

Stone Metaphors about a Village: a “Stone Vessel” or “The Most Portuguese”

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One of the most eminent figures of the Portuguese critical thought once stated: “the most Portuguese village of Portugal does not exist”¹ (Cortesão 107). Yet, in 1938, national authorities had distinguished Monsanto (Idanha-a-Nova, Portugal) as that village. At the time of this designation, people lived then in an authoritative, antiparliamentary and anti-liberal political regime, designated as ‘Estado Novo’ (‘New State’), that held the government in Portugal from 1933 to 1974.

While the official propaganda saw the village as a symbol of national identity, Fernando Namora (1919-1989)—one of the pioneers of the Neo-Realistic literature in Portugal and the most read Portuguese writer of his time (Lourenço, “Escrita” 22) — attributed a significant value to the landscape of Monsanto. Reflecting on his own experiences as a medical doctor during 1944, and later as a frequent visitor and lover of that village, the writer left us a relevant corpus for the study of the literary landscape of Monsanto: the short stories “História de um Parto” [“History of a Birth”] and “Apenas uma Laranja” [“Only an Orange”] published in *Retalhos da Vida de um Médico* [Sketches in the Life of an MD] respectively in 1949 (1st series) and in 1963 (2nd series); the novel, *A Noite e a Madrugada* [The Night and the Early Morning] (1950); and the chronicle, *A Nave de Pedra* [The Stone Vessel] (1975).

At its onset, Neo-Realism was engaged in a social context mainly focused on the rural environment (Namora, “Esboço Histórico do Neo-Realismo” 4). Authors assumed the role of drawing up an inventory of society and denouncing its miseries becoming social inventors, committed to a reality they though they ought to have denounced (Namora, “Prefácio” 21). According to Mário Dionísio, Neo-Realism would distinguish itself by “highlighting the heroism of those who are the means for social transformation”² (Torres 209).

In the theoretical framework of the “newer environmental criticism,” open “to include, in principle, any text whatsoever” (Buell 27), this paper aims to examine the literary landscape of Monsanto, in order to understand how landscape is defined and what values are assigned to it. To do so, it sets

¹ “A aldeia mais portuguesa de Portugal não existe” (all translations are by the authors).

² “Realçar o heroísmo da luta daqueles que são os meios da sua transformação.”

Fernando Namora's discourse against other contemporary writers such as Carlos Queiroz, António Ferro, Cardoso Marta and Adolfo Simões Müller, and Antunes Paiva, directly or indirectly associated to the ideological bases of the "Estado Novo." It also discusses their influence in today's visions of the village.

Monsanto: Latitude 40.039468; Longitude: 7.114259

Monsanto rises over the vast plateau of Idanha-a-Nova, a region crossed by the tributaries of the Tagus, near the border with Spain. Punctuated by pronounced multiple elevations, its rural landscape character results from a mosaic of small woodlands and intensive agricultural areas, that benefit from soft hills and irrigation (Cancela de Abreu, Pinto-Correia and Oliveira 115) (Figure 1). The geological substrata comes to the surface in the form of *inselberg* and rises about three hundred meters above the surrounding land (a maximum altitude of 758m).

The stony hill of Monsanto, leading up to the Castle, supports a human occupancy dating back to Palaeolithic. Archaeological studies also revealed Roman, Wisigothic and Arabic remains. In the 12th century, the settlement was donated by the first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques, to the Knights Templar. During the first half of the 20th century, that was still one of the strategic areas for the great transhumant herds, in seasonal transit between the northern mountains and the centre of Portugal.

Its traditional stone houses, made of granite, were built among the oval boulders that constitute the place (Figure 2). These aspects gave to the village a picturesque singularity.



Figure 1 – Monsanto and the surroundings (Margarida Fernandes, September 2010).

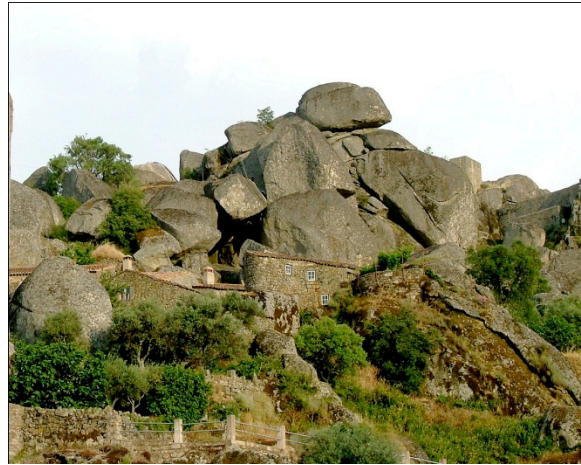


Figure 2 – Monsanto’s traditional stone houses (Maico, June 2004).

The Silver Rooster

During four decades of the 20th century, the national Portuguese ideal was profoundly marked by the personality of the dictator Oliveira Salazar. He had a rural upbringing. He was the “ploughing minister,”³ always attached to his “verdant agricultural plot,”⁴ an apologist of the countryside against the subversive madness of the cities and the industrial world. He defended a modest life, having as its main ambition “to oblige the Portuguese to live as they always did”⁵ (Rosas xxxvi).

In the 20th century, while some countries in Europe were taking relevant steps to introduce democracy, the maintenance of the “Estado Novo” demanded active practices of cultural suppression and manipulation. The rules of the contest “The Most Portuguese Village in Portugal” clearly shows that its intention was “to combat using any means available against the penetration in our country of any disturbing ideas favouring the dissolution of the national unity” and “to instill veneration for tradition and national regionalism into the Portuguese people”⁶ (“Regulamento” 123, published initially in the official newspaper *Diário da Manhã*, on February 8, 1938). Salazar thought that “our race was dormant,”⁷ and that he could reverse it through the action of propaganda; as he wrote, “Thus we shall convince our people, slowly, that we

³ “Ministro lavrador.”

⁴ “Courela viçosa.”

⁵ “Levar os portugueses a viver habitualmente.”

⁶ “Combater por todos os meios ao seu alcance a penetração no nosso país de quaisquer ideias perturbadoras e dissolventes da unidade nacional”; “desenvolver nos portugueses o culto pela tradição, estimulando o regionalismo nacional.”

⁷ “A nossa raça adormecida.”

are thinking about them, that their happiness and well-being are two of our main goals”⁸ (Ferro, *Entrevistas* 56).

The contest called “A aldeia mais portuguesa de Portugal” [“The Most Portuguese Village in Portugal”] was a propaganda initiative of great success. It concerned ethnographic and folkloric national renaissance. The winners would get a “Silver Rooster,” an icon of hard labour. The contest was part of a process of desiring that “the necessary, the truly beautiful would be to transform rustic Portugal in a constant exhibition of living popular art”⁹ (Ferro, “Discurso” 115). The “Estado Novo” created a stereotyped image of the “Portuguese identity,” built upon a “popular culture” that was re-elaborated according to the main ideas of the regime, and readjusted to fit the notions of order, citizenship and society stemming from fascist ideology (Paulo 80).

From the candidate villages, a national jury would select the one that offered “more resistance to foreign and decomposing influences and a state of conservation in its highest degree of purity”¹⁰ (“Regulamento” 124). This jury evaluated housing, furniture and country tools, dress codes, popular arts and industries, forms of commerce, means of transportation (on land, on sea, and on rivers), oral poetry, short stories, superstitions, games, songs, music, choreography, theatre, feasts and other costumes, topographic and panoramic physiognomy.

Joaquim Pais de Brito documented the stages to arrive at the final selection. In 1938, an on-the-spot appraisal of all top-candidates culminated with the choice of Monsanto (511-532).

The Landscape of Monsanto, according to Fernando Namora

Fernando Namora emphasized the petrified scenery: “Its name is Monsanto, it is made of stone — my curdled vessel”¹¹ (“A Nave” 9); “monstrous cliffs, where man challenged the laws that prevented him from building an eagle’s nest and encompassing the sky, the distance, the ambition and the vertigo”¹² (“Apenas” 335). The writer described the prominence of rocky outcrops, the chaos of boulders, visible to those that came from the neighbouring villages, and found an explanation for the occupation of such a remote, haughty and singular place. Furthermore, he invited the reader to take a look at the top of the place, “where one observes a skirt holding a perspective in

⁸ “Convenceremos assim o povo, pouco a pouco, de que pensamos nele, de que a sua felicidade e o seu bem-estar constituem uma das nossas maiores preocupações.”

⁹ “O necessário, o verdadeiramente belo, seria transformar Portugal rústico numa constante exposição viva de arte popular.”

¹⁰ “A maior resistência oferecida a decomposições e influências estranhas e o estado de conservação no mais elevado grau de pureza.”

¹¹ “Monsanto se chama, de pedra é feito — minha nave coalhada”

¹² “Monstruoso penhasco, onde o homem desafiou as leis que o limitam para construir um ninho de águias e dele abranger o céu, a distância, a ambição e as vertigens.”

each of its frills”¹³ (“A Nave” 19). From there, he describes a plateau that stretches for miles and compares it to a “coagulated sea”¹⁴ (“A Noite” 182), as well as mountainous regions surrounding in different directions, be it towards Spain or into the national territory:

all of its hillocks are a forest of escarps that start toning down as they enter the plain and disappear in bouts of fury or in oasis of softness¹⁵ (“A Noite” 20); [T]here, the wild province says goodbye to the plain, it raises itself on the steps of the cliffs to look haughtily to the Spanish mountains, while the frieze of plateaus running along the border line observes the coming and going of the smugglers and the fugue of rivers¹⁶ (“História” 21); the plain tries to climb up to the border of the slopes, as waves that, although tired, still have a soul to surprise the cliffs.¹⁷ (“Apenas” 335)

Namora did not limit himself to focusing on natural landscape as standing apart from the transforming force of labour and the millenary changes in vegetation. Quite the other way around, he registered how local inhabitants saw each environmental element: “the eyes observed all this, hopping to work or looking to the open passage to the border”¹⁸ (“A Noite” 32). However, the surrounding Nature was not prosperous nor did it allow any rest:

Plain with wild eyes and voluptuous breathing, spaces without limits, trees growing out of silence all of a sudden, high as towers and filled with night, immediately merging into the same unsheltered solitude. Impenetrable and anxious plane. A heavy and tiring breath that oppressed and pleased came out of its belly, its wheat, its herbs, its meagre leaves of holly, its entire atmosphere.¹⁹ (“A Noite” 18)

Namora presented a mosaic of pasturelands, narrow paths, big properties and wheat fields. He described a functional and aesthetic unity between people and environment: “Both men and landscapes of this extreme province of Beira,

¹³ “Como se observa uma saia rodada que em todos os seus folhos tem vista.”

¹⁴ “Mar coagulado.”

¹⁵ “Todas as suas lombas são uma floresta de alcantis, que se vai amainando no encontro com a planura e nela se esbate ainda em surtos de fúria ou já em oásis de macieza.”

¹⁶ “Ali, a província bravia despede-se da campina, ergue-se nos degraus das fragas para olhar com altivez as serras de Espanha, enquanto o friso de planaltos que corre as linhas da fronteira espreita as surtidas do contrabando e a fuga dos rios.”

¹⁷ “A campina se esforça por trepar às vertentes da raia, como ondas que, apesar de fatigadas, ainda têm alma para surpreender as falésias.”

¹⁸ “Os olhos apreciavam tudo isto através da esperança de trabalho ou de caminho aberto para a fronteira.”

¹⁹ Campina de olhos bravios e ofegar voluptuoso, de espaços sem fundo, de árvores que cresciam de repente do silêncio, altas como torres e cheias como a noite, para logo se fundirem na mesma solitude desabrigada. Campina insondável e aflita. Exalava-se do seu ventre, do trigo, das ervas, das magras folhas dos azinhos, da atmosfera repleta, exalava-se de tudo isso uma respiração gorda, arquejante, que tanto oprimia como deleitava.”

always alert and suspicious, offer us the idea of a life so hard as it is marginal”²⁰ (“A Nave” 13); “Don’t you feel the smell of the earth in your senses? They cannot understand that peasant and earth are the body and the soul of the same person”²¹ (“A Noite” 241).

Fernando Namora also attributed landscape changes to the long exploitation of natural resources. “In the time when wolves and boars came up to the slopes of the village”²² (“A Noite” 208), woodlands covered great part of the territory. But when Namora lived there, environmental degradation “announced itself in the heart of the plane by its rare oaks, without branches or arms, and the brown chamomile that smothered the seeds”²³ (“A Noite” 211).

The subsistence of the villagers was based on agriculture, and on smuggling activities as a complement. They could only find, however, “lost hopes, meagreness and hunger during the whole year”²⁴ (“A Noite” 154-5). Namora stressed social injustices by mentioning the local refrain, “the rich make blood sausages out of the sweat of our brows”²⁵ (“A Nave” 30), and reported the poor working conditions and miserable salaries that day labourers could earn:

[T]he peasants only own their arms and they have to rent them to survive²⁶ (“A Noite” 134); [t]he daily pay, depending on the whim of clouds or big bosses, was not enough for half a year, including the extra activities of wheat reaping and the making of olive oil²⁷ (“A Nave” 15); fallow lands, ploughed lands, day labourers operating the miracle of making the seeds germinate, cattle fairs to sell the oxen and the pigs and to drink a glass of wine. Far off herds crossing someone else’s wheat-fields, persecuted by mercenary labourers; herds that did not walk on a straight line.²⁸ (“A Noite” 154-155)

The big property dominated the plain and extensive agricultural practices were common (*e.g.*, pasturing, annual cultures on non-irrigated lands, ranches, olive groves). The steep and stony slopes of Monsanto’s hills, however, were also used by the villagers to diversify the production of food and to feel “the

²⁰ “Homens e panoramas desta Estremadura beiroa, de desconfiança em alerta, nos oferecem, pois, a ideia de um viver tão duro quanto marginal.”

²¹ “Não sentes o cheiro da terra nos teus sentidos? Eles não podem entender que o camponês e a terra são o corpo e a alma de uma mesma pessoa.”

²² “No tempo em que os lobos e os javalis chegavam aos barrocais da vila.”

²³ “Anunciava-se no coração da planície pelos raros carvalhos, sem rama e sem braços, entre a margaça que esganava as sementes.”

²⁴ “As esperanças perdidas, a magreza e a fome de todo o ano.”

²⁵ “Os ricos fazem morcelas do suor da nossa testa.”

²⁶ “O campónio tem de seu os braços e aluga-os para subsistir.”

²⁷ “A jorna, a depender do capricho das nuvens e dos mandões, mal dava para metade do ano, já nela incluindo a ceifa de empreitada e a safra dos lagares.”

²⁸ “Terras alqueivadas, terras lavradas, ganhões obrando o milagre de germinar sementes, feiras para vender os bois e os porcos e para se beber um golo de vinho. Rebanhos de longe atravessando searas alheias, perseguidos por ganhões mercenários; rebanhos de mal-andar.”

dream of the land”²⁹ (“A Nave” 21). Namora has lands, animals and people merging into a single unified body, and into a single life story:

a yard between two boulders, in fact, a shell filled with humus carefully transferred from the small agricultural plots. There are gardens and fig trees that give a bad shade in it, things, however, that grow, as if from the insides of a person. Moreover, persistence, together with shrewdness, make the foxes leave the barrens, so that the cattle will not be deadly assaulted, and so that the game (once their nails have been caught in the traps of those who, by necessity and instinct, have learned their tricks) feed the greedy mouths of those who suffer scarcity and lack of resources.³⁰ (“A Nave” 21)

As a medical doctor, Fernando Namora did observe the terrible conditions of nutrition, sanitation and health, revealing, “the peasants worked like the damned, and like the damned they dyed of plagues and starvation”³¹ (“A Noite” 21). Among the most deadly diseases, he enumerated malarial fever and typhus. He reported a typhus epidemic with great sorrow:

[I]n some houses I came to find two or three bodies lying on mats, side by side, moaning, as if they were only waiting for somebody to throw them in an open grave [...] “Are those houses?” you could ask. They say they are. At least there are people living in them, and desires, and disappointments, and diseases [...] those empty bellies, those faces where the fever had nothing more to devour than the ardent anxiety of the eyes.³² (“Apenas” 335-336)

In Monsanto, homes were very small, cold and dark, “places that suggest lures”³³ (“A Nave” 11). While visiting a woman who had just given birth, he observed the lack of sanitary conditions and the strategies people used to cope with their needs after many hours without eating:

²⁹ “O sonho de terra.”

³⁰ “Um quintal entre dois penedos, a bem dizer uma concha de húmus trasladado amorosamente desde as leiras do campo. Nele crescem hortos e figueiras de má sombra, coisas, todavia, que nascem como das entranhas de uma pessoa. E a pertinácia, de meias com a astúcia, fá-lo espantar dos baldios as raposas ladras, para que as cabeças de gado não tenham assalto de morte, e para que as cabeças de caça (às vezes filada à unha em armadilhas de quem, por necessidade e instinto, aprendeu as manhas dos bichos) tape as bocas assanhadas pela magreza dos ganhos.”

³¹ “Os camponeses trabalhavam como danados, e como danados morriam de pragas e de fome.”

³²³² “Em algumas casas fui encontrar dois ou três corpos estendidos sobre esteiras, alinhados, gemebundos, como se estivessem ali apenas à espera que alguém os lançasse numa vala [...] Serão casas?, perguntareis. Dizem que sim. Pelo menos, vivem lá homens. E anseios e desilusões e doenças [...] esses ventres escavados, esses rostos onde a febre já nada mais tinha para devorar do que a ansiedade ardente dos olhos.”

³³ “Moradas que lembram fojos.”

They would wait outside, sitting on a slab that occupied almost the whole patio, where there was a urine trail coming from the huts³⁴ (“História” 24). He gave him a loaf of bread weighing several kilos, stale and mouldy; he took off the little green nests from it and he started to eat calmly. The woman also gave him olives loaded with salt. Then, he emptied a jug of water into his throat. I already knew that those undernourished people would cheat their hunger with litres of water and piles of vegetables, sometimes herbs from the fields, due to a thirst caused by the excess of salt in their food. And filling their stomachs that way, they would silence their desire of plenitude.³⁵ (“História” 25-26)

Biophysical and human elements were both united by the suffering, which comprised non-rewarded work, social injustice, starvation and disease. In *A Noite e a Madrugada*, Namora became clearer in his thesis, qualifying the villager as being “rough and desolate as the landscape!”³⁶ (32). He also belonged to that distressed landscape (Nunes 111) and was determined to save people from misery and pain.

In 1946, Fernando Namora wrote about the consequences of the “Silver Rooster” attributed to Monsanto, and about the propaganda issuing from it:

The peasants are indifferent today to the arrival of tourists, which seem to flaunt an impossible life in front of their eyes. The peasants may be with them in their festivities tied to the local legends, they give colour and movements to the re-enactments of the past, because they feel proud of their land and their titles, though they may feel that their hopes in such distant people shall be disappointed.³⁷ (Brito 531)

Three decades later, Namora still asked: “are we talking about the most Portuguese village in brutality? In pureness? In resigned misery?”³⁸ (“A Nave” 23). “[T]hat taciturn hardened people, going up and down abysses, making the land of others bloom [...]”³⁹ the granite people with their bones stretching an olive skin”⁴⁰ (“História” 21-22); they did notice the arrival of the “newcomer (...)

³⁴ “Esperavam cá fora, sentados numa laje que ocupava quase todo o pátio, onde se abria um canal para esgoto das urinas escapadas das furdas.”

³⁵ “Deu-lhe um pão de vários quilos de peso. Rijo e embolorado. O homem raspou meticulosamente o bolor, abriu o pão ao meio, tornou a esfarelar os ninhos verdes e comeu, com vagares. A mulher deu-lhe ainda azeitonas, carregadas de sal. Depois ele despejou nas goelas uma bilha de água. Eu já sabia que aquele povo subalimentado iludia o estômago com litradas de água e pilhas de verdura, às vezes ervas do campo, numa sede provocada pelo sal dos alimentos. E assim, entulhando-o, calava aquela ânsia de plenitude.”

³⁶ “Âsperos e desolados como a paisagem!”

³⁷ “O camponês é já hoje indiferente à chegada do turista, espécie de aceno de uma vida impossível. Acompanha-o ainda nos festejos que andam ligados às lendas, dá cor e movimento às reconstituições do passado, porque tem orgulho na sua terra, nos seus títulos, embora se sinta ludibriado em tudo o que esperava dessa atracção dos povos distantes.”

³⁸ “A aldeia mais portuguesa, na brutalidade? no casticismo? na miséria resignada?”

³⁹ “Aquele povo soturno, endurecido a subir e descer abismos, frutificando uma terra alheia.”

⁴⁰ “A gente granítica, com os ossos a esticarem uma pele morena.”

looking for bravery and folklore”⁴¹ (“A Nave” 24). Monsanto was no longer an anonymous entity; but progress and improved welfare – the so-called “dream of the land” - did not reach the plains of Idanha-a-Nova. However, people adapted and

got some nitwits that recited the sentences of a guided tour to the visitors, made them lanterns, pottery with the Bell Tower painted on it, branches of holly to put in the living rooms, and colourful views on postcards. Then, the peasants had to go back to work since living by beauty alone was not enough, for politicians’ conversations are no more than empty words, which are not enough to keep a house.⁴² (“A Nave” 24)

The bucolic view of the “Estado Novo”

In *Landscapes of Portugal*, Carlos Queiroz comes in defence of the values of the “Estado Novo” with a bucolic discourse describing the image of the country. He identified Portugal as a rural country and valued the work in the fields and its beautiful agricultural landscapes. Portugal’s morphological features and other elements are considered “the fulcrum and the sap of its national history” (Queiroz 9). The exaltation of the landscape was reduced to clichés and generalizations: “the majority of Portuguese landscapes exhale an intimate grace which impregnates the atmosphere with joy” (Queiroz 13). In this context, the landscape results from the work of humans, mainly from the work of peasants. Furthermore, idealized as “calm and discrete, almost childish” (Queiroz 13), peasants were supposedly happy in his daily work and showed elevation of spirit and deep religious feelings.

The arguments about landscape quality were built upon the nostalgia of Rousseau’s “good savage” that knew its generalized apology in Portugal during the 19th century. In the fields one could breathe “the very good healthy air, filled with deep knowledge and benevolence”⁴³, and the urban practices were considered to produce “the exhaustion of the body, the starvation of the soul and the spillage of property”⁴⁴ (Castilho 98).

According to “Evocação de Monsanto” [“Evocation of Monsanto”], which the official body of propaganda published in 1947, villages were advantaged places that “are worthy for the beauties they possess and for the ones they allow us to see”⁴⁵ (Martha and Müller 7). The praise of the landscape rested on four

⁴¹ “Arribadiços (...) à cata de braveza e folclore.”

⁴² “Destacou dois atoleimados que soletaram a cartilha de cicerones, fabricou-lhes lanternas, loiça pintada com a Torre Sineira, azadinha para dependurar na sala de visitas, imprimiu-lhes vistas coloridas em bilhetes de recordação – e ala para a lida, que isto de atestados de beleza, quando a conversa dos políticos de conversa não passa, nunca governaram a casa de ninguém.”

⁴³ “Ares boníssimos de saúde, de sabedoria e benevolência.”

⁴⁴ “O gasto do corpo, a inanição da alma e o desbarate da fazenda.”

⁴⁵ “Valem pelas belezas que possuem e pelas que deixam ver.”

well-defined ideological pillars: History, Tradition, Religion and Labour. Here are some eulogy examples:

we see it in its fantastic architecture, an initial work of Cyclops, that put boulder upon boulder opening paths among the cliffs⁴⁶ (8); the village, with its ancient stones, has the aspect of an altar from the far off past, one of those altars erected by the primitive races⁴⁷ (9); we see the image of eight centuries of life, as if we felt the very heart of Portugal beating in its stones ⁴⁸ (9); the native of Monsanto is a patriot, a stout defender of his parish, haughty, sometimes in an exaggerated manner, and persevering in the conservation of old habits⁴⁹ (17); the men dedicate themselves to the very tough task of ploughing the fields, from sun up till sun down, with the hoe and the plough. The women dedicate themselves to house work, to clearing the weeds from the fields, and harvesting the wheat; the children take care of the cattle.⁵⁰ (33)

In “Evocação de Monsanto” relevant elements for the social and economical characterization of local populations are brought to light as very precarious housing conditions (one or two narrow divisions, paved with slabs or simply unpaved, roofs but no ceilings), primitive forms of trade, archaic means of transportation (animals or wooden carts of animal traction) and generalized illiteracy. People lived in a very isolated region, which was the result of its remote, peripheral localization, and still in 1953 lacked asphalted roads, bus services and electricity (Buescu 17).

The official discourse alternated between lamenting discretely the socio-economic situation and praising the picturesque, bucolic landscapes and rural life in the middle of precariousness and privation. As Martha and Müller write, “it seems that a progress not altogether understood has put an end in many parts of the country to this bucolic note of poetry and seduction”⁵¹ (27).

In the award ceremony that gave the “Silver Rooster” to Monsanto, António Ferro made a speech justifying the prize, “Monsanto is above all a moral fortress of our land, a synthesis of the virtues of the race. It is our rigid flag made of stone”⁵² (116). The metaphor about the firm substrata and the raw material used for shelters evoked the essential values to the “Estado Novo.” As

⁴⁶ “Revêmo-la na sua arquitectura de sonho, obra inicial de ciclopes, que dispusessem penedos sobre penedos e rasgassem veredas entre fragas.”

⁴⁷ “A aldeia, com as suas pedras seculares, tem o aspecto duma ara dos tempos recuados, dum desses altares erguidos pelas raças primitivas.”

⁴⁸ “Vemos a imagem de oito séculos de vida, como que sentindo palpitar nas suas pedras o próprio coração de Portugal.”

⁴⁹ “O nativo de Monsanto é patriota, bairrista convicto, altivo, por vezes até ao exagero e perseverante na conservação de velhos hábitos.”

⁵⁰ “Dão-se os homens ao rudíssimo tráfeço de rasgar os campos de sol a sol, com a enxada e o arado; as mulheres, às lides caseiras, às sachas, mondas e ceifas; as crianças, à guarda do gado.”

⁵¹ “Parece que um progresso mal entendido tem acabado em muitos pontos do país com esta nota bucólica de poesia e sedução.”

⁵² “Monsanto é mais uma fortaleza moral da nossa terra, síntese das virtudes da raça, nossa rígida bandeira de pedra.”

the granite resists to the erosion of climatic influences, Monsanto is the “seal of the spiritual motherland we were and still want to be”⁵³ (116-117).

Monsanto, Terra de Sonho [*Monsanto, the Dreamland*], a book of short stories by Antunes de Paiva was published in 1944, the same year Fernando Namora was practicing medicine in Monsanto. In its prologue, Monsanto was described under the bucolic view of the “Estado Novo”: the village is “attached to its very old traditions”⁵⁴ (11) and compared to a “paradise almost lost in the far ends of the Motherland”⁵⁵ (14); “a little village of fairies”⁵⁶ (15), “a living tabernacle of memories”⁵⁷ (19), and an “Eden of love and joy”⁵⁸ (23). Where Namora saw distance and isolation, Paiva found “just three kilometres of irregular road among groves and big properties, it is short the space that separates me and my companions from that type of nativity scene”⁵⁹ (12). Where Namora felt scarcity and adversity, Paiva exalted the “Prosperous Nature”⁶⁰ (11), the “idyllic corner, a piece of marvellous landscape at our feet with a strip of greenery and granite boulders raising themselves beatifically to the heaven”⁶¹ (12), “a little world of Natural Art – a world of watercolours and exuberance, glorious, and mystical”⁶² (18). He described Monsanto “upon the romantic cliff of white foam as the white wings of a swan”⁶³ (12) where there was “something gigantic and supernatural”⁶⁴ (21).

In *Monsanto, Terra de Sonho* there is no mention to famine, disease, or exploitation at work: the “good people are tired but always happy”⁶⁵ (Paiva 15). In the same vein as the pastoral romantic, in Monsanto “the [...] country girls that from sun up to sun down work in the fields to earn their daily bread are also beautiful”⁶⁶ (Paiva 15). In terms of the housing conditions, Paiva reflects that there are “poor houses, but clean and airy”⁶⁷ (16).

Antunes Paiva resorted to pastoral symbolism to charge his subjective literary landscape descriptions with lyricism, and took out of Monsanto its most notorious natural and social features. One does not learn about life in the fields

⁵³ “Selo da pátria espiritual que fomos e queremos ser.”

⁵⁴ “Aferrada às suas antiquíssimas tradições.”

⁵⁵ “Paraíso quasi perdido nos confins da Pátria.”

⁵⁶ “Aldeiazinha de fadas.”

⁵⁷ “Sacrário vivo de recordações.”

⁵⁸ “Eden de amor e alegria.”

⁵⁹ “Três quilómetros apenas, de caminho irregular e cavado entre vergeis e montados, é curto o espaço que me separa, e aos meus companheiros, desse presépio.”

⁶⁰ “A Natureza próspera.”

⁶¹ “Recanto idílico, ou pedaço de paisagem maravilhosa erguida a nossos pés, do que renque de verdura e amontoado de granito elevando-se, beatificamente, até às alturas...”

⁶² “Um pequeno mundo de Arte natural – um mundo de aguarelas e exuberâncias, de místico e de glória.”

⁶³ “Sobre o romântico morro de espumas brancas como as asas brancas do cisne.”

⁶⁴ “Qualquer coisa de gigantesco e sobrenatural.”

⁶⁵ “Boa gente afadigada, mas sempre contente.”

⁶⁶ “São belas as moças do campo que, desde o nascer ao pôr-do-sol, trabalham a terra com amor e ganham o pão de cada dia.”

⁶⁷ “Casinhas pobres, mas limpas e arejadas.”

of Monsanto, a euphoric veil puts labour out of focus and makes of landscapes idealized scenarios.

The Stone Metaphor

Even after the important political, economic and social transformations at local and national levels, the instauration of a democratic regime on April 25, 1974, and the joining of the European Community on January 1, 1986, the 70 years' old epithet of "The Most Portuguese Village" is still stuck to the image of Monsanto.

Today, the idea of elevating rural environments to symbols of national identity is out of the question. But tourism agents and local authorities persistently remember the "Silver Rooster." They want to revive that moment, to re-value the label that brought to the village some celebrity, even if it did not contribute to the population well-being in the past. Such population was forced to emigrate in the decades between 1940 and 2001, and the most Portuguese village has lost 69% of its resident population ("Portuguese Official Statistics").

In spite of their different ideological messages, literary representations by Namora and Pavia and other "Estado Novo" writers, show some common aspects. First of all, the geological element, the granite stone that comes out of the earth and shapes the landscape, and the relationship between the environment and the people. But while for Namora landscape is, above all, a metaphor for the hard life of the peasants—facing social injustices and scarcity of resources—, in the discourse transmitted by the "Estado Novo," the stone represents the identity values of the nation, values that no one wants to change. Secondly, the emphasis given to the role of agriculture and pastoralism in shaping the landscape highlights its productive capacity. Eduardo Lourenço had already noted that Neo-Realism did not break the canons of idealism that dated from the 19th century, especially those related to labour as the wealth of the working classes. Quite the contrary, Neo-Realism relocated in "each individual [...] all the clichés that up to then had been attributed to the 'Portuguese' in general, and to Portugal"⁶⁸ (*O Labirinto* 36). Pierrette and Gérard Chalender had also pointed out that, including Namora, the ambience of the country would be, above all, the earth, the soil cultivated by the work of man (44).

Fernando Namora is a literary icon of Monsanto. He praised the village, but not its epithet, "The Most Portuguese." While he protested against exploitation and inequalities (not all people work; just a few benefit from the profits of work), Carlos Queiroz, António Ferro, Cardoso Marta and Adolfo Simões Müller, Antunes Paiva and others saw work as a value in itself,

⁶⁸ "No sujeito povo (...) todos os clichés que até então haviam funcionado em relação ao 'português' em geral e a Portugal."

something in which people need to find a physical and spiritual sense for their daily life.

Presently, Monsanto persists in the periphery of social and cultural development and survives anchored to the past, as in the time when it was considered an example for other Portuguese villages. The place is now part of the network “Historical Villages of Portugal” (“Monsanto”) and seems to be confined to a fossilized perspective: “the preservation of Monsanto aims at recovering the original dimension the village had some decades ago, whose characteristics are particularly attractive for tourism and cultural activities”⁶⁹ (“Turismo”). Monsanto’s cultural landscape, which now provides economic benefits in the form of goods and services, includes natural resources, traditions and wildlife habitats that were produced by a long-term interaction of humans and nature. Outside its urban area, the recuperation of that rural landscape of the first half of the 20th century demands an adequate land management. Only a landscape restoration focused on composition (the number of land use types and the area of each of them) and configuration (spatial location of land uses, number of patches, average size of the patches, and measures of connectivity), will contribute significantly to the distinctiveness and readability of the landscape, or in other words, to its identity and its coherence.

The maintenance of the rural landscape of Monsanto is a complex task and it is not clear whether local people and stakeholders want to keep it. In a landscape profoundly dynamic, while the stones perpetuate themselves without change, the agricultural land is being converted into forested areas (of eucalypts), or abandoned, mainly there where there is no perspective of crop irrigation (Cancela de Abreu, Pinto-Correia and Oliveira 116).

To rehabilitate its cultural physiognomy, beyond simple architectonic arrangements and valorisation of its geological features, the rural landscape of Monsanto would benefit from the re-introduction of traditional farming practices. In a context of uncertainty about the economic models that will dominate the democratic European systems in the years to come, some recent political proposals—coming from the most conservative rightwing to the most radical left— point to a mandatory use of the most productive agricultural plots. The management of the landscape could also rely on the exchange of ecological processes associated with pastoralism and extensive agriculture, and on alternative techniques of managing plant biomass (e.g., prescribed fires) (Moreira, Queiroz and Aronson 221).

At the present time, discourses about Monsanto are developed in a permanent duality, between regional traditions and openness to new cultural influences. This ambivalence incorporates part of the “dreamland” (from the

⁶⁹ “A preservação de Monsanto visa recuperar para a povoação a dimensão original que teve até há algumas dezenas de anos e cujas particularidades são suficientemente atractivas para a dinamização turística e cultural.”

‘Estado Novo’) and part of the “dream of the land” concept (from Namora). However, it is clear that the village is no more a symbol of national identity or of social conflicts between peasants and landlords.

Monsanto faces continuous depopulation, only masked by the presence of seasonal visitors and tourists attracted by its unique aesthetic panorama. But, while the surroundings are showing slow, yet profound, transformations, as a consequence of land abandonment, the village is waiting, in its stone stand, for the right moment to become a less heavy “vessel,” whatever that will mean throughout the 21st century.

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