Although Saramago's A Jungada de Pedra is not by any means his most popular or universally praised novel, the mere existence of an European Community whose shape and implications are a continuous source of reflection and debate at all levels (take the Danish referendum over Maastricht, for instance) would alone justify, in my opinion, a critical examination of the novel's approach to the matter. Moreover, from a strictly literary viewpoint, A Jungada de Pedra certainly displays most of the qualities and features identified by some critics as the novelist's 'trade mark': a prodigious, fantastical imagination; an acute awareness of the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of the act of writing and reading; a distinctive use of intertextuality; a striking irony, bitter at times, whereby through characters and narrator Saramago manages to voice his own social and political concerns; an impressive command of the wide range of resources language can offer, such as registers, word-play, set phrases and proverbs. These features, to name but a few, have already been highlighted by such eminent critics as Maria Alzira Seixo, Luís de Sousa Rebelo and, more recently, Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva. However, a comprehensive critical study of José Saramago remains to be written and it may not be too difficult to guess why. Despite the fact that he is now approaching seventy, Saramago's arrival on the literary scene and his standing as one of Portugal's leading novelists at the present time are a comparatively recent phenomenon.

Before we discuss some of the issues raised in A Jungada, a brief look at its story-line may be helpful. The sudden appearance of a geological split across the Pyrenees, accompanied by an imperceptible quake, causes the Iberian Peninsula to break off and drift away from the rest of Europe, an event perceived on both sides of the mountains as apocalyptic: the End of the World or, at the very least, a first sign of how close to it one may be. Quakes, one will remember, have long been associated with eschatological visions and...
millenarian beliefs but, having said that, the prospect is further enhanced by the infernal barking of the hitherto silent dogs in Cerbère, the first example of Saramago's handling of classical mythology, as well as historical, biblical and legendary material. Given Cerberus' role as the watchdog of Hades, the unprecedented barking clearly achieves a symbolic, doom-laden intensity, building up suspense.

Once detached from Europe, the gigantic 'stone raft' starts a transatlantic voyage following an unpredictable route that opens up a whole host of possible scenarios, dangers and outcomes until, at the end of the novel, it eventually stops somewhere between Africa and Latin America (the exact place is unclear). This trajectory is complemented at one stage by a rotation which causes the Algarve to become, albeit temporarily, the northernmost province of Portugal. Luckily, by then the foreign holiday-makers on whom so much of the region's seasonal economy depends have long abandoned its ill-fated resorts.

Once on its way, the course taken by this new island is closely watched by people from all sorts of professional backgrounds and walks of life: scientists, engineers, tourists, television and radio reporters and newscasters, the Press and, above all, the politicians, both national and international, whose ethos, decisions and statements the narrator highlights, thereby managing to focus on the contemporary world scene and expose the sometimes dubious threads that help weave the web of international affairs: false solidarity, irresponsibility, self-interest and the like. The only instance of genuine concern over the fate of Iberia is provided by young people all over Europe, as far afield as Finland and the ex-Soviet Union, who organize rallies and dare proclaim their 'Iberian citizenship' by writing it on the walls (162-66). The whole atmosphere is vaguely reminiscent of May 1968 in the streets of Paris which may or may not have been at the back of the author's mind. Nevertheless, their sympathy and solidarity are branded by the politicians as plain anarchism and ascribed by the youths' parents to juvenile idealism.

The separation of Iberia has understandably a stronger and more immediate impact on its populations whose feelings swing from terror to anxiety, from bewilderment to curiosity. Apart from a few sceptical, down-to-earth characters like Roque Lozano (a curious blend of Sancho Panza and Thomas the Apostle), the narrator singles out and follows the fortunes of two Spaniards and three Portuguese all of whom, at least once, perform actions or witness phenomena that clearly exceed the limits of human capability and understanding and for which, therefore, no rational explanation is to be found.

Whilst standing on a beach in the north of Portugal, Joaquim Sassa throws a stone at the waves only to see it fall much farther than he could have dared to expect. Although a one-off achievement, his unsuspected strength does recall the feats of Hercules or Samson, both mentioned in the novel (178 and 263).

José Anaíga, for no apparent reason, is followed everywhere by a flight of starlings that only vanish for good when Joana Carda, his future lover, enters the stage. His experience may perhaps find a parallel in the Pied Piper of Hamelin, referred to on page 116.

Joana, we are told, has just moved from Coimbra, her marriage having broken up. Her decision to start a new life is ritually translated by the line she draws on the ground with a twig and which proves to be indelible. At the end of the novel, the twig will be left stuck on the grave of Pedro Orce, the elderly chemist from Venta Micena, whose body can sense the slightest quake whereas the most sophisticated equipment fails to do so. Not surprisingly, since he can actually feel the Earth move, references are made to Galileo (139 and 301).

Finally, Maria Guavaira is a young Galician widow who holds a plot of land which she cultivates herself with the help of two labourers, one of whom has his mind set upon marrying her in the near future. Her episode is perhaps the most exquisite and intriguing of them all. The old blue sock she unwaves produces an enormous thread which in turn forms a blue cloud. Joaquim Sassa who, together with the others, had been led to Galicia by the dog who had run off from Cerbère right at the outset, picks up one end of the thread hanging from above only to find Maria Guavaira holding the other end herself. As far as love is concerned, they are thus (quite literally) tied up.

When considering this episode, two likely influences spring immediately to mind. Maria's loneliness as a widow is, to a certain extent, similar to Penelope's, although the latter has allegedly never doubted Ulysses would return from Troy one day. Furthermore, her harassment by a suitor can be
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compared to that experienced by the faithful Greek woman during Ulysses' twenty years absence. In the Odyssey, the first being to recognize and welcome the Greek hero on his return to Ithaca is his dog, Argus; in A Jangada, another dog (named Constante or Anjo da Guarda) acts very much as a match-maker, having travelled all the way from Galicia to central Portugal and back.

It seems also possible to compare Maria and Joaquim to Ariadne and Theseus. Ariadne's thread (mentioned at the end of the very first chapter, 18) is credited with having helped Theseus find his way into the Labyrinth of Crete and out again; in A Jangada, as I have said, Maria and Joaquim find themselves holding opposite ends of the same thread. In both episodes, therefore, apart from providing some sort of guidance, this thread is clearly meant to lead to a lovers' reunion.

The somewhat magical nature of all these phenomena—and 'magic realism', with its use of fable and myth, has already been identified as a major literary influence on Saramago's career—

is undeniable, although each protagonist would agree that a connection between the quake and their feats is far easier to suggest than to prove, not least due to his/her difficulty in ascribing the rational categories of Cause and Effect. Yet, far more important than the shortcomings of human reasoning is the all-pervading sense of magnetism or inevitability that unites in a common quest (and I am using the word deliberately) three men and two women... to say nothing of the dog.

Incorporating as it does elements of fable, myth and romance, as I have tried to suggest, it is also important to be aware that behind the outward form of a journey across the length and breadth of the former Peninsula, deeper layers of meaning can be discerned in the novel. Eventful and momentous as the journey itself may be, there is also ample scope for mutual and self-discovery as far as feelings and emotions are concerned; in a sense the voyage without matches the voyage within. Love, friendship, jealousy, solitude, commitment, pity, doubt and fear... all these and more are enriching experiences the protagonists will have to go through, work on and learn to live with. Many of their views and debates turn out to be so remarkably profound that indeed there are times when the characters come across as beings enlightened by some sort of Revelation, not unlike that experienced by the Apostles after the Descent of the Holy Spirit.9 One is bound to ask oneself:

can it all be due to a mere physical change (however radical) in the surface of the Earth? Or is Saramago trying to preach through these Apostles a different Gospel?

The question here is that whatever 'message' the reader may choose to read into the novel it cannot be denied that the quake is the fictional pretext for Saramago to examine the present geopolitical situation of Iberia or, in other words, its status and role in a wider European jigsaw. The conclusion is straightforward: if Europe is to present and regard herself as a credible and reasonably homogeneous supra-national entity, there are not simply economic imbalances to be lessened and political, military and environmental measures to be agreed upon and implemented: although often overlooked, there is also a cultural diversity that must be not only safeguarded but nurtured as well. Through the narratorial voice, Saramago seems to suggest that this goal cannot be achieved unless long-standing prejudices and stereotypes cease to exist:

Os europeus, desde os máximos governantes aos cidadãos comuns, depressa se tinham acostumado, suspeitava-se que com um inexpesso sentimento de alívio, à falta das terras extremas ocidentais, e se os novos mapas... ainda causavam à vista um certo desconforto, seria tão somente por motivos de ordem estética... (160-01)

Ainda que não seja lisonjeiro confessá-lo, para certos Europeus, verem-se livres dos incompreensíveis novos povo ocidentais agora em navegação desmastroada pelo mar oceano, onde nunca deviam ter vindo, foi só por si uma benéficia, promessa de dias ainda mais confortáveis, cada qual com seu igual, começamos finalmente a saber o que a Europa é... (162)

If we bear in mind the Communist Party's staunch opposition to Portugal's application for membership to the EEC in the late seventies, and the fact that A Jangada came out in 1986 (the year when both Iberian countries were admitted into the EEC), it will no doubt be very tempting to regard the novel as a political allegory or parable. To put it more clearly, the break-up of the geographical union might signify the desirability, in Saramago's view, of reversing a political option seen as potentially harmful or menacing to the national interest. In the novel, as it happens, the separation of Iberia, widely viewed as a catastrophe at first, leads gradually to its self-sufficiency and
independence insofar as the eschatological fears and the prospect of chaos give way to a new order and normality. On the other hand, the rest of the Continent (which, as we have seen, manages to come to terms with the situation remarkably well) ends up expressing concern and regret at such a loss through its young people.

In terms of geopolitical options, the physical separation might also be interpreted as the rejection of the 'Land' (Europe) in favour of the 'Sea' (the Atlantic), a dilemma which, incidentally, António José Saraiva has already dismissed as a false one. In an article inspired by a dispute between Spain and Portugal over the fishing industry and maritime sovereignty,⑩ Saraiva argues that such an option on Portugal's part would presuppose the existence of a large, updated and well-equipped fleet which is far from being the case, whether one has in mind naval military exercises, commercial navigation or the fishing industry itself.

Likewise, when one looks at the raft's variable course one may perhaps be inclined to interpret it as mirroring the multiple paths that Portuguese foreign policy may have (or has had) to tread. I shall offer here two examples. When the raft is sailing towards North America and collision seems inevitable, is this meant to be a criticism of or warning against economic dependency in view of the substantial loans granted by the IMF in the early days of the post-revolutionary period? Similarly, the raft's subsequent change of direction down the Atlantic would suggest that no foreign policy can afford commitments to our former colonies to slacken or be obliterated, a view which the recent peace negotiations in Angola seem to substantiate by and large.

Tempting as all these hypotheses may be, the fact is we would still be interpreting this novel and its political overtones through Saramago's ideological stance which would predetermine and justify on its own the set-up of a fictional framework. A Jangada de Pedra would then be reduced to little more than an imaginative propaganda exercise.

There are obvious dangers here. Firstly, as we know, too ready a link between an author's ideology and the work of art s/he gives birth to may lead us into falling prey to a simplistic determinism that may ultimately curtail, if not deny altogether, the independence and dignity of artistic creation. Secondly, it must be recognized that the Communist Party's official attitude towards the EEC has changed considerably over the years, former opposition having given ground to discrete enthusiasm and ever-watchful participation in the parliamentary sessions in Strasbourg. True, Portugal's membership is now a fait accompli and it was certainly regarded by all successive governments since 1976 as an overriding priority; still, I very much doubt the Communist Party would be prepared to turn back the clock to the point of advocating that Portugal should drop out now. Even if that were indeed the case, we have no reason to assume that Saramago would never dare criticize his Party-political guidelines, should he feel inclined to.

There is one last issue we should address here. The old concept of iberismo has, perhaps inevitably, been revitalized by the publication of this novel inasmuch as a dystopian Europe is sharply contrasted, as the narrative wears on, to an increasingly utopian Iberia.⑪ The apocalyptic prospects impending at the outset clearly wane once the protagonists decide to grant absolute priority to the apparently pointless, endless quest that has somehow singled them out, rather than the other way round. For the five companions, wisdom lies in learning to accept that no human, logical, rational reasons can be advanced to answer their questions. Like the Apostles themselves, once their old jobs and occupations are left behind and their calling is fully accepted, the former Peninsula's harmony, self-reliance and, as we learn in the last few pages, its universal fertility speak louder than words. The simultaneous pregnancy of every woman is presumably due to this second Genesis as though, by becoming encircled by the waters of the Atlantic, this new Iberia, like a child in the maternal womb, is itself waiting to be born. If we pursue this analogy a little further, I would venture to add that the quake functions as the umbilical cord whose severance constitutes the first step towards the birth of a new autonomous being.

To what extent does this new being personify the concept of iberismo, very much upheld by and associated with some late nineteenth-century intellectuals?⑫ To start with, one has to be aware that the concept itself is not as consistent or easily definable as might be expected, not least because the term was equally applied to two different political models or envisaged scenarios: one on a federal (or confederal) basis, normally associated with republican and socialist thinkers like Teófilo Braga, for instance; the other,
subscribed to by Oliveira Martins, founded on an alliance between two sovereign states. Both, however, shared the aim of rescuing Portugal and Spain from their painfully visible decline since the Discoveries, unlike Central and Northern Europe whose nations, with their enterprising economies, scientific achievements and sophisticated technology, now carried the torch of European civilization. Considering the past grandeur of both Iberian countries, the panorama was all the more humiliating and it was hoped that whatever form it might take, iberismo might provide a solution to their common ills, the causes of which had firstly to be scrutinized thoroughly.13

For those who may have suspected Saramago was suggesting some form of rapprochement with Portugal’s age-old ‘rival’, it may be appropriate to quote Maria Alzira Seixo who, as early as 1987, addressed the matter by noting that ‘o iberismo é aqui (A Jangada) menos uma concepção socio-política que uma conjunção casual de esforços num mesmo sentido de sobrevivência’.14 Unequivocal as the reassurance was, the fact is that suspicions about Saramago’s hidden meanings, as we shall see, must have lingered on. Besides, I myself believe that A Jangada was partly responsible for an upsurge of interest among the intellectuals in such issues as the Iberian identity or the complex relationship between the two neighbour countries. To prove this point, let us mention two authors: Natália Correia15 and Eduardo Lourenço.16

After reviewing the different races and peoples who settled themselves in the Peninsula throughout the ages and their contribution to a common cultural heritage, Natália Correia argues convincingly that Iberian identity is a product of three basic factors: continentalidade, mediterraneidade and atlantidade. Equally illuminating are her views on an ‘Absolute Spain’ versus a ‘Spain of the Spains’ as the two historical trends that came to be embodied in Castile and Portugal, respectively. The main problem readers may have to face is, however, Natália’s poetical outbursts: her extravagant imagery and penchant for sound-effects, when given their head, can at times disrupt one’s attention and indeed obscure the very points the author puts across.17

For Eduardo Lourenço, the Portuguese image of Europe, based simultaneously on allurement and resentment, has engendered an inferiority complex which has contributed to a hyperconscious (sense of) identity whose symptoms are, among others, nostalgia and messianism. Whether or not Saramago’s readers may accuse him of anti-Europeanism, Lourenço is adamant on this matter:

Seria longo e deslocado … expor as razões pelas quais a sua [a de Saramago] quebedesca ou swiftnia ficção de uma deriva ibérica que nos afastasse sem fim dessa Europa, olhada assim como lugar de perda da nossa alma e da nossa identidade, me parece divertida mas falaciosa. Teria de lembrar que essa Europa onde nos dissolvermos, frágiles capuchinhos do lobo capitализta e multinacional que ela representa, não é culturalmente ninguém, mas o espaço aberto onde durante séculos não desdenhamos de aprender, de ensinar ocasionalmente e de ser vistos, ouvidos e lidos.

Se alguma vez este alegórico reflexo de pânico diante do nosso futuro como europeus não se justificou é nos dias que correm. A deriva atlântica já a fizemos. É mesmo a essência do nosso específico europeuz.18

Saramago’s own views came to be expressed in two newspaper articles and the simple fact that he published them suggests that he either wished or felt compelled to clarify his position to a public that probably received A Jangada as an anti-European manifesto (which would be bad enough) or a pro-Spanish one (which would be even worse).

In the first article, Saramago reflects on the traditional image of Spain as Portugal’s archetypal enemy whilst hoping for ‘uma relação nova que sobrepusesse ao diálogo entre Estados, formal e geoestrategicamente condicionado, um encontro contínuo entre todas as nacionalidades da Península, assente na busca de harmonização de interesses, no privilegiamento das permutas culturais, na intensificação do conhecimento, enfim’.19 Taking the point a step further, he stresses the desirability of a permanent and close dialogue with all Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking communities throughout the world as the cornerstone of what he terms trans-ibericidade. He then concludes, leaving no room for any possible ambiguity or misunderstanding: ‘O iberismo está morto? Sim. Poderemos viver sem um iberismo? Não o creio’.

In the second article, ‘Europa Sim, Europa Não’,20 Saramago looks further afield, dwelling on the risks of a narcissistic Eurocentrism, as it may lead to an implicit or explicit belief in Europe’s innate superiority over other
continents, nations or peoples. Inside the EEC itself, Saramago is only too aware that the greater or lesser degree of economic power can easily be made the yardstick by which the cultural standards of its individual country members are evaluated. The article ends with a singular pledge here quoted in its English version:

*Jangada de Pedra*, this novel in which I separated the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of Europe is, needless to say, the outcome of a historical grudge. But I hereby testify that I would be prepared to bring my wandering raft back from sea after having learned something during the voyage, if Europe should acknowledge that she is incomplete without the Iberian Peninsula and make a public confession of the errors, injustices and outrages she has committed. For, when all is said and done, if it is expected of me that I should love Europe as if she were my own mother, the least I can ask is that she should love, and indeed respect, all her children as equals.41

It seems to me that nothing whatsoever will allow us to speculate on Saramago’s *iberismo* if by that we mean (as we often do) the nineteenth-century vision of a federation or alliance. To do so, one would have to turn a blind eye to a substantially different political context (that of today’s Europe) where the Community plays an ever more pre-eminent part. Neither do we have any reason to harp on the old clichés and ‘impeach’ Saramago for his alleged unpatriotism, simply because being anti-Spain does not make one a better (or truer) Portuguese. In Eduardo Lourenço’s accurate verdict, ‘o anti-espanholismo é a doença infantil do nosso nacionalismo’.22

However, in a sense *Jangada* does present us with an ‘Iberianism revisited’, if we accept the fact that the EEC, on top of changing our political commitments (after all, Portugal is no longer *orgulhosamente si*), may well have changed the semantics of *iberismo*, both word and concept. If that is indeed the case, then Saramago’s Iberianism, far from posing a threat or being a stigma, is a conscience-raiser, one that offers his readers a double challenge. Firstly, it reminds one of the need to preserve Portugal’s and Spain’s sense of identity in the broader framework of a Europe without frontiers. Secondly, it invites both countries to rethink and, if need be, rewrite their history and their myths, casting aside any destructive ill-feeling or narrow-minded patriotism if

only because, as António José Saraiva has pointed out, ‘Sem Portugal, a Espanha é uma nação mutilada; sem a Espanha, Portugal é um areal estéril’,23 not even the *jardim à beira mar plantado* we all like to claim her to be.
NOTES


5. His emergence as a fully-fledged novelist can be dated back to 1980 when Levantado do Chão was published but there is little doubt that his popularity increased enormously when Memorial do Convento came out three years later.


7. In an interview published a few years ago, Francisco José Viegas mentions Deodat de Dolomieu’s Voyages aux îles Lipari and its reference to the Messina earthquake of 1875 which was allegedly preceded by the howling of the local dogs, an order having been issued to put them down. See Pedro Borges, ‘Francisco José Viegas – o fascínio pelo policial’, Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias, IXth year, 349, 20 March 1989, p.18.

8. In Chris Baldick’s words, ‘a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the “reliable” tone of objective realistic report ... The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels ... are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often phantasmagorical political realities of the 20th century’ (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.128).

9. See the discussion of such topics as ‘Normality’, (pp.125-26), ‘Life’ and ‘Experiences’ (p.261), ‘Names’ and ‘Dreams’ (p.264), ‘God’ (pp.269-70) and Pedro Orce’s speech on the Great Chain of Being (p.269) at the heart of which, as Luis de Sousa Rebelo has pointed out, the influence of Plotinus is clear (‘A Jangada de Pedra ou os possíveis da história’, p.347).


12. Before assessing the views of individual authors who have dealt with the issue of iberismo (a larger task than the one I have undertaken in the present study), a general introduction and some references for further reading can be found in Dicionário de História de Portugal, ed. by Joel Serrão, 4 vols (Lisbon: Iniciativas Editoriais, 1963-71), II (1965), 461-63, and A. H. de Oliveira Marques, História de Portugal, 5th cdn, 2 vols in 1 (Lisbon: Palas Editores, 1975), II,