patterns of partnership and parenthood, giving over their children to be raised by City officials and abandoning outdated notions of fidelity to one partner; no mother will recognize her own child. They will live in common houses and meet at common meals. When citizens – and especially guardians – of the City refuse to utter such words as “mine” and “not mine,” then the community will have become one. Consider, says Socrates, the city

whose state is most like that of an individual man. For example, if the finger of one of us is wounded, the entire community of bodily

connections stretching to the soul for ‘integration’ with the dominant part is made aware, and all of it feels the pain as a whole, though it is a part that suffers (Plato, p. 701).

Classics scholar Gerald Runkle suggests this development in *The Republic* approaches a form of communism, in which it too is feared that family loyalty may weaken loyalty to the class. “Unlimited by home ties, (the workers) can work for the success of the movement with the great masses instead of individualistically concerning themselves with immediate family problems,” he notes. “They come to rejoice more in the development of the productive forces of society than in the development, say, of their living room” (Runkle, 1958, p. 132).

The structure of Blindness

It should come as no surprise to us now that a woman should dominate Saramago’s *Blindness*. She is a doctor’s wife – nameless, but no more so than any other character in these novels. She is not described with adjectives or sentiment, but allows her actions, intellect and commitments to speak for her. I posit that she is a Guardian of her city, a Platonic ideal charged with leading her bondsmen out of the cave.

To follow this line of reasoning, it would be helpful at this point to trace the correspondence between Plato’s allegory and *Blindness*’s plot points in broad strokes.

First, the events of *Blindness*: a man sitting at a traffic light one day waiting for the light to turn green suddenly goes blind. As the plot progresses, this strange blindness

spreads throughout the entire city and, with the mysterious plague escalating, the city's government confines the newly blind to an abandoned mental asylum. Of all the inmates in the asylum, only one still has the use of her eyes: the doctor's wife. As the miniaturized system of the asylum begins to break down, she does her best to protect her small band of charges, negotiating food supplies for them, helping to keep them clean, sharing her husband's sexual favours with one of them, even murdering for them. When the asylum is burned to the ground, she leads her group into the chaos of the city, where social conditions have completely failed. Slowly, she leads them to her own home on the fifth floor of an apartment block, where she can care for them all until their vision is miraculously restored.

The story describes the journey of Plato's Guardian, although not from the allegory's outset. *Blindness* begins after the guardian character has re-entered the cave and regained her vision, and at the point at which she decides to take on the responsibility of leading her bondsmen out of the cave. This decision is signaled at the end of the novel's third chapter, when the doctor's wife gets into the car with her husband and declares (falsely) that she too has gone blind. In a book almost entirely without of adjectives and adverbs, here the writer inserts a word that sums up the depth of her courage: viz., "The woman *calmly* replied, You'll have to take me as well, I've just gone blind this very minute" (Saramago, 1995, p. 36; italicization mine).

As noted, the first stage in the enlightenment of the Cave's guardian is to break his or her shackles and stare into the fire of the cave, precipitating a period of blindness and confusion; it would follow that the same procedure must be followed by the other

bondsmen in the cave. Accordingly, this stage is depicted in the first part of the novel, in which the doctor's wife's charges wander blindly through the asylum. Here, as they gaze into the fire and become blind, they are beset with woes resulting from their new affliction: some of them suffer mortal injuries, some are sexually abused and humiliated, all are afflicted by hunger, fear and unsanitary living conditions.

Two different categories of tyrant torment them: their fellow bondsmen, who are the blind but organized thugs who distribute food and rape the women, and the guards of the cave (described in Chapter 7 of *The Republic* alternately as 'instructors', 'passers-by' and 'men' who hold up the objects whose shadows appear on the wall) who are the novel's faceless prison guards who keep the group from leaving the asylum. One important note: as Plato gravely predicts, the guardian who returns to the Cave to free his fellow bondsmen must exercise extreme caution:

Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death (Plato, p. 749).

The doctor's wife is constant danger through the first part of the novel: knowing her ability to see would make her a valuable commodity for those who would seize and separate her from her group, she must guard against revealing herself. As the asylum descends into a spiral of chaos and tyranny, and the thugs launch their systemized rape of the female inmates, the doctor's wife pledges to defend her group by murdering the

leader of this group of lawless thugs. In the skirmish between the raped women and the rapist thugs, the blind accountant realizes she is sighted (“You’re not blind, you can’t fool me” (Saramago, 1995) and threatens to kill her – but not before she kills his leader with a pair of scissors.

Part Two of the enlightenment process requires Plato’s guardians and bondsmen to leave the cave and travel to the “upper world”, where they are blinded anew by the light of the sun. Accordingly, the doctor’s wife leads her blind troupe from the burning asylum out into the wider world and up into the sanctuary of her home. The group’s journey is once again harrowing, and they suffer again from hunger, fear, disappointment and frustration. But in the larger world, the group and its guardian are no longer plagued by fellow Cave dwellers who wish to kill them, either for urging the prisoners to loose their chains and stare into the fire, or for leading them to escape the Cave altogether. And here, their encounters are not entirely dangerous: the old woman who has taken possession of the apartment of the girl with the dark glasses, the writer who squats in another apartment, various city-dwellers who wander the streets looking for food – these poor souls are competitors for food and shelter, but for the most part little threat to the small band of bondsmen.

It is therefore curious that it is in the upper world that the doctor’s wife experiences some of her most despairing moments. When she sees a pack of dogs tearing apart a human body, she vomits; when she descends into an underground food storage facility and realizes she has encountered a tomb, she vomits again in misery. Pity and anguish beset her, and she seems closer to losing heart in her mission than before.

However, she is joined in this section of the novel by a dog – the dog of tears – who, as we have already seen, personifies the best qualities of Plato’s guardian class. This animal finds the doctor’s wife at a moment in the novel when she is lost, adopts her and becomes her guardian, just as she has become guardian to her small troupe.

In the final pages of the novel, the group reach the home of the opthamologist and his wife; here, they are safe to bathe, to make new allegiances, to eat, to rest, and finally, to regain their sight. The significance of the elevated apartment should not be lost on us: just as the bondsmen from Plato’s Cave must travel above ground to experience their final enlightenment, it is here, five stories up, that the blind troupe regains its sight, high above the other inhabitants of Saramago’s city.

It is not enough that *Blindness* closely follows the plot points of Plato’s Cave. Just as Plato opens up his discussion of the guardian and the tyrant within the entirety of *The Republic*, so too does the novel develop its characterization of the doctor’s wife and, to a lesser degree, the members of her blind troupe and its enemies. As noted earlier, Plato describes his guardian class in a variety of ways: one of these is through the use of metaphor and, in particular, the comparison of the various classes of the Republic to precious and base metals. In Chapter 3, Socrates’ discussion of the education of guardians and the importance of monitoring them through their youth includes a testing process in which the young philosophers must be tested “much more carefully than men do gold in the fire” (Plato, p. 658); a few chapters later, he speaks of guardians who die in battle as belonging to a “golden race.” In other chapters, he develops the metaphor, describing the “intermixture” of precious and base metals as analogous to the

interbreeding of guardian and farmer/craftsmen classes, and strongly advising his listeners to seek out and honour “the gold in their generation, for which reason they are the most precious” (Plato, p. 659).

We have already seen that *Blindness* uses very little in the way of grammatical descriptors (viz., adjectives or adverbs), and that use of these descriptors should be carefully noted. In the instance of Plato’s gold metaphor, the guardian-heroine is associated with gold (although it must be admitted that the association is not a sustained one):

His wife unclasped her watch, did the same for her husband, removed her earrings, a tiny ring set with rubies, the gold chain she wore round her neck, her wedding ring, that of her husband, both of them easy to remove (Saramago, 1995, p. 143).

The girl with the dark glasses has a similar set of belongings, the author writes, although no wedding band; we are left to assume that her jewellery is gold like that of her protector’s. Why would the girl with the dark glasses be associated in this way with our guardian-heroine, the doctor’s wife? Does *Blindness* associate the blind bondswoman in this way with the guardian class? We shall revisit this question a little later.

Another strong metaphor established by Plato is the image of the dog as characteristic of the guardian class. As we have seen, the dog’s skill in reasoning – specifically, its ability to recognize familiars and reject strangers by way of intellectual rationale – is highly praised by Socrates, and is mentioned at numerous times throughout the course of the *The Republic*. Consider this passage in Chapter 2, in which he asks

Glauccon to consider how the nature of a dog is like that of a guardian's:

(Y)ou know that well-bred dogs are perfectly gentle to their familiars and acquaintances, and the reverse to strangers... Why, a dog, whenever he sees a stranger, is angry; when an acquaintance, he welcomes him, although the one has never done him any harm, nor the other any good... And surely this instinct of the dog is very charming – your dog is a true philosopher.

Why?

Why, because he distinguishes the face of a friend and of an enemy only by the criterion of knowing and not knowing. And must not an animal be a lover of learning who determines what he likes and dislikes by the test of knowledge and ignorance? (Plato, p. 622-623).

Blindness assumes this metaphor in a somewhat more literal sense: instead of merely assigning doggy characteristics to his guardian-heroine, it creates a 'personification': the dog of tears.

This noble character arrives at a point in the novel at which the doctor's wife is at her lowest point, her guardian abilities flagging. Her troupe has left the asylum, and she is hunting alone for food; she travels "far from where she had left her husband and companions" and finds herself in front of a supermarket that has already been emptied of food. Blind people continuously forage among its empty shelves; one is injured and cracks a ribald joke while the others encourage him. "Hell," she says to herself, "I'll

never get out of here, using an expression that formed no part of her usual vocabulary, once more showing that the force and nature of circumstances have considerable influence over language” (Saramago, 1995, p. 227). Use of this mild expletive reveals the depth of this excellent woman’s demoralization.

Using her guardian’s powers of deduction (as well as her eyes), she realizes the supermarket’s storeroom of back-up food is underground, and she finds the stairway leading to this store. She enters the stairwell, closes the door behind her – and becomes blind. Keeping close to the stairway wall, she descends.

I’m going mad, she thought, and with good reason, making this descent into a dark pit, without light or any hope of seeing any, how far would it be, these underground stores are usually never very deep, first flight of stairs, now I know what it means to be blind, second set of stairs, I’m going to scream, I’m going to scream... (Saramago, 1995, p. 229).

Below ground, she finds and gathers food, ascends again, flees the ravagers in the supermarket, and becomes lost. Despairing, she falls to the ground; a pack of dogs surround her and one licks the tears from her face, “perhaps it had been used to drying tears ever since it was a puppy”:

The woman strokes its head, runs her hand down its drenched back, and she weeps the rest of her tears embracing the dog. When she finally raised her eyes, the god of crossroads be praised a thousand times, she saw a great map before her, of the kind that town councils

set up throughout city centres... (Saramago, 1995, p. 234).

The appearance of the dog of tears occurs at the beginning of the second major section of *Blindness*, and he serves not only as a formal expression of Plato's dog metaphor but signals another important stage in the doctor's wife progression as a guardian – for it is at this point in the novel that the guardian-heroine 'ascends' from the Cave and is blinded by the sun of the natural world. The novel handles this a little differently in that his guardian must first descend the stairs, become blinded by darkness, then light her way back up the stairs with matches, but in principle, the development is the same. As she despairs, the dog of tears – a guardian-guide of sorts – arrives to signal the map that will take her back to her troupe.

This treatment of the dog of tears is remarkably similar to Socrates' description: like the original animal, this one is not always good natured ("he is a gruff, ill-tempered animal when he does not have to dry someone's tears" (Saramago, 1995, p. 239), nor does he suffer strangers gladly, especially when they behave badly (when the old woman squatting in the girl with the dark glasses' apartment shouts at the little troupe, "the dog of tears...leapt at her and started barking furiously, the entire stairway echoed with the uproar" (Saramago, 1995, p. 249). A little later, the dog of tears feeds himself by devouring one of the old woman's hens, further evidence of his contempt for her as a stranger to his adopted troupe.

If the dog exemplifies the guardian class, its foil in both texts is the pig, which typifies the tyrannical elements of society. Early in *The Republic*, Socrates and Glaucon are discussing the various classes of citizen in the city and the best manner in which all

might be gainfully employed. Glaucon then changes tactics somewhat, asking his teacher how he might provide for a “city of pigs.” Socrates does not take long to catch his student’s meaning:

Good, said I. I understand. It is not merely the origin of a city, it seems, that we are considering but the origin of a luxurious city... If it is your pleasure that we contemplate also a fevered state, there is nothing to hinder (Plato, p. 619).

Plato does not pursue this metaphor as methodically as he does the dog image, but the novel picks up on it with alacrity. In *Blindness*’s first rape scene, the leader of the thugs molests the girl with the dark glasses; she vomits while he ejaculates, “pant(ing) like a suffocated pig” (Saramago, 1995, p. 180). At the outset of the second rape scene, the doctor’s wife visualizes the scene, “fifteen women sprawled on the beds and on the floor, the men going from one to the other, snorting like pigs” (Saramago, 1995, p. 187). A little later, she slaughters the leader of the thugs by decapitating him with her scissors, in much the same way a butcher would slaughter a hog.

For the book, the lair of the blind thugs is Socrates’ fevered city of luxury, where goods are hoarded and kept from the rest of the asylum’s inmates; the pig inhabitants are not satisfied with “the ordinary conveniences of life” but must have “relishes and myrrh and incense and girls and cake” (Plato). *Blindness* disposes of this corrupt city not by converting its inhabitants but by burning it to the ground, clearly the best solution for it.

In his discussion of the education of the guardian classes in Chapter 3 of *The Republic*, Socrates calls for this training to be in every way balanced. Between the two

end points that represent gymnastics and music, the guardian-in-training must find a happy medium:

I have observed...that the devotees of unmitigated gymnastics turn out more brutal than they should be and those of music softer than is good for them... But our requirement, we say, is that the guardians should possess both natures... And the soul of the man thus attuned is sober and brave... (Plato, p. 655).

Indeed, the ideal guardian is never mentioned in Plato strictly in terms of his or her excess of courage or, on the other hand, extreme artistic tendencies, but always in the balanced terms of “wisdom, temperance, courage” (these words appear in combination no less than three times in Chapter 4), “courage, temperance and the rest of them” (no less than twice in Chapter 6).

Correspondence of metaphors and other figurative terms is not so difficult when comparing two texts like *The Republic* and *Blindness*, but a rather more liberal interpretation is required when it comes to thematic comparisons. Plato’s guardian, who after being properly educated represents a perfect balance of courage and gentleness, athleticism and musicality, is exemplified in the doctor’s wife, but it is one thing to suggest this and another to prove it.

Revisiting the plot points of the novel may help. We have already noticed the first act of “spirit” (Socrates’ word) by the doctor’s wife, when she joins her husband at the asylum. Certainly her courage in killing the leader of the thugs is a major act of spirit, as is her descent into the basement of the supermarket, her resourcefulness in finding her

troupe shelter and leading them back to her home.

But none of these acts of courage occur without temperance. The doctor's wife reveals after (or during) each of these acts that while she is bold, she also has a gentle nature – so much so that any act of courage is usually followed by a polemical act of compassion. After joining her husband in the car that will carry them both to the asylum, he tells her he's going to ask the authorities to take her home. She objects: "No, my love, you can't, I'm staying to help you" (Saramago, 1995, p. 40).

Another example: following the first horrific rape scene in which the doctor's wife is forced to fellate the leader of the thugs (surely an act of courage for her), the women are free to leave the scene and the blind insomniac woman collapses at their feet. She raises the body and sees it as her own: "This is the image of my body, she thought, the image of the body of all the women here" (Saramago, 1995, p. 182). She carries the body herself back to the ward, steals into the refectory for water, and returns to wash the bodies of the dead woman and her raped companions:

When the doctor and the old man with the black eyepatch entered the ward with the food, they did not see, could not see, seven naked women and the corpse of the woman who suffered from insomnia stretched out on her bed, cleaner than she had ever been in all her life, while another woman was washing her companions, one by one, and then herself (Saramago, 1995, p. 185).

Finally, after killing the leader of the thugs and challenging the panicking rapists to find her, she flees – and promptly collapses. "Her eyes clouded over, I'm going blind,

she though, but then realized it would not be just yet”:

Little by little she regained her strength. Her tears continued to flow,
 slower and more serene, as if confronted by something irremediable.
 She struggled to her feet... She knew that if it were necessary, she
 would kill again (Saramago, 1995, p. 192).

Other descriptions of the doctor’s wife’s numerous balanced acts of courage and compassion would fill a book longer than *Blindness*. The novel describes in detail the evolution of a virtuous being – in every way it speaks more eloquently for itself than any academic treatment.

Communal aspects of the texts

However, there are a few more characteristics of the guardian that would benefit from discussion. One major element that cannot be ignored is the strong communal mandates of both the Republic’s guardian and the doctor’s wife. We have earlier glossed the nature of this early communism in Plato’s work; in *Blindness*, it is exemplified in acts too numerous to name here. Again, focusing on a few of these will have to suffice.

To review our earlier discussion, Socrates calls for the integration of his city dwellers into a single unit, like a living body that feels pain and pleasure, not in an isolated sense but throughout its entirety. Further, couples must not confine themselves to their nuclear families but share their lives and their property with their community, thus focusing their productivity on the good of the community, not upon the good “of their

living room” (Runkle, 1958).

Blindness responds to this call from *The Republic* within its first few pages. One by one, slowly at first, then more rapidly, its characters – save the doctor’s wife – are leveled to one equal playing field: blindness. Taken from their homes and forced to share food and shelter, they quickly form a communal group that must co-operate to survive. As the novel progresses and the people of the group learn to overcome their differences, they earn a place in the apartment of the ophthalmologist and his wife, where their vision is restored.

The book reinforces the communal – the anonymous – nature of this group by refusing to name its characters. Instead, each are identified by a small element of their person: one individual is the old man with the black eyepatch, another is the girl with the dark glasses, another the ophthalmologist or doctor, another the insomniac. Almost all these labels make some reference to the human eye – and in the case of the insomniac, to the eyelid that refuses to cover the eye.

Sharing is another major motif here: the group shares whatever food it receives, the old man with the eyepatch shares the sound of his radio, the girl with the dark glasses shares her home with her group and with the old woman squatting there, the doctor and his wife share their apartment with the entire group. Indeed, the doctor’s wife shares her husband with the girl with the dark glasses; one evening she finds them together in bed. Her reaction is not to condemn but to forgive them both:

Be quiet, the doctor’s wife said gently, let’s all keep quiet, there are times when words serve no purpose, if only I, too, could weep, say

everything with tears... She sat on the edge of the bed, stretched her arm over the two bodies, as if gathering them in the same embrace (Saramago, 1995, p. 174).

As we saw earlier, the girl with the dark glasses wears jewelery similar to that of the doctor's wife – are the two women spiritual sisters? Sharing her husband's sexual favours with the girl with dark glasses furthers Plato's suggestion that guardians should share their partners if they are to establish a truly communal whole.

There is of course one major anomaly in this part of the argument: the doctor's wife, who does not go blind and upon whom the others depend upon for their survival, is not merely a member of the blind troupe but its guardian and leader. Further, her designation as a guardian puts her in a class that Plato clearly considers above the others he describes in *The Republic*. This is hardly the classless society we associate with the Marxist depiction of communism.

But the allegory of communism in *Blindness* follows the pattern set for it by *The Republic*, not by *Das Kapital*. Socrates' 'good city' has by necessity a hierarchy and a ruling class of philosopher-guardians, but these rulers are disinterested in the act of ruling. Plato goes so far as to suggest that the most reluctant of rulers is the best for his ideal city.

These tenets are followed throughout *Blindness*, as we have already seen. As for the reluctance of the ideal guardian(s) to rule, we see at key junctures that the doctor's wife questions her ability to lead the troupe ("I'm a coward...it would be have been better to be blind than go around like some faint-hearted missionary" (Saramago, 1995, p.

164) and admits doubts in her own strength to guide them:

She looked at them, her eyes filled with tears, there they were, as dependent on her as little children on their mother. If I should let them down – she thought (Saramago, 1995, p. 225).

Dialectic as a function of communality and education

In discussing Plato's unique form of dialectic, it is helpful to note that *The Republic* is a work of political theory, written almost 30 years after Plato's *Gorgias*, a condensed textbook of rhetorical practice. The latter dialogue is a confrontation circa 387 B.C. between Socrates and three rhetoricians – Gorgias, Polus and Callicles – in which Socrates attempts to lead the group to understand that dialectic is the best and most acceptable form of philosophical reasoning, since it is the only one that tests hypotheses as they are advanced. By contrast, the sophistic or rhetorical argument begins with an end in mind and argues not to discover truth but to win a communications game.

Gorgias was for Plato an early work, whose dialectic theory resoundingly informs *The Republic*. Curiously, the question of dialectic in *The Republic* is felt but not overtly heard or discussed: it is not until much later in the text – Chapter 7 – that Socrates reveals its primacy in the great political theory of *The Republic*:

This, then, at last, Glaucon, is the very law which dialectic recites...

(W)hen anyone by dialectic attempts through discourse of reason and apart from perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of

each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself the nature of the good in itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible... And the release from bonds, and the conversion from the shadows to the images that cast them and to the light and the ascent from the subterranean cavern to the world above... all this procedure of the arts and sciences that we have described indicates their power to lead the best part of the soul up to the contemplation of what is best among realities... (Plato, p. 764).

We have seen through our structural analysis of *Blindness* that the journey of the doctor's wife and her troupe leads them in a similar way, from underground darkness and blindness to a sunlight place in the world above. But how did this small group of people arrive there, and against all the odds? How was it that they communicated clearly enough to make such a journey and arrive safely?

The answer lies for *Blindness*, as for *The Republic*, in dialectic – Socrates' favored educational device. The run-on exchanges of Saramago's later novels (notably *Seeing*, *The Cave* and *The Double*) spring from a depiction of dialogue as a shared stream of consciousness that leads to a greater truth. By omitting personal names from each strand of reasoning and by combining the exchanges into a scantily punctuated flow, *Blindness* establishes the communal nature of communication, and the extraordinary way human beings can arrive at a greater truth through shared discussion.

Consider the following dialogue:

Will you kill again (the doctor asks his wife after the murder of the

thug leader), If I have to, I shall never be free from this blindness, And what about the food, We shall fetch it, I doubt whether they'll dare to come here, at least for the next few days they'll be afraid the same might happen to them, that a pair of scissors will slit their throat, We failed to put up resistance as we should have done when they first came making demands, Of course, we were afraid and fear isn't always a wise counselor, let's get back, for our greater safety we ought to barricade the door of the wards by putting beds on top of beds, as they do, if some of us have to sleep on the floor, too bad, better that than to die of hunger (Saramago, 1995, pp. 193-194).

An exchange like this between husband and wife blurs the line between one and the other, but to concern oneself as a reader about keeping the two separate is entirely beside the point. *Blindness* intends its reader to lose track of the players in a dialogue; the reader can only track the written line of reasoning to its end point. Within this dialogue, typical of the ones running through *Blindness*, we move from the story's practical concerns about food and self defense to a universal truth reached through rationale: it is better for the group to defend itself and sleep on the floor than it is to die of hunger. Who has reached this conclusion? It doesn't matter: the important factor is that the conclusion has been reached and consensus gained.

Ironically, it is with the art of dialectic that *Blindness* moves to extricate itself from *The Republic*, not so much from its holistic form as from its ideology. Where Plato is always clear to indicate who is speaking at every point in Socratic dialogue, prefacing

each transition with the name of the speaker (viz., Socrates and his interlocutors), *Blindness* deliberately obscures the speakers in its numerous dialogic exchanges. Nowhere are the words of the doctor's wife identified clearly in the dialogue above – despite the fact that she is the guardian of her group, the wisest sentences here may as well have been uttered by her husband or even an unidentified Other who has entered the conversation.

The fact that *Blindness* allows wisdom and intelligence to be shared amongst its characters (if not equally, then at least with some generosity) represents the great transformation and departure the novel makes from its root allegory. Where *The Republic* represents a largely communal society with pronounced autocratic idiosyncracies – a society where only a few members are equipped to teach, for example – *Blindness*'s world is a communal society whose guardian classes are modest and generous enough to share everything they have, including the credit for their intelligence. Indeed, a 21st-century educator, particularly one schooled in the inquiry method, which advocates that students actively engage in their own learning by working in teams rather than by receiving direction from a teacher, will recognize the dialectic method employed in *Blindness*.

To resume: by way of dialectic, the doctor's wife not only shields her group from harm through her sightedness (i.e., by witnessing horrors that she will not describe to the others), then acting as a translator of events when needed, but she willingly shares her intellectual gifts with a woman she might otherwise have considered a threat and a rival for her husband's affections – namely, the girl with the dark glasses.

The doctor's wife said, We all have our moments of weakness, just as well that we are still capable of weeping, tears are often our salvation, there are times when we would die if we did not weep, There is no salvation for us, the girl with dark glasses repeated, Who can tell, this blindness is not like any other, it might disappear as suddenly as it came, It will come too late for those who have died, We all have to die, But not to be killed and I have killed someone, Don't blame yourself, it was a question of circumstances, here we are all guilty and innocent... (*Blindness*, 1995, p. 96).

The doctor's wife predicts the end of the plague of blindness, sharing her optimistic speculation with her younger colleague; a less generous companion would have kept her counsel to herself, particularly in light of the fact that a confident individual would be apt to foment suspicion in such a vulnerable group. Moreover, she speaks with compassion to a person too inexperienced to contextualize an inadvertent murder (as oxymoronic a notion as that might be). Indeed, besides her sightedness, her compassion is the characteristic that most clearly distinguishes the doctor's wife from the others in her group and from the guardians of *The Republic*. For while Plato's guardians are a superior breed with their nobility, courage, sureness and beauty, they are nowhere described as "caring," "compassionate," "altruistic" or "kind" individuals (note: entering these words into the search function for an online version of *The Republic* reveals 0 matches.)

Popper on Plato

Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* accuses Plato of promoting a harmful and ultimately totalitarian view of collectivism as superior to individualism. Although until now we have focused on the more humanitarian and progressive aspects of *The Republic*, contemporary readers are also queasily aware that for Plato, races are not necessarily equivalent. Popper points out that:

Greeks and barbarians are unequal by nature; the opposition between them corresponds to that between natural masters and natural slaves. The natural inequality of men is one of the reasons for their living together, for their natural gifts are complementary. Social life begins with natural inequality, and it must continue upon that foundation (Popper, 1945, Vol. 1, p. 71).

Further, Plato's guardians are, argues Popper, members of a "master race" (Popper, 1945, Vol. 1, p. 51) that must be kept pure and may even resort to infanticide if that purity is threatened. Unlike the motley but ultimately egalitarian society established by *Blindness*'s group of seven, Plato's ruling class is a superior breed granted the right to bear arms, the right to be educated and to hold political rights. And opposed to *Blindness*'s constant striving for growth and development, Plato's text (complains Popper) glorifies a stratified, fossilized, normative state that abolishes change wherever it finds it: "True happiness, Plato insists, is achieved only by justice, i.e. by keeping one's place. The ruler must find happiness in ruling, the warrior in warring; and, we may infer, the slave in slaving" (Popper, 1945, Vol. 1., p. 169).

The Open Society and its Enemies was published on the eve of the Nazi

movement's demise; with its unsettling insights and veiled commentary, the double volume is positioned in 20th-century scholarship as a ferocious critique of fascism and its precedents. In the context of this paper and its aims, Popper's work may then give the essayist pause: that is, do the discrepancies between Plato's latent fascism and *Blindness*'s humanism void an allegorical analysis of the two texts? Is there a point at which we would be well advised to abandon such a comparison, given the absolute dissimilarity of the two ideologies?

A few responses to that query: by the theoretical guidelines established earlier in this paper, Popper most certainly commits the intentional fallacy in his insistence upon uncovering Plato's 'true' aims in his writing – no doubt a comparatively forgivable move within the realm of political theory. But a second and more provocative answer might be that because an allegory is not a metaphor, we should not worry overly that allegorical analysis appears to be misaligned in this case. Some explanation is in order here: where metaphor claims that one thing *is* another, and that something entirely new is created from the union, allegory merely suggests that one thing is modeled upon another and that the new development (the second text) has some form of relationship with the first. In this way, allegory bears a resemblance to the trope of simile, which puts forward a similarly qualified and moderate claim. In the case of the Allegory of the Cave and *Blindness*, we are safe to say that because the form, the characters and the narrative of the later book are based upon models presented in the earlier text, allegory is still at play – but with a key difference.

That is, the allegory of *Blindness* takes liberties that other secondary texts might

not take: it is a *critical re-reading* of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Indeed, in light of the 20th century's various failures in ideological experiment (viz., Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and communist Russia), how could any allegorical reading of Plato be made without intense scrutiny of and potential revision of Socrates' totalitarian prescription? In particular, those who have lived through the Second World War do not look kindly upon the idea of a "master race" and "inferior" classes, intellectually superior guardians or a collective imperative. In fact, I suggest this notion – viz., that a critical allegory may revise the ideology of an earlier form, with the resulting text still honouring elements of its structure – counters the idea that the trope is only an artificial and hackneyed parroting of an outdated text. As I have suggested, even the most conservative reading of a text as allegory is still a 'new' work, positioned as it inevitably is in a new environment and a different time; perhaps reading postmodern texts as progressive, dialogical critiques of earlier works might bring us to a more productive and community-minded postmodernism.

There is no doubt that gender and queer studies benefit enormously from the critical chemistry of intertextuality: consider for one example Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and its structural dependency upon Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The issues of white colonial power, patriarchal hierarchies and their consequences receive considerable attention in the newer text; in all, the aims of *Wide Sargasso Sea* seem very much in line with *Blindness*, insofar as neither text endorses the worldview of its precedent (Berg, 2001, p. 371).

Robert Hariman calls for a new public attention to the symbolic mode of allegory,

“to understand how it is a language for encoding reality and binding people together...I believe that allegory has been a resource for skilful democratic advocacy” (Hariman, 2002, p. 269). Rhetoric plays a role in Hariman’s proposal, but so does literary criticism:

(In the future), allegorical critique will be more a process of reorganizing than of unmasking, and one that above all does so in order to create challenging encounters between past and present – a strong field of associations that exists in the space between amnesia and the linear temporality of modernism (Hariman, 2002, p. 290).

We may do well in our intertextual studies to seek allegorical analyses of earlier texts; such readings may bring us closer to an understanding of how our culture has evolved (or devolved, as might well be the case), given the commonalities of and discrepancies between the two works. As Hariman suggests, understanding the common figures of allegorical generations may lead us to examine our values in the light of history and society, and give us a new mode of understanding of our life/world. An intertextual reading of a novel like *Blindness* allows the reader and scholar to freely bring one or more texts to another, and to explore the practically limitless correspondences between them. As a methodology, both allegorical and metaphoric analysis prove fruitful in examining *Blindness*, as the story may be envisioned as a new reading of an ancient story, viz., Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.

And what of the new meaning created when these two works, the new and the old, are deliberately set in relation to one another? What am I saying when I insist that *Blindness* has its roots in the Allegory of the Cave? The answer, I think, lies in the moral

that is expressed through the books' shared message: namely, that people must take care of one another if the human race is to survive. The stronger must care for the weaker; the wealthy must share what they have with the impoverished; the wise must teach and lead the less wise. One might argue that *The Republic* sees this directive as a matter of efficiency and expediency, while *Blindness* considers it an ethical imperative; regardless, the end result of the texts' direction is the same.

One final note: I am also aware that while Popper's thesis is sound at one hearing, at the next, it suffers from a reciprocal mean-spiritedness that denies Plato's interpretation of education, namely (to repeat):

...(O)ur argument indicates that this is a capacity which is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good (Plato, p. 754).

What to do with this contradictory note? Very little except to agree that the discussion – the dialectic – does not end with Popper nor with this thesis, but continues with the progress of humanity's moral education.

CONCLUSION

In a 2002 interview for *The Independent*, José Saramago told British interviewer Amanda Hopkinson that “Western civilization has never been as close to living in Plato’s cave as we are now... We no longer simply live through images; we live through images that don’t even exist” (Hopkinson, 2003). What does he mean by such a statement? Is he referring to society’s 20th-century immersion into a synthetic culture dominated by the visual imagery of television and the interactive fantasies of an online gaming community? Or is his allusion less literal – does he mean that those of us in the West are so fixated on images of wealth and individual achievement that we have lost our ethical ways, our sense of responsibility to the community?

Mercifully, Saramago does not routinely make such elusive statements to the press. In fact, when it comes to the media, the Portuguese novelist is positively garrulous and absolutely clear, granting interviews to numerous publications with the help of translators (Saramago speaks Portuguese, Spanish and French but no English). His comments upon the wars in the Mexican state of Chiapas, in Iraq and in Palestine have been faithfully reprinted in the international press, and with little question as to his intentions. Consider the following excerpt from an interview he gave to *Tierramérica’s* Carla Maldonado:

Q: What is your stance on the impending war in Iraq?

A: This attack is being prepared by the empire of the United States. In

the 19th century the world empires reached their peak, in the 20th century they declined, and now in the 21st century they are recovering. But the difference is that today there is only one single colonial empire in the world: the United States. Before, there were the Portuguese, Spanish, French and British empires. Now there is just one.

Q: Are weapons and petroleum industry interests behind this drive for war?

A: Yes, they are part of the motives for this war, but there are also many more. To make this clear (if anything can be sufficiently clear in this world): no other country has military bases in the United States, but that empire has military bases around the world. This fact, which does not seem to bother people, can only mean one thing: I have military bases throughout almost the entire world, in other words, I have an idea of domination. These are not bases with universities and hospitals; they are bases with soldiers and weapons. This has a specific end: to control the world. It would be better if we would talk with each other about what is behind all of this, and not just what is on the surface. (*Tierramérica*, 2003).

Note the final sentence in this exchange: "It would be better if we would talk with each other about what is behind all of this, and not just what is on the surface."

Comparison of Saramago's writing to that of Plato's throughout this thesis has

revealed numerous discrepancies, but none so glaring (at least for me) as the apparent disconnect in didactic methodology: that is, where Plato incorporated his teaching methods within the body of his writing, Saramago has left out that function, leaving it to the reader to interpret his intentions. In this way, the Portuguese novelist is truly a 20th-century writer, whose understanding (tacit or otherwise) of literary debates on intentionality respects the ability of informed readers to draw their own conclusions from his work without further exposition. The fact that *Blindness*'s characters engage in dialectic to understand developments in their own progress relieves Saramago from any need to translate his meaning for readers: the communicative action required by the writer to guide readers to face the sun of truth is simply not required when that work is done for him so thoroughly and so democratically by his characters.

But as we see here, while the writer declines to engage in direct political discussion within the context of his novels, he has no such compunction when it comes to discussion with the press. Like Plato, Saramago adopts an authoritative and often cranky demeanor, directing the journalist (and by extension, the public) to probe beneath the appearance of things and to learn to question for themselves the political and ethical motives of self-appointed ruling nations. Indeed, a second thesis exploring Saramago's communications model with his readers might examine exactly how Plato's dialectic methods are extended through these media interviews rather than through the novels. Are we in fact living in Plato's Cave? And if we are, how do we get out? José Saramago may not have answered the question within the bounds of the *Independent* interview, but a curious reader will learn the answer to those questions in his novels.

I wish to end this analysis on a personal note. *Blindness* has been described as a novel of dystopia, a story of unrelenting gloom and a lament for the wicked ways of mankind. Given the novel's themes, this writer cannot understand why more critics do not also detect the lineaments of hope, leadership, compassion and social justice so compellingly described in this extraordinary work.

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