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DEATH AND THE IMAGINATION IN ALEXANDRE HERCULANO'S 'EURICO'

Historical novels must be concerned with death, because they are about people who are no longer alive. This is an obvious enough statement today, but was much more exciting when historical fiction was in its infancy. In Portugal, in the 1840s, critics regularly pointed out that the new novel created by Alexandre Herculano was especially remarkable because it could bring the past alive, and thus make it possible for readers to come to know people who had been dead for centuries. Garrett's historical poems, *Dona Branca* and *Camões*, gave their first readers a similar experience.

Herculano's friend Rebello da Silva refers to this aspect of the new literature several times in his review of *O Monge de Cister* (*The Cistercian Monk*). Before the arrival of Garrett and Herculano on the literary scene, he says, it was not possible to 'recall to the world of ideas and of the understanding those who sleep wrapped in their shrouds and with the weight of eternity on their breasts'. Later, he makes a connection between the artist and God: 'After God, only art is omnipotent, so that it can say to nothingness: "Exist!", and to the corpse, as to Lazarus,

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"Arise and walk!".¹ The notion that the artist, like God, could bring to life what no longer existed was a potent one in a country and a period in which the neo-classical belief that the function of art was to imitate nature was still taken seriously.²

Herculano, at least, considered this notion carefully on various occasions. In the well-known essay 'Poesia: imitação-bello-unidade' ('Poetry: imitation-beauty-unity') of 1835, he rejected the neo-classical theory of imitation in favour of the idealistic belief that beauty exists not in the outside world but 'within us, in the world of ideas'.³ But there are modifications to this theory in some of his later articles, written in the 1840s when he was preoccupied with the problems of history and of historical fiction. Here, Herculano concerns himself with the relationship between the imaginative creations of the artist and historical or contemporary reality. These articles are 'A Velhice' ('Old Age'), 'A Vida Soldadesca' ('The Soldier's Life') and 'Os Egressos' ('The Expelled Monks'), published in 1840, 1841 and 1842 respectively. Apart from Vitorino Nemésio's tantalizingly brief reference to 'A Velhice', I believe that no one has used these articles as sources for Herculano's literary theory.⁴

However, they are of considerable interest, because they not only contain modifications of Herculano's earlier views, but also approach literature from a radically different direction. The articles, like 'Poesia: imitação-bello-unidade', published under the heading of 'Literatura' in the ninth volume of the *Opúsculos* (*Minor Works*), are the record of Herculano's experiences as a reader. The three articles of 1840-1842, which do not appear in that collection, show him dealing with the problems of being a writer.

It is, paradoxically, probably because 'A Velhice' and 'Os Egressos' are about Herculano's work as a writer that their status

¹ L.A. Rebello da Silva, 'O Monge de Cister', *A Época*, 1848, pp. 216-21; see at p. 216 and p. 218. All references in this article are to the original texts. The translations, which are all my own, have not been published before.

² Ofélia Milheiro Caldas Paiva Monteiro, *A Formação de Almeida Garrett*, Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Românicos 1971, ii, 166-69.

³ 'em nós, no mundo das idéas'. Alexandre Herculano, 'Poesia: imitação-bello-unidade', in *Opúsculos*, Lisbon: Bertrand 1907, ix, 23-72; at p. 37.

⁴ Vitorino Nemésio, 'Prefácio', in Alexandre Herculano, *Lendas e Narrativas* (ed. Vitorino Nemésio and António C. Lucas), Amadora: Bertrand 1978, i, vii-xxi; at pp. x-xiii.

as documents of literary theory has been ignored.⁵ Because of his belief that the poet, as any other imaginative writer, draws his inspiration from within, his experiences and preoccupations as a man form the basis of his work, with the result that the latter cannot be understood without the former. There is, therefore, a good deal of non-literary material in the articles to which I have referred, and this may have obscured the important ideas about literary creation, and especially about the role of the imagination, which they contain.

The literary theory which Herculano had expressed in 'Poesia: imitação-bello-unidade' gives great responsibility to the artist. But in the 1830s, the period of *A Harpa do Crente* (*The Harp of the Believer*) and *A Voz do Profeta* (*The Voice of the Prophet*), Herculano accepted this responsibility confidently. In 'A Semana Santa' ('Holy Week') - which he later came to see as a youthful work⁶ - the poet has a vision of the Last Judgment. The dead arise from their graves, and are awarded eternal bliss or punishment. Herculano is confident of the truthfulness of his vision and of his role as prophet:

No! - it was not an empty dream, the vague delirium of a burning imagination. I was carried, leaping beyond time, to the late hours when scenes of mystery occur, to say: 'Tremble! Even in the shadow of the altar, the last sleep can be a troubled one!'.⁷

In this passage, then, Herculano feels able to predict the condemnation even of those who are buried in church. However, this sublime self-assurance begins to disappear later. Vasco Graça Moura has shown how 'Num Album' ('In an Album'), written between 1843 and 1848, that is, after the publication of *A Harpa do Crente*, mocks the pretension of the earlier work. In 'Num Album', the poet laughs at his own feelings: 'Afterwards, feeling depressed, he stops to think about himself, he finds in his breast

⁵ 'A Vida Soldadesca', like the other two articles mentioned, is partly concerned with literary theory. It adds little to 'A Velhice', however, and will not be discussed in detail here.

⁶ Alexandre Herculano, 'Nota' to 'A Semana Santa', in *Poesias* (ed. Vitorino Nemésio and António C. Lucas), Amadora: Bertrand 1977, i, 3-44; at p. 37.

⁷ 'Não! - não foi sonho vão, vago delírio/De imaginar ardente. Eu fui levado,/Galgando além do tempo, às tardas horas,/Em que se passam cenas de mistério,/Para dizer: Tremei! Do altar à sombra/Também há mau-dormir de sono extremo!' (*Ibid.*, p. 20, lines 305-10).

a wilderness, and sadly laughs.⁸

The articles of the 1840s also reveal Herculano as much less confident of his role as an interpreter of God's word to man and of the creative power of the imagination. All three texts show how the writer should use his imagination in the service of justice, which it is the duty of a Christian society to maintain, but the boldness of 'A Semana Santa' has been replaced by a much more tentative account of the relationship between imagination and reality and between God and man.

In 'A Velhice' Herculano describes an incident in his military service during the civil war of 1832-1834, when he had given alms to a pathetic old blind beggar. The old man, worn by age and suffering, is no longer capable of rational speech, but Herculano can imagine the details of his tragic life, and uses what he has imagined to arouse the pity of his fellow-countrymen for others in a similar situation. Herculano describes the appearance of the beggar and exactly when and why his imagination got to work on him.

The appearance of the beggar was serene, like that of a baby sleeping in its cradle, or a corpse sleeping in its shroud, because both are tranquil at heart, because neither is *living*.

Vegetating is not living. The old man was simply vegetating.

This is perhaps the greatest of human miseries.

And I had pity on the old man, as the Gospel ordains, grieving at the spiritual agony he must have endured, to the point of making him incapable of feeling.

It was then that I peopled his life with events. Who knows if my imagination told me more of the truth than the beggar's own narration would have done!⁹

⁸ 'Depois, desanimado/Pára a pensar em si,/Acha no seio um ermo/E tristemente ri.' Vasco Graça Moura, 'Herculano Poeta', in *Herculano e a sua Obra*, Oporto: Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 1978, pp. 43-77, at pp.57-60. The quotation from 'Num Album' comes from *Poesias*, i, 246.

⁹ 'Era sereno o parecer do mendigo, como o de uma criancinha que dorme em seu berço, como o de um morto que dorme em seu sudário; porque tanto um como o outro tem o coração tranquilo; porque nem um, nem outro vive.

Vegetar não é viver. O velho vegetava apenas. É talvez esta a maior das misérias humanas.

E eu tive dó do velho, como manda o Evangelho, condoendo-me das dores de espírito, que devia ter padecido, a ponto de lhe calejarem a sensibilidade.

Foi então que povoiei de sucessos a sua vida passada. Quem sabe se a imaginação me disse mais verdade do que me diria a narração do mendigo!' (Alexandre Herculano, 'A Velhice', in *Cenas de Um Ano da Minha Vida*, [ed. Vitorino Nemésio and António C. Lucas], Amadora; Bertrand 1973, pp. 79-91; at p. 85).

It is clear that there is a great difference between 'A Velhice' and 'A Semana Santa'. In the poem, Herculano imagines the Last Judgment (albeit rather conventionally) - a scene which no one has yet witnessed. In 'A Velhice' the work of the imagination is much more restricted. Herculano claims to have met and spoken to the person described there, and uses his imagination only to fill in those details which the beggar was too old to provide. Since the beggar is effectively dead, and is alone in the world, the true facts about him cannot be known, and the only way to reconstruct the biography of this living corpse is by the use of the imagination. From one point of view, then, Herculano's imagination can be seen to be subject to the scruples of an academic historian. But from another point of view, as Herculano explains, the imagination has something to offer which a factual account (itself limited by the extent of the veracity of the informer) could never do. The pathos of Herculano's account of the beggar will, he hopes, excite the pity of all those who have to do with afflicted old age.

In 'Os Egressos' of 1842, Herculano presents his ideas about the imagination in a more developed form. The piece is best-known for its passionate denunciation of the wrongs suffered by the religious orders of Portugal after the expropriation, by the liberal government, of their property. In order to achieve the right level of indignation among his readers Herculano created the pathetic figure of an evicted Benedictine wandering through a storm to his death from exposure, and several pages at the start of the article are devoted to describing the imaginative process whereby this figure came into being.

Herculano describes himself alone, one November evening, in his study, far from any kind of social distraction, and busy with historical research into the relationship between the King and the Papacy in the early Middle Ages. But the evening happens to be stormy, and on such an evening his thoughts wander from history to contemporary problems. It is at this stage that his vision of the poor Benedictine occurs. At first, Herculano rejects his vision, and turns up his lamp in order to banish it. But then something unexpected happens:

I raised my arm to trim the lamp, and my head to see if my work was good. I don't know if, by these words, I am making a wrong use of biblical reminiscence. The theologians will tell me.

Let there be light - and there was. The lamp gave forth a brilliant ray, which flooded the whole room.

If only I had never committed this act of omnipotence! In the doorway opposite, which led into

another unlit room, was the figure I had seen in my waking dream.¹⁰

Like Rebello da Silva, Herculano sees his creation as analogous to God's. But in Herculano's creation there is no divine light and life, but instead darkness and death. The old Benedictine is near the end of his life, and the landscape through which he is trudging is also a strangely lifeless one. Apart from the dying monk himself, whose habit is as cold and damp as the ground in which he will soon be lying, the only other living things in Herculano's imaginary landscape are the trees which line his road, and they look black and corpse-like.

Herculano's vision is, then, of a shadowy, unreal kind. Its intensity diminishes as the essay continues, until eventually only the old man's voice is heard, chanting the psalms. Nor is the figure of the Benedictine a product only of Herculano's imagination, as its origins lie in his knowledge of history and experience of life. He hints that he had personally witnessed the expulsion in 1834 of the monks from the monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, and it is certainly possible that the dying monk of the vision of 1842 is the same as the pathetic old man forced to leave his cell by the Liberals eight years previously. Even if he is not, Herculano can relate his vision to reality because it occurred at a moment when he was studying ecclesiastical history, and in particular the *Monarquia Lusitana* of Frei António Brandão, an author and a personality whom he admired. He knows something about friars, and is therefore in a good position to invent one. In any case, since the old man (like the beggar of 'A Velhice') is without friends, colleagues or family, and will soon be dead, no one is likely to gainsay Herculano's portrait.

But if Herculano is careful to create a plausible vision, which is compatible with reality, he still makes high claims for it. In comparison with the lies of the bureaucrats who have failed to provide justice for the victims of public policy towards the religious orders, 'The reality is my vision; the priest, the monk, is now a beggar.'¹¹ The brutal injustice of this fact is

¹⁰ 'Ergui o braço para a espevitar [the lamp], e a cabeça para ver se a minha obra era boa. Não sei se nestas palavras abuso das reminiscências bíblicas. Os teólogos o dirão.

O meu fiat lux foi cumprido. O candeeiro despediu um clarão brilhante, que alagou todo o aposento.

Nunca eu tivera praticado este acto de onipotência! Numa porta fronteira, que dava para outro aposento desalumiado, estava o vulto que vira no meu devaneio de homem acordado'. (Alexandre Herculano, 'Os Egressos', in *Opúsculos*, Amadora; Bertrand n.d., i, 133-52; at p. 140).

¹¹ 'A realidade é a minha visão; é que o monge, o sacerdote, se converteu em mendigo.' (*Ibid.*, p. 143).

made far more vivid by Herculano's invented portrait of just such a monk.

In the articles which have just been discussed, then, Herculano sees reality and imagination as related and interdependent. But his interest is not exclusively in the creations of the writer - he is also interested in the situation of the writer himself. In the poetry of the 1830s and in *A Voz do Profeta* Herculano saw the writer as a solitary prophet, outside ordinary life and superior to it. However, by the time of 'A Velhice' and 'Os Egressos' he had become aware that the writer occupies a more ambiguous position. In 'A Velhice', Herculano confesses that when he first gave alms to the beggar he laughed at himself for doing so. Later, as he explains, he overcame this feeling, and released in himself a sense of Christian charity, but he remained aware that he was not always so much better than the society he condemned.

Exactly the same occurs in 'Os Egressos'. Herculano's horror at the ill-treatment of the monks and friars is tempered by his awareness that he, too, was partly responsible for the suffering of the religious orders, and he appeals for 'Bread for the victims of my beliefs, your beliefs, the beliefs of our age. They are dying of hunger and of cold!'¹² It is perhaps because he knows himself to be compromised that, although he hints at eternal punishment for the Portuguese on the last page of his article, he does not precisely spell out what will happen. By the 1840s Herculano had lost his metaphysical certainties. The best-known expression of his doubts occurs in *O Pároco de Aldeia*, of 1843-44, where he praises the moral values of Christ's teaching, but questions his divinity.¹³ They are apparent in 'Os Egressos' also, particularly when Herculano speaks of his 'efforts, often ineffective, to reach the truth which calmly awaits us, after our death, in the expanses of endless time'.¹⁴ In 'A Semana Santa', however, he had described the Last Judgment without qualms.

Herculano began to publish fragments of *Eurico* in the *Revista Universal Lisbonense* in 1842, and the novel appeared complete in 1844. It is, therefore, contemporary with 'A Velhice' and 'Os Egressos', and expresses many of the same doubts. Nevertheless, it is also the most imaginative of Herculano's historical novels. He himself denied that the book was a historical novel at all, because there was not enough information available about

domestic life in the Visigothic period to justify that description of it. In the introduction to the book he calls it 'a chronicle-poem, legend or whatever you like'.¹⁵ This statement about *Eurico* should not be taken entirely at face value - Chapter I, for instance, is a factual account of the Visigoths - but there is much less of an attempt to evoke daily life in bygone eras than there is in *O Bobo (The Fool)* or *O Monge de Cister*. A comparison between the supposed origins of *Eurico* and *O Monge de Cister* also shows the extent to which Herculano was prepared to let *Eurico* be read as a fantasy. He says that he came across both stories in a Gothic manuscript, which once belonged to an old monastery in Minho. In *Eurico* this piece of Romantic nonsense passes almost unnoticed, but in *O Monge de Cister* Herculano, stung by the hostile reception of the first volume of his *História de Portugal*, mocks at length those people who believe the unsupported word of a historian who bases his work on the evidence of a manuscript which only he has seen.¹⁶

All this does not mean that *Eurico* is an uncontrolled fantasy. By choosing as the hero of the novel a creative artist, whose poems in many ways resemble the fantasies of 'Os Egressos' and his other articles about the imagination, Herculano was able to explore once again the scope and limitations of fiction.

In 'Recordações', ('Memories'), the first of his visions, *Eurico* describes himself as meditating, one December midnight, in a graveyard. Not surprisingly, he feels intensely alone: no one but *Eurico* would dare to approach such a place at such an hour. His thoughts are on what lies beyond the grave, but they give him no comfort. Like the Herculano of 'A Velhice' and 'Os Egressos', *Eurico* is on his own, striving, without success, to penetrate the mysteries of death. In the next section of the vision his thoughts turn to the history of the Visigoths and, in particular to the heroic day, three centuries previously, when the sons of Teodorico avenged their father, who had fallen in battle against Attila. As he does so, his imagination brings alive the distant past. But the scene thus brought alive, like the equivalent scene of the old Benedictine in 'Os Egressos', is one of death: the bodies of the Huns who had been killed following the revenge taken by Teodorico's sons.

Eurico's vision of the impending Arab invasion of Spain and of the collapse of the Visigothic empire, in 'A Visão' ('The vision'), has much in common with his visions of the past. What

¹² 'Pão para os que foram vítimas das crenças, minhas, vossas, do século, e que morrem de fome e de frio!' (*Ibid.*, p. 151).

¹³ Alexandre Herculano, *O Pároco de Aldeia*, (ed. Vitorino Nemésio and Maria Petronila Limeira), Amadora: Bertrand 1969, p. 27.

¹⁴ *Esforços não raro ineficazes para alcançar a verdade, que, além da morte, nos espera tranquila nas ampliações do tempo sem fim* (*Opúsculos*, p. 136).

¹⁵ 'Crónica-poema, lenda ou o que quer que seja'. Alexandre Herculano, *Eurico o Presbítero (Eurico the Presbyter)*, (ed. Vitorino Nemésio and António C. Lucas), Amadora: Bertrand 1980, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶ Alexandre Herculano, *O Monge de Cister*, (ed. Vitorino Nemésio and António C. Lucas), Amadora: Bertrand 1977-78, ii, 339-47.

Eurico sees, when he is mysteriously transported to the top of the rock of Calpe, is, in a far more exaggerated form, the lifeless landscape of 'Os Egressos'. From the top of the rock the sea seems still and corpse-like, while the oppressive, windless atmosphere is 'like the shroud of the deceased, over whose grave the earth has been well trodden down, cold, wet and heavy'.¹⁷ Eventually the rock itself disintegrates and, like melted snow, forms a smooth, dead lake. Above this strange landscape Eurico sees two clouds, one from Africa, the other from Europe. They meet and, in another image of violence and death, he seems to hear the clash of armies.

Eurico's visions depend on the same attitude to the imagination that Herculano had expressed in the articles discussed earlier. Like those of 'A Velhice' or 'Os Egressos', they are intended to have a moral function, to excite the Visigoths' sense of filial duty or to warn them of the consequences of their corruption and wickedness. Despite their intensity, however, they are no more than momentary glimpses of the past and the future, because they are visions of death and dying, and cannot therefore last long. The poet may be a creator, but his creations are threatened by mortality, while he himself is compromised by the guilt which he shares with other members of society. The Visigothic clergy was corrupt, and in his own way Eurico shared that corruption.

Most people will be familiar with the details of Eurico's failings as a priest. It may perhaps be worth recalling, though, that Eurico, the young poet and warrior, fell in love with Hermengarda, the daughter of the haughty Fávila, who rejected Eurico as a suitor because of his inferior social position. In despair, Eurico became a priest, but even after taking his vows he was unable to banish the vision of Hermengarda from his mind. For Eurico, the vision of Hermengarda has replaced the vision of heaven. His tortured glimpses of the past and of the future are the result of his feelings of guilt. But although these feelings gave him a heightened understanding of his own society, they also inhibited him from making his understanding public. Eurico's feelings for Hermengarda were a closely guarded secret, and he was taken as a model of priestly rectitude. If he had published his visions, no one would have believed them. Just as, in 'Os Egressos', Herculano could not spell out the punishment which awaits a guilty society, so Eurico did not reveal his forebodings about the future. The poet's guilt prevents him from fulfilling himself and diminishes the value of what he can contribute.

Herculano's attitude to Eurico is a double one. On the one hand, Eurico, like Herculano, is a creative writer, and there are parallels between their work. On the other, Eurico is a creation

of Herculano's, like the beggar and the friar of the articles. Herculano's attitude to all three victims of society is broadly similar.

As a celibate priest, deprived of the saving power of love, Eurico's position arouses Herculano's sense of injustice and his imaginative powers just as the old beggar or the old Benedictine had done and, like them, he is seen as dead or dying, even when he is alive. In Chapter 2 Herculano says of Eurico that his rejection by Hermengarda amounted to a kind of spiritual death, and this idea pursues the hero throughout the novel. It appears in 'A Visão', and both Eurico and the narrator refer to it several times in the interview between the hero and heroine in Covadonga, Eurico particularly dramatically when he asks Hermengarda to imagine what it is like to spend ten years bound to one's own corpse. But the notion of spiritual death is not an entirely tragic one. It is also the state of mind typical of the poet, as Eurico confesses in 'Recordações':

I was led to the wilderness [the rock of Calpe] by an inner feeling, the feeling that I had woken, still alive, from this feverish dream called life. This is a dream from which no one wakes, except after death. Do you know what is this awakening of the poet?¹⁸

The notion of the spiritual death of the poet ties many of Herculano's thoughts about the imagination together. The loss of belief in the immortality of the soul, and the resulting sense of spiritual death, means that the poet does not have the comfortable certainties of ordinary men. But such comfortable certainties prevent ordinary men from making those anguished speculations about life beyond the grave, historical and metaphysical, which are the prelude to imaginative activity. The poet's spiritual death also suggests that, at least in part, the origin of imaginative activity is supernatural. If the poet belongs in part to the timeless world of the dead he can glimpse the past and the future - though, because he is also human, his visions are themselves doomed to perish and are therefore of death and dying, and set in a nightmarish moribund landscape.

Herculano does not only use his hero's ambiguous state, between life and death, to express the sufferings and achievements of the poet or the tragedy of the celibate priest. The same ambiguity can also indicate that Eurico is not a historical character, but a figment of Herculano's imagination. Even at the moment of the most daring physical activity the hero seems not to be truly alive. Eurico's boldest feat is probably his rescue of

¹⁷ 'Semelhante ao lençol do finado a quem recalçaram a gleba que o cobre, frio, húmido, pesado.' (Eurico, pp. 57-8).

¹⁸ 'Arrastava-me para o ermo um sentimento íntimo, o sentimento de haver acordado, vivo ainda, deste sonho febril chamado vida, e de que hoje ninguém acorda, senão depois de morrer. Sabeis o que é esse despertar de poeta?' (Ibid., pp. 36-37).

Hermengarda, which Herculano takes four chapters to tell. The climax of the rescue occurs when Eurico carries Hermengarda's insensible body across a fallen oak, the only bridge over the river Sália. Eurico's companions watch, fascinated, as he carries Hermengarda to the river, and notice that a mysterious change had come over him. His walk was stiff and slow, like a ghost's: his footsteps made no sound, and it seemed as though his heart had stopped beating, and his lungs breathing. Hermengarda, too, is convinced that she has been in the arms of a corpse.

Herculano makes his hero unreal at least in part because of his dubious historical status. Since there is no documentary evidence for his existence, he cannot live in the same concrete way as the other characters. The notes to the novel, and the epigraphs of the chapters, show that Herculano consulted historians of his own and of earlier periods in the course of his researches into the last days of Visigothic Spain. This period he also covered, briefly, in the introduction to his *História de Portugal*. No one corresponding to Eurico is mentioned by any of these writers, or by Herculano himself, except in the novel. Most of the other major characters are historical, however. The faithful but ultimately doomed Teodomiro, the Moors Táriq and Abdulaziz, Pelágio and his father Fávila: all these are regarded as genuine by the medieval chroniclers and by Masdeu, Romey and St-Hilaire, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authorities whom Herculano also consulted. Herculano included in his novel such details of the personalities of these people as were known. Abdulaziz, for instance, had a notorious penchant for Christian ladies.¹⁹ Several authorities claim to record Pelágio's speech before the battle of Cangas de Onís: Herculano could have deduced from this Pelágio's courage and defiance.²⁰ Even the sacrifice of Cremilde and her nuns can be supported by documents, though they refer to a later period, as Herculano admits.

The chief events of the book are also to be found in the sources. The Arabs did indeed land on the Ilha Verde, and subsequently occupied the rock of Calpe. The battle of Chrysus lasted three days according to some authorities, eight according to others. Herculano decided that the shorter period was the more likely. The night attack and the crossing of the river by Christians is Herculano's invention, but it is a plausible invention given that the battle took place on the banks of the Guadalete (or Chrysus). Most writers agree that treachery was the cause of the Christian defeat, while there is uncertainty as

to whether Rodrigo fled from the field or was killed there. While Herculano eventually concludes that Rodrigo did die fighting, there is a reference to the controversy about his conduct in that Eurico at first believed that he had deserted the army.²¹ In the second battle described in *Eurico*, Cangas de Onís, Herculano again followed his sources, particularly in the details of the ambush which Pelágio prepared for the advancing Moors.²²

Even the abduction of Hermengarda by the Moor Abdulaziz, and her subsequent rescue, has a shadowy basis in history, since there is a traditional story about the abduction of an unnamed sister of Pelágio's. St-Hilaire dismisses it as a fable, but Herculano must have known it, because he quotes Rodrigo de Toledo, one of the sources of the fable, in the epigraph to Chapter Nine.²³ According to Rodrigo, the renegade Christian Munuza abducted Pelágio's sister by luring him away on a bogus embassy to Córdoba. On his return Pelágio retrieved his sister, without difficulty, and withdrew with her into the mountains. In order to anticipate any possible revenge, Munuza instigated Táriq against Pelágio, but the latter escaped across a swollen river where the Moors could not follow him. (At this point the sister, who is never named, seems to disappear from the story.) Then follows the battle of Cangas de Onís, and the victory of Pelágio. After the battle some of the retreating Moors are killed by a rock-fall as they cross another river, while Munuza is liquidated by the Asturians.²⁴

Herculano clearly found several suggestions in this tale for his novel. The abduction of Pelágio's sister, the pursuit across the river and the drowning of the Moors all form part of *Eurico*. Herculano would not have felt himself under an obligation to follow every detail of Rodrigo's tale exactly, because it was regarded as a fable by the critical historians of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Herculano's use of it is revealing of the restraints he placed on his imagination. The totally fantastic is never permitted. Even Eurico never does anything which is actually impossible, and in any case Herculano stresses his fictional status throughout. It is certainly unlikely that Eurico could have rescued Hermengarda as he did, or have caused so much havoc in the Moorish army at the battle of Chrysus, but even with his brave deeds he did not alter the course of history. He was

¹⁹ M. Rosseeuw St-Hilaire, *Histoire d'Espagne depuis l'invasion des Goths jusqu'au commencement du XIXe siècle*, Paris: F.-G. Levrault 1837-79, ii, 73-5.

²⁰ See, for example, Juan Francisco de Masdeu, *Historia crítica de España, y de la cultura española*, Madrid: Don Antonio de Sancha, 1793-1805, xii, 55-6.

²¹ St-Hilaire, *op.cit.*, i, 370-77.

²² *Ibid.*, ii, 292-94.

²³ *Ibid.*, ii, 291.

²⁴ Rodrigo de Toledo, 'D. Roderici Ximenez Navarri Archiepiscopi Toletani, rerum in Hispania gestarum libri ix', (ed. Andreas Schottus), in *Hispaniae Illustratae*, Frankfurt 1603-06, ii, 25-148; at pp. 67-71.

unable to avert a Christian defeat at Chrysus, and he took no direct part in the Christian victory of Cangas de Onís.

Herculano's serious consideration of the central problem of the historical novelist, the relationship between fact and fiction, and the variety of artistic solutions that he found for it, are the most original feature of his novels and stories. Otherwise, there is much that is conventional in *Eurico*, as in the rest of his historical fiction. There is a highly-charged, gloomy atmosphere about the book which has obvious affinities with the Gothic novel, which was very popular in Portugal in the early nineteenth century.²⁵ Historical fiction, too, came relatively late to Portugal, and Herculano knew the work of Hugo, Vigny and especially Scott, to all of whom he refers in 'A Velhice'.

Scott himself had described the fall of the Visigoths in his poem *The Legend of Don Roderick*, which had been made known to Portuguese readers as early as 1811.²⁶ The work by Scott which most influenced Herculano was, however, *Ivanhoe*. An article in *Panorama* suggests that he was familiar with French and Portuguese translations, as well as with the original.²⁷ Readers of *Ivanhoe* will recognize in the black armour and concealed identity of Eurico Scott's Black Knight, who mysteriously aids the Saxons against their foreign oppressors until he is revealed as King Richard, returned from the Holy Land in disguise. One of the most striking features of *Eurico*, therefore, is very likely to come from a foreign source. The racial conflict between Saxon and Norman in *Ivanhoe*, too, may have inspired the conflict between Visigoths and conquering Moors in Herculano's novel. Herculano's admiration for *Ivanhoe* is visible in *O Bobo* as well as *Eurico*. The fool Dom Bibas, disguised as a monk, rescues Egas from the dungeon of the Castle of Guimarães just as, in Scott's novel, the fool Wamba, also in clerical disguise, rescues his master Cedric from the Castle of Torquilstone.

Ivanhoe was immensely popular throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, and Herculano's use of it should not be taken as proof that he had nothing of his own to contribute to the historical novel. In particular, the seriousness with which he

faced the central question of truth and fiction contrasts markedly with the approach of other writers, Vigny as well as Scott. Scott prefers to argue his way round the problem, rather than face it head on. In the Dedicatory Epistle to *Ivanhoe*, he writes:

Still the severer antiquary may think that, by thus intermingling fiction with truth, I am polluting the well of history with modern inventions, and impressing upon the rising generation false ideas of the age which I describe. I cannot but in some sense admit the force of this reasoning....

Scott goes on to defend himself by speaking of the need to make the past intelligible to the present, and this is a defence that has been accepted by critics like Lukács, because - he claims - it shows that Scott was aware of the true dynamics of history.²⁸ However, it remains the case that Scott, especially in *Ivanhoe*, introduced fictional material without warning his readers that he was doing so, and without distinguishing that material from fact.

Scott returned to the relationship between truth and fiction in the Introductory Chapter of a later novel, *The Fair Maid of Perth*. There, in the person of Chrystal Croftangry, he refers to it with a good deal of cynicism:

I am quite conscious of my own immunities as a tale-teller. But even the mendacious Mr Fagg, in Sheridan's *Rivals*, assures us, that though he never scruples to tell a lie at his master's command, yet it hurts his conscience to be found out. Now, this is the reason why I avoid in prudence all well-known paths of history, where every one can read the finger-posts carefully set up to advise them of the right turn....

In his 'Réflexions sur la vérité dans l'Art', the preface to *Cinq-Mars*, Vigny also showed little respect for factual truth. For him, what he called artistic truth was far more important than mere factual accuracy, as the text of his novel reveals. In the 'Réflexions', he had stated clearly that 'la VÉRITÉ dont il l'art doit se nourrir est la vérité d'observation sur la nature humaine, et non l'authenticité du fait'.²⁹

Herculano is very far removed from this cavalier approach. There is plenty of imaginative material in his novels, but he remains conscious, nearly always, of the need to distinguish such

²⁵ Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa, *O 'Horror' na Literatura Portuguesa*, Lisbon: Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa 1979, pp.60-61.

²⁶ 'A Visão de Dom Roderigo, Poema', *O Investigador Português em Inglaterra*, November 1811, pp. 151-62.

²⁷ 'Ivanhoe traduzido em vulgar', *Panorama*, 28 April 1838, 134. This unsigned article was attributed to Herculano by Gomes de Brito, 'Alexandre Herculano: estudos critico-bibliográficos', in *Dicionário bibliográfico português de Inocencio Francisco da Silva* (23 vols.), Lisboa and Coimbra 1858-1958, xxi (1914), 345-695; at p. 547.

²⁸ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (transl. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell), Harmondsworth: Penguin 1981, pp. 68-69.

²⁹ Alfred de Vigny, *Cinq-Mars*, preface by Pierre Gascar, Paris: Gallimard 1980, pp. 28-29.

material from historically accurate information. Herculano's attempts, in *Eurico* and, in different ways, in the other novels and stories, to combine the imaginative and the factual give his historical fiction its greatest claim to originality. It is for this reason that Eurico is a much more interesting figure than Scott's Black Knight. Richard is in disguise for political purposes: he does not want to reveal his identity until he is strong enough to challenge his brother John. The mystery does not go beyond this. The mystery of Eurico is far more significant, and his whole nature is profoundly ambiguous. Poised between reality and unreality, life and death, he expresses the dilemma of the historical novelist who wishes to recreate the past but knows that to do so with total truthfulness is impossible.

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