José de Sousa Saramago (Azinhaga, 16/11/1922 – Tias, 18/06/2010) was a novelist, a playwright, a poet, a literary critic and a journalist. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1998. He moved to Lisbon with his family when his dad, a former peasant, found a job as a policeman in the capital. There young José started some technical study, but later had to give up university because of lack of finance. He did many jobs until he started in the publishing world, as a literary editor. His journalism was often censored by the dictatorship and when he started his literary career, with a first novel, in 1947, he was not successful.

In 1959 he joined the Portuguese Communist Party, which was clearly hidden from the fierce political police forces of Pide. However, in the 60s he gained popularity as a critic and an editor («Seara Nova» review) – and in 1966 he published his first collection of poems "The possible poems". He kept on working for publishing houses and from 1972 to 1973 he edited the cultural magazine of the most important Portuguese newspaper, the "Diario de Lisboa".

These are still his formative years, which lead to the time of the Carnation Revolution: in the early 70s he published poems, drama and novels. But it’s the “later” Saramago that starts a new generation of literature, one that is freed from the bonds of the régime sufferance.


In the next 6 years he published The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis and The Stone Raft, among other works. These novels are considered influential and gained him great praise. He won worldwide fame in the ‘90s with The History of the Siege of Lisbon, The Gospel according to Jesus Christ, and Blindness. Despite the acknowledged success, Saramago remained faithful to his cultural frankness and even appeared detached from the public scene even at the time of his widest fame, i.e. when in 1998 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, despite the opposition of the Vatican for him being a declared atheist.

However, his subsequent work as an editor and an essayist seems to follow necessity of presence rather than true inspiration.

Because of dissatisfaction with the conservative political government of Portugal, he decided to spend his last years with his wife in the Canary Islands, where he died in 2010.

His style

The motivation for the Nobel Prize was: who with parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony continually enables us once again to apprehend an elusive reality”.

One of the most striking features of Saramago's works is narration from unusual viewpoints, that yet reveal the human factor behind the story. This is why many of his works are considered
allegories. His syntax is complex with long periods (even longer than one page, sometimes) and unconventional punctuation (e.g. No question marks or inverted commas to signal direct speech).

The plots are complex and often are set off by unexpected or unreal events, occurring in an undefined setting. It is as if the reader must not ask why it happened and just accept that it happened. Characters are also often not called by name, and are thrown into the difficult action. They are certainly not heroes, the writer doesn't spare irony towards them. And yet you feel all the humanity of their virtues and vices and the sympathy of the writer for these unremarkable representatives of mankind.

**BLINDNESS**

*Blindness* is the story of an unexplained mass epidemic of blindness afflicting nearly everyone in an unnamed city in an unnamed country. The novel follows the misfortunes of a handful of characters who are among the first to be stricken (the man who is stuck at the traffic lights when he finds himself blind) others who are then quarantined and controlled in a horrible asylum where hygiene, living conditions, and morale degrade in a very short period, mirroring the society outside. The main character is "the doctor's wife," who has strangely not been infected, but pretends to be in order to help the other forced guests of the asylum. Order is initially preserved at the cost of inhuman measures, but later chaos and disorder reign, The protagonist survives despite shortage of food and other violence, still helping other characters that manage to run away from the asylum. The scene remains apocalyptical with squatters trying to survive at the expenses of their similes, until the disease mysteriously disappears.

Saramago explained: "it's not that we have become blind. We are blind. Blind people that can see and blind people that being able to see, do not see."

It is clear that the blindness the writer refers to is the lack of humanity, the inability to feel piety and sympathy that can affect any country, any city. Even the rain that finally washes away the dirt from the blind people, seems providential rather than the symbol of a social rebirth. However, the reader feels that there are different kinds of blindness and can make out a personal vision of the allegory.

**A Journey to Portugal**

This story is a pretext to talk about the existential experience of the traveller. It is a journey of knowledge about people and feelings. There is also a stop in Aveiro.

**The History of the Siege of Lisbon**

The editor of a book entitled *The History of Siege of Lisbon* decides to alter the meaning of a crucial sentence by inserting the word "not" in the text, so that the book now claims that the Crusaders did not come to the aid of the Portuguese king against the Moors. This has repercussions both for himself and for the profession of the historian. The second plot is about a love siege that the editor makes
on a functionnaire of the publishing house that also recalls a past love story set at the time of the history that is told in the book.

This is a light-hearted book that reveals the writer's concern for the importance of the construction of history especially in countries where religion is involved in politics.

*The Gospel according to Jesus Christ*

Saramago's Jesus has been considered blaspheme, but he is a very spiritual character while being also utterly human, with the doubts and pain of any human being. The story of Jesus is not altered, but it is the viewpoint that is new, which is typically human, with a critical and logical mind. There is no faith in miracles, but the awareness of being in the power of a father, a distant and indifferent God, that causes his son pain and doubts. It is also a reflection about good and evil and the ambiguous ways of the divine plans, that can achieve the GOOD through apparent EVIL and PAIN.