

# British Landscapes in the works of Maria Ondina Braga and Jorge de Sena: Issues of Identity in Crossing the Borders<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article analyses the relationship between descriptions of English landscape and the configuration of the narrators' identity in the works of two Portuguese writers: Maria Ondina Braga's *Estátua de Sal* (Pillar of Salt, 1969) and Jorge de Sena's *Inglaterra Revisitada* (England Revisited, 1986). We will focus on how the narrators' views are reflected in the landscapes described, and how the image of the "other" relates to the constantly evolving identity universes of the narrators.

**Keywords:** Imagology, identity, England, landscapes, cartographies

## 1. Introduction

England was the country of exile of Portuguese writers Almeida Garrett (in 1823 and later in 1828) and Alexandre Herculano (in 1831) because of the Whig politicians' defence of liberal ideas. It later became a space where Maria Ondina Braga and Jorge de Sena, who both worked for a short time in England in the 1950s and underwent significant experiences. Maria Ondina Braga (1932-2003) went to England as an *au pair* with the aim of studying and perfecting her knowledge of English (see Williams 2010). Following this, she worked as an English teacher in various countries such as Angola, France, India and China (Macau and Beijing), where she later lived. England was also the first foreign destination for Jorge de Sena (1919-1978) before he went into exile first in Brazil (1959) and then in the United States (1964), but he too visited numerous other countries. Sena's first stay in England was between October and November 1952 when he did an internship as a civil engineer at Blackwood Lodge. As the writer mentions in a text dated 1957 (the date of his second visit to England), when he went to England for the first time he knew nothing of Europe, not even Spain, because he never even "crossed the border" (79). These two first visits inspired the work *Inglaterra Revisitada* [*England Revisited*] (1986), composed of six letters ("Cartas de Londres") and two lectures, edited posthumously by his wife, Mrs. Mécia de Sena. The "Cartas de Londres", which were broadcast by the BBC World Service Portuguese section, reveal Sena's delight that his dream of visiting England had come true – Albano Nogueira describes him as an "Alice in Wonderland" (120). The two lectures he gave at the British Institute in Oporto, entitled "A Journey through English

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Literature with some remarks on the situation of culture" and "England Revisited" respectively, were based on the visits he had made in 1952 and 1957.

*Estátua de Sal* and the part of *Inglaterra Revisitada* corresponding to "Cartas de Londres" have been chosen for analysis because they show the authors' first personal contact (at the beginning of the 1950s) with the landscape, culture and language of a country which left an indelible mark on their lives and careers. It should be remembered that his visits to the British Museum inspired the poems in his work *Metamorfoses* (1963).

This comparative analysis will consider how the narrators contemplate different spaces / landscapes then (re-)construct them in thought and words. It will also take account of the role of alterity and identity in this process. Various philosophers and theoreticians have focused on the close connection between the construction of space and identity, among them Heidegger (*Being and Time*), Gaston Bachelard (*La Poétique de L'Espace*) and Michel Merleau-Ponty (*Phénoménologie de la Perception*), among others (*apud* Malpas 5-6). Jeff Malpas highlights those points where Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty coincide regarding the relationship between the human being and space (1999). Space is not only the place where the human being is born and grows up, it is also the places visited, journeyed through and contemplated. This is the basis for a particular relationship with the world. For the present analysis, we take as our point of departure Michel Collot's premise that landscape is always linked to the subject's point of view: "Le paysage apparaît ainsi comme un espace transitionnel, qui offre un modèle pour concevoir une identité ouverte, dont l'affirmation n'exclut pas l'ouverture à l'alterité." (Collot 2011:81). In other words, the landscape appears as a space of transition, conducive to a model for the conception of an open identity. Therefore, we shall see how the landscapes that are contemplated and described reveal the narrators' ways of viewing the world and the search for and configuration of new identities traced through confrontation with the "other", in this case the foreign reality. In fact, the importance of distance as an element that sets in motion a process of identity searching is also underlined by Roland Antonioli when he observes that distance creates the feeling of a difference perceived simultaneously as a source of richness and loss, as part of a lost "I" (Antonioli 1985: 9). Thus an attempt – and a process – to define identity and knowledge of the "I" and the "other" is triggered. Both of the works under consideration have first person narrators, representing the empirical authors, who show us the multiple strands of the foreign reality they observe, as in the case of landscape, which, as stated by Denis Cosgrove, "represents a way of seeing [...] constitutes a discourse" (XIV).

## **2. British landscapes: open spaces and nature**

*Estátua de Sal* is a fictionalised autobiography written by Maria Ondina Braga in Macau recalling –and re-evaluating – her English experience. In this work the narrator relates the events and describes the people and places that have had an impact on her life. The moments in England that she singles out reveal her preference for open spaces set within springtime, with many of the descriptions

being revealed as pictorial hymns to nature: "Primavera! Falo nela e as recordações despertam, são criaturas, aqui a meu lado, a gritarem pela escrita" (Braga 1969:17). Her memories are personified, they move from the abstract to the concrete domain and cry out to be recorded and made permanent. Following on from this, we see how the description is also imbued with dynamism and merges image, word and movement. As stated by Cosgrove and Daniels "spectacle and text, image and word have always been dialectally related" (58). Thus, the landscape is described as a spectacle, with a combination of elements presented together for the reader's appreciation:

Na Inglaterra: o campo! Não há outro tempo lindo naquele país sombroso. Ficam os prados de veludo e de mal-me-querer amarelos como topázios a brilhar ao sol — o sol que, surgindo após três meses de ausência, deixa os ingleses estonteados. Há sebes aromáticas de madre-silva. Há cerejeiras e macieiras em flor. E, ao pé do Tamisa, que, passando Oxford, aliviado da sua gravidade londrina, é todo claro e leve como um turista, as vacas gordas, belas, no pastio, têm imponência de deusas. (Braga 1969: 17).<sup>2</sup>

We should note that the elements of nature she describes are given added value through personification, metaphor and comparison. A feeling of relief is attributed to the Thames, which later becomes "light" like a tourist, while the fat cows are compared to goddesses. In addition to the visual, this description is also impregnated with olfactory sensations ("aromatic hedgerows") and tactile sensations ("velvet") which cause synaesthesia. Thus, for example, the reference to the smell of the honeysuckle adds vivacity and verisimilitude to the description. In this respect, as Tuan says. "Odor has the power to evoke vivid, emotionally-charged memories of past events and scenes" (10). And so the frequent allusions to smells contribute to the transmission of ephemeral and intense emotions, which confer greater realism and life on the landscapes observed. In fact, the sensations described reveal the profound interconnection between the narrator and the nature she contemplates since, as Helena Carvalhão Buescu remarks, "o terreno da sensação [...] pertencendo embora ao sujeito, extravasa já dele e marca a passagem do seu próprio corpo para o corpo da natureza" (98). In other words, sensation goes beyond the subject and imply a "fusion" between the subject and the object, "sensation as co-existence or communion" (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 248). In this case, what stands out is precisely the communion since the elements of nature which form part of the description establish a complex set of relationships among themselves, they carry a meaning, they function as a synecdoche of the real; in other words, they are a representation of the whole through a part of that reality, that part which was selected by the "eye" of the narrator. This process of fusion of sensations leads, as

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<sup>2</sup> In England: the countryside! There's no time as lovely in that gloomy country. The meadows are made of velvet and yellow daisies shine like topazes in the sun — the sun which, emerging after three months of absence, leaves the English stunned. There are aromatic hedgerows of honeysuckle. The cherry trees and apples trees are in blossom. And beside the Thames, flowing past Oxford, relieved of its London severity, is as clear and light as a tourist, the beautiful fat, cows in the pasture are as impressive as goddesses. (my translation).

Buescu says, to a fragmentation and disaggregation of the landscape as a whole yet, at the same time, to the composition of an imaginary space (108). This situation of recreating a space with mixed sensations occurs, for example, when the narrator recalls a bus ride in April from Birmingham Stratford to see a performance of a Shakespeare play:

Eram os pomares em flor. Era uma loucura de branco — as pereiras baluçando ao vento da manhã a neve dos toucados como fadas a noivar em conto de Shakespeare. E do chão molhado evolava-se um macio perfume de Intemporalidade. (Braga 1969:17).<sup>3</sup>

Once again we observe the use of comparison and personification and the presence of smells to vivify nature, but in this case bound to an abstract element: timelessness. This idea of timelessness is inscribed in a poetic form within a landscape – which could correspond to a picture – that is both subjective and impressionistic. This is because the open and rural space is represented through the subjective eye, rooted in a personal imaginary. In this case it is a subjective topology with a psychological root that is more internal than external. In this respect, Braga’s England is comparable to the Proustian places mentioned by André Ferré: “la géographie proustienne est une géographie toute psychologique, et même toute subjective et impressionniste” (1939 :20).

What seduces the narrator of *Estátua de Sal* in London is not the urban atmosphere of the city, since she confesses she does not even like it, but rather the open spaces that are related to nature, such as the parks where people go for picnics and where the Queen’s swans hatch their offspring. Consequently, in contrast to the open spaces of nature, the landscapes associated with life and freedom, we come across (en)closed urban spaces that are claustrophobic and devoid of humanity: “Onze horas da noite no relógio de Paddington Station. A monstruosa cidade engolia os viajantes à saída da estação. Senti, arrepiada, a goela da fera ao descer para o cais deserto do metropolitano” (Braga 1969: 25). Here we find Braga resorting to an organic metaphor – the city conceived as a monster or animal – that was usual in nineteenth-century authors such as Wordsworth, Baudelaire and Eça de Queiroz.<sup>4</sup> This use of metaphor aims to facilitate the reading and understanding of the urban space, reducing it to something familiar and rapidly understandable. Organic metaphors have often been used to describe functional relationships, that is to say, the way in which cities function (Sharpe and Wallock 1987: 36). In Braga’s perception, the city seems to dehumanize the people from the moment it “swallows” them. This experience of depersonalization and disintegration is experienced by the narrator herself who seeks to transform a complex reality into another more easily understood one. In this context, the reference to time and a

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<sup>3</sup> The apple orchards were all in flower. There was a crazy blanket of white — the pear trees shaking the snow off from their headdresses in the morning wind like fairies romancing in a tale by Shakespeare. And the wet ground exhaled the soft perfume of Timelessness. (Braga 17 –my translation).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Zé Fernandes’ description of Paris in Eça de Queirós’s posthumous novel, *A Cidade e as Serras*.

specific place contributes to a "mimetic" representation of the reality witnessed, producing, following Barthes' line of thought, the "reality effect" through narrative unities (location, spatial characterisation) that establish verisimilitude and which anchor the fiction in reality, evoking the empirical 'world' as it is experienced (89). What is more, the image of the city represented as a devouring monster emphasises the feeling of loneliness and the disintegration of the "I" to which she refers: "Foi nas populosas ruas de Londres, ao lusco-fusco, talvez mais do que em qualquer outro lugar, que senti a esmagadora calamidade da solidão" (Braga 1969: 25). The narrator constantly compares the feeling of emptiness the great city arouses in her with the comfort the country landscapes give her, as revealed by her nostalgia or the "jardins privados em Worcester, paredes cor de barro enegrecido onde as velhas árvores se debruçavam e por trás das quais o vento vinha, com versos de Stevenson" (Braga 1969: 72). The private gardens are not open spaces, but rather spaces protected by walls which preserve their intimacy since, as she says, the "muros que, ocultando sentimentos íntimos, pessoais, não sofriam do devassamento dos parques" (Braga 1969: 72). When remembering brief moments and episodes in the provinces, she stresses there was a whole provincial cosiness that spoke of ripening apples and ash fires (Braga 1969:72). In contrast, "Em Londres havia, com certeza, muito mais, mas quantas vezes parecia que não havia nada!" (Braga 1969: 72).

On the other hand, in Sena's first "Carta de Londres", it is precisely the city of London he had been dreaming of for so long:

Anos a fio, como tantos outros sonham com a "capital do espírito" ou "cidade das luzes", eu sonhei com esta cidade sombria e dourada severa e pomposa, negra e vermelha, suja e nevoenta, em que viveram tantos homens que admire, e tantos personagens de romances que amo, viveram para mim ainda mais do que aqueles. (27)<sup>5</sup>

Sena's description of the city reveals its most varied and positive traits as he considers it free, civilised and noble. Thus the descriptions are presented in an iterative way, revealing a variety of different journeys and routes through the city. The urban agglomerations with their apparent homogeneity reveal "equality in difference". We can see how even those elements of the city considered negative are described positively, in London even the dirtiness seems to have a solemn and discreet charm (28). In effect, the benchmark by which Sena's narrator judges the foreign reality is always Portugal, the country of origin, since he never divests himself of his cultural and experiential baggage. As Paula Gândara points out, the central character in "Cartas de Londres" is in fact Portugal, whose presence is established by constantly referring to the Portuguese space and the contrast between the two countries (347). Interestingly, the England Sena admires contrasts with the England of Eça de Queirós,<sup>6</sup> who in his *Cartas de Inglaterra* mainly points out the

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<sup>5</sup> For years on end, while others have dreamed of the "spiritual capital" or "the city of lights", I have dreamed about this sombre and brilliant, severe and pompous, black and red, dirty and foggy city where so many people I admire have lived and so many figures of novels whom I love (the latter living more intensely in me than the former). (Sena 36, translated by Aurette)

<sup>6</sup> Eça de Queirós spent some time in England, where he was Portuguese consul between 1874 and

defects. Thus, Sena's work is closer to Almeida Garrett's *Diário da Minha Viagem a Inglaterra* (1823-1824), published by the *Gazeta de Notícias do Rio de Janeiro* from 1880 to 1886, which transmits a very positive image of England, configuring it as a positive space and one that enables discovery and new horizons. Sena declares that he understands perfectly Garrett and Herculano's feelings with respect to how difficult it is to be in England: to feel themselves amidst the gentleness of English people and the gnawing nostalgia of a rude and less ordered Portugal (Sena 33). Thus the narrator draws a contrast between the gentleness of the English people and the order and organisation of England, and the roughness and disorganisation of his own country of origin where his loved ones are to be found and to which he belongs. The new horizons Sena discovers in England also relate to the art works he views in the various museums he visits. He highlights his admiration for the Romantic painter Turner, whose works are on display in the Tate Gallery. Hence, if in the description from *Estátua de Sal* presented above, Braga's English landscape is full of spring colours and impregnated with appealing aromas that go beyond the boundaries of pictorial representation, in the extract below Sena represents London as painted by Turner, verbally describing a pictorial image in a process that owes much to ekphrasis. Here the landscape contemplated and filtered by the eye of the narrator is presented in the form of an imaginary picture influenced by Turner's works:

Uma luz afinal como a de Londres, mas transformada em tintas sobre tela, porque a luz de Londres enevoada, com um sol dourando espectralmente os edifícios [...] é, embora com modéstia, esta luz matutina que Turner viu a todas as horas do dia e em tudo [...] Turner, assim como está representado em toda a parte – e mais numerosamente na Tate Gallery – pelos seus quadros, anda na rua, na luz que nos ilumina (36).<sup>7</sup>

Here we see how Sena creates a new version of reality, although without using the imaginary and animist aspect employed by Maria Ondina Braga to depict the natural world. It is the urban landscape of the city of London – and not the open spaces – that is described through Turner's painting. Sena does not limit himself to describing the painting, but emphasises the visual sensations and the question of luminosity, central in Turner's work. Turner is embodied in the landscape and acts as a channel between the eye of the painter and the eye of the writer. England, and London in particular, is represented as a space impregnated with art, an art that lives in all the elements ranging from the light that illuminates the streets to the very air

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1888. In his work *Cartas de Inglaterra*, he offers a critical image of Portugal and also a rather disenchanting view of England since he emphasises the negative aspects of the country, beginning with the climate and then moving on to other factors, e.g. "É à Inglaterra que devemos esta crescente hipocrisia que invade o mundo" (Queirós 158).

<sup>7</sup> A light, in fact, similar to London's light, seen through the fog, with the sun turning the buildings [...] is, though more modestly, the same morning light that Turner saw at all hours of the day and in everything [...] And so, represented everywhere – and especially at the Tate Gallery – through his painting Turner walks in the streets, in the very light that illumines us. (Sena 44, translated by Aurette)

that people breathe. In fact, Sena mentions in the postface to his work *Metamorfoses*, a series of poems that he defined as "poetic repercussions of other arts" (155), that it was indeed London that had awakened his ekphrastic calling and his attraction to other arts, although Patrícia Silva McNeill has pointed out that in his poetry, Sena takes ekphrasis to a new level:

De facto, os poemas de *Metamorfoses* não constituem meras descrições verbais de obras de arte (embora também as incluam nalguns casos) mas vivências estéticas evocadas pela memória (como o próprio Sena sugere no Postfácio), retomando, em parte, o sentido original mais lato do termo como uma descrição vívida e evocativa da experiência de um objecto. (2010:3)

Later on, Sena proposes to represent England through the hypothetical drawing of a landscape that synthesises the main aspects of the country: some hills, a gothic tower, some cows pasturing, an endlessly long train, and a flock of conspicuous geese condemned to Christmas purity and to the commercialisation of foie-gras (Sena 1986: 52). This description functions as a synecdoche representing those elements of England considered the most emblematic: the natural landscape, characterised by hills (the rugged and the verdant), the gothic tower as a symbol of a historical and cultural period, the chimneys (which represent industrialisation), the meadow and the cows (an allusion to the country's more bucolic side), and the train (which could represent development and progress). Finally, the flock of geese appear as being "condemned" and linked to the "commercialisation of foie-gras" while ironically connected to the "purity" of Christmas, in other words, to consumerism. The narrator makes a series of comments about the monuments and the diversity of the English countryside, the fusion between nature and the marks of history, civilisation and culture. Unlike Maria Ondina Braga, who associates London with loneliness and the feeling of being imprisoned, for Sena the English capital is a city of freedom, organisation and culture. He describes his visit to the British Museum and to other places of culture.

In *Estátua de Sal* we see how the narrator identifies with the open spaces of nature which are valued and personified as though endowed with a special animistic force. Braga's Portuguese gaze, her perspective, has its counterpart in the twentieth-century continuation of "the strong tradition of English countryside idyll" (Spiering 149). However, in *Inglaterra Revisitada*, Sena's fascination with the city of London and with the civilisation, order, culture and humanity that emanate from it is apparent. In both works, the "human landscape" assumes great importance alongside the geographical landscapes, and finds a material form in the relationship with the "other".

### **3. Human landscapes: a look at the "other"**

Both authors are searching for the inhabited landscape, the character of the people and knowledge of the "other"; as Pierre Sansot says, "Certes, un paysage n'existe que dans un échange vivant avec ceux qui l'habitent et comme une totalité" (82). In the case of Maria Ondina Braga's novel, fragmented moments of the narrator's life are recounted as if she were dealing with scattered scenes from a remembered film. In one episode she begins to see the landscape and her surroundings in another way – when her students asked what she is thinking of giving up for Lent, she realises that she has already given up many things in her life in order to live in that country. When she becomes aware of the degree of abnegation involved in the process of moving to another country, she says that, unexpectedly, she felt she was beginning to "live more" (18) and to give more value to small, everyday actions.

It is through the process leading to self-knowledge and discovery of the identity of others and her own identity that the author "miraculously" discovers her own essence in that world permeated with civilisation and culture in that labyrinth of lives, she has found "the pure seed of existence!" (Braga 1969: 19). Consequently, in that strange and foreign world, full of history and culture, in the "labyrinth of lives" into which she plunges, the narrator, after making a huge effort for a whole year, finally reveals that she has managed to contemplate in the palm of her hand the "real treasure" (20). The "treasure" she refers to goes beyond ideas of happiness or understanding since it concerns something powerful and inexplicable that is defined as "life!" (21). Distance from her country of origin seems therefore to be an important (pre-)condition for the narrator to penetrate her inner world and arrive at a profound truth regarding her existence and her role in the world. On this outward but primarily inward journey, the narrator undertakes ontological questioning in order to find and redefine her own identity. In the scene below, the introspective path is closely linked to loneliness. Thus, the search for inhabited landscapes becomes a way to ease this loneliness, and the search for the "other" as a fellow human being is shown by the description of her trips to Hyde Park where she can see all kinds of people: women, men, children, English people, foreigners (Chinese, Indians...) and also trees and animals (horses and birds) (Braga 1969: 23). As a garden is a human construction, somewhere between nature and culture (Elkins 2008: 70) it represents nature as well as society, which, in Braga's perception is full of binaries: female/male, rich/poor, integrated/separate. In this way, faced with the variety of the human mosaic which circulates in Hyde Park, the "other" as fellow human being that the narrator is seeking ends up diluted. Unable to establish contact with anyone, she says she has found only the trees, which for a few moments seem to assume the role of confidants when she says how it would be good to cry with her head leaning against their rough and wrinkled trunks. Here we find a certain proximity to Romantic descriptions of landscape, especially because of the intimate relationship that exists between the perceptive and the descriptive capacity or, to put it another way, "a descrição aparece [...] como forma de apreender uma subjectividade por assim dizer fusional, comum ao homem e à natureza [...]"

(Buescu 1990: 185). So to speak, subjectivity, common to man and nature, which only descriptive activity can, on one hand, capture and, on the other, create in and through writing.

Nature also serves as a point of reference in the narrator's quest to understand her varied, multicultural milieu. In fact, she treats the English language school as a curious and colourful spectacle that she metaphorises as an aviary: each of her fellow students is identified as a bird of a different species that somehow embodies their qualities. So the Malay boy is small and dark like a sparrow, while the Yugoslav boy is studious and pensive like the owl (Braga 1969:72-73). Besides resorting to metaphorisation of "others", she may be seeking a better way to understand their characteristics, since birds are animals with a particular symbolism. According to Cirlot, "birds are frequently used to symbolize human souls and they are symbols of thought, of imagination and of the swiftness of spiritual processes and relationships" (28). The author highlights the unique and distinct characteristics of each of her fellow students, all of different nationalities, in her search to identify the distinctive, diverse elements that distance them from the norm. Faced with a reality that is so distant and different from her culture of origin, the narrator's sentiments fluctuate between the happiness that comes from the certainty of being alive and her confidence in herself (Braga 1969: 73) and, on the other hand, profound unhappiness and the sensation of being in the wrong place (Braga 1969: 74). However, Maria Ondina Braga is no less interested in the "native" inhabitants, and does not stop at attempting to characterise the English; instead she is concerned with getting to know them, above all how they interact with other peoples and cultures.

Sena, for his part, comments throughout his letters on the character of the British people and his impressions of them. The importance of his experience in England for the development of his personal and national identity becomes evident when he says there is no better lesson for understanding ourselves than spending time in the midst of people who speak another language and live with other customs (Sena 1986:57). He stresses the importance of time spent abroad in order for us to get to know ourselves; in other words, the fact that alterity, the recognition of an "other" different to us in respect of language and culture, leads to a deeper knowledge of our own identity. Space and time find themselves intimately connected, with both acting as configuring agents of the construction and reconstruction of an identity which always evolves when confronted with the other, the social environment and the surrounding culture. In this way, as Joep Leerssen says, "identity and alterity, auto- and hetero-image, mirror each other: each determines the profile of the other, and is in turn determined by it" (Leerssen 2007: 340).

It is in Sena's final letter that we find the greatest reflection and meditation on the characteristics of the English race, emphasising their human aspect. He refers to their reserved nature since they are considered to be: "um povo extremamente bisbilhoteiro, que se educou numa dieta de discreção" (Sena 1986: 58). On the other hand, Sena tries to dismantle stereotypes about the English when he states that English people are more communicative and more familiar in personal exchanges

than Portuguese people (Gago 2010: 288). Jorge de Sena's England becomes the idyllic place of exile, a "magical kingdom" (Monteiro 1988: 11) marked by the ideas of progress, harmony and justice, which is drawn as a counterpoint to the grey Portugal of the Dictatorship with its backwardness, social inequalities and injustices. In other words, England is depicted as a space of freedom inhabited by discreet people and lovers of culture and whose vastness contrasts with the littleness, the oppression, the cult of appearances, the mediocrity and the disregard for culture that are found in Portugal in the 1950s. Thus, although Sena is aware of the English reality, the fact that he emphasises its qualities serves to highlight the contrast with his own country of origin and to show the Portuguese public that the existence of a better society and a better world is possible.

#### 4. Conclusion

Both Maria Ondina Braga and Jorge de Sena journey through and describe several different English landscapes, ready to discover new cultures and apprehend the intimate reality of things. For both of these writers, perception of the world does not consist in the passive recording of external stimuli, but is conditioned by the expectation of something similar or completely different to the Portuguese cultural reality. Consequently, the process of understanding and describing is based on their selection of aspects of the present combined with others from the past from which meanings, resulting from the interaction between the subject and the reality observed, are constructed. Nevertheless, the narrator of *Estátua de Sal* seeks her refuge in nature, in the open landscapes that she understands and describes through the synaesthesias that leads to a deep communion between the observer and the landscape observed, Heir to a perspective with Romantic and Proustian roots, the narrator searches intensely for "l'esprit du lieu" that distinguishes it from all others. Thus, the landscape of a real geography is transfigured by the imagination and through the written word into an element that belonging to an imaginary geography. Parallel to this landscape endowed with animism and life appears the urban landscape which imprisons and annihilates the human being but where there is also the discovery of the "Other" through contact with the other nationalities, cultures and lives that inhabit daily life.

For both authors, contact with the landscapes (urban and rural), culture, language and people of England allows them to broaden their horizons and go beyond their own personal, national and artistic boundaries, bringing literature and the visual arts closer together. As Anne Spirn observes, "Landscape, as language, makes thought tangible" (53). In this way, both of them make their thoughts tangible, they project their imagination and their subjectivity on to the English landscapes, which they "translated" even before they had translated many famous English-language writers since, as Spirn also remarks, "The language of landscape can be spoken, written, read, and imagined" (2008: 253).

The evocation of British landscapes is a key aspect of Maria Ondina Braga's works, namely a deep connection with nature allied to a desperate loneliness which

is projected in a love of the culture of the "other", and interpenetrated by a profoundly memorialist strand which leads to a fusion between imagined, remembered and experienced "mental landscapes" which are always impregnated with sensorialism, as also seen in Maria Ondina Braga's *Passagem do Cabo* (1994) and *Nocturno em Macau* (1991).

Sena's descriptions, in contrast, bear witness to his deep love of culture and the arts in general (embodied for example in his work *Metamorfoses*), his interest in social issues, at times dealt with in a mordantly ironic way – as is widely shown in many of his poems. Hence, these English landscapes are drawn primarily as metaphors for worlds and identities which are being constantly reconfigured, yet sculpted in the realm of words.

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