The José Saramago Foundation is a private cultural institution declared of public utility based in the Casa dos Bicos, in Lisbon, with a delegation in Azinhaga. Constituted by the writer himself in June 2007, its aims to defend and disseminate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Duties, the promotion of culture in Portugal and around the world and the defense of the environment. In its delegation at Azinhaga, in the old school, the visitor can find evidence of the life and work of José Saramago, entitled The seed and the fruits. The Casa dos Bicos, head office since June 2012, offers a permanent exhibition on the life and work of José Saramago, entitled The a l’auteur son apprenti and other cultural activities such as book presentations, representations of plays and conferences. The José Saramago Foundation is a private cultural institution declared of public utility based in the Casa dos Bicos, in Lisbon, with a delegation in Azinhaga. Constituted by the writer himself in June 2007, its aims to defend and disseminate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Duties, the promotion of culture in Portugal and around the world and the defense of the environment. In its delegation at Azinhaga, in the old school, the visitor can find evidence of the life and work of José Saramago, entitled The seed and the fruits. The Casa dos Bicos, head office since June 2012, offers a permanent exhibition on the life and work of José Saramago, entitled The a l’auteur son apprenti and other cultural activities such as book presentations, representations of plays and conferences. 

José Saramago was awarded with the Camões Prize in 1995 and with the Nobel Prize in 1998, along with titles as The Elephant’s Journey (Alentejo) in order to get enough documentation about the landless peasants. As a result, he writes the novel Terra do Pecado. Six years later, in 1953, he finished Skylight, published only after his death. 

The year 1950 was the one in which José Saramago met the writer Fernando Pessoa, who became his close friend and mentor. Together they founded Cor, a publishing house, along with the translation work he performed since 1955 for the American market. In 1953, he published only after his death. 

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Out of the tangled skein of memory, out of the darkness of its inextricable knots, I tug at what appears to be a loose end. Slowly I pull it free, afraid it might fall to pieces in my fingers; it’s a long thread, green and blue, and smells of slime, warm and soft as being mud. It is a river; it drenches my now wet hands. The river flows over my upturned palms, and suddenly I’m not sure if the water is flowing out of me or washing over me. I continue to tug at the thread, which is not just a memory now, but the actual body of the river itself. I am the boats and the sky above them, and the tall poplars that slide seamlessly among the luminous films of my eyes. I am the fish in my blood and hesitate between staying too near the surface and plunging the depths, just like the voyeur tumultuously issued by memory. I feel the strength of my arms and the pull that prolongs them. It pushes down into the river and into me like a slow, steady heartbeat. Now the sky is nearer and has changed color. It’s all green and full of singing because the songs of birds are quavering on every branch. And when the boat stops in a large clearing, my naked body gleams in the sun, among the still brighter light spilling the surface of the water. Here, memory’s reconstructive powers and the suddenly revealed future of the future four into one truth: A nameless bird appears out of nowhere and perches silently on the still prow of the boat; I eat morsels for the whole river to be bathed in blue and for the birds on the branches to explain to me why the poplars are so tall and their leaves so full of musings. Then, with the body of the boat and the river safely back in the human dimension, I continue on toward the golden pool surrounded by the raised swords of the bulrushes. There I will bury my pole two feet down in the living rock. A great primordial silence will fall when hands join with hands. And then I will know everything.

Protopoem, in Small Memories, 2006

The house where I was born no longer exists, not that it matters, because I have no memory of having lived in it. The other house, the impoverished dwelling of my maternal grandparents, Josefa and Jerónimo, has also disappeared beneath a mound of rubble, the house which, for ten or twelve years, was my true home, in the most intimate and profound sense of the word, the magical cocoon in which the metamorphoses vital to both the child and the adolescent took place. That loss, however, has long since ceased to cause me any suffering because, thanks to the memory’s reconstructive powers, I can, at any moment, rebuild its white walls, replant the olive tree that shaded the entrance, open and close the low front door and the gate to the vegetable garden where I once saw a small snake coiled and waiting, or I can go into the pigsties and watch the piglets suckling, enter the kitchen and pour from the mug into the chipped mug the water which, for the thousandth time, will quench that summer’s thirst.

in Small Memories, 2006

José Saramago, years 60 © José Saramago Foundation Archive