CAPONEU - The Cartography of the Political Novel in Europe

Antonio Tabucchi

Pereira Maintains

Sostiene Pereira

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Sostiene Pereira (1994), the best-known novel by Italian author Antonio Tabucchi, was adapted for the screen a year after its publication by director Roberto Faenza, with renowned Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni playing the title character, Pereira. In addition to the success of the book and the popularity brought by the film adaptation, the context of its publication in Italy – the electoral victory and rise to power of Silvio Berlusconi – gave the work a distinct political significance. It became a symbol of resistance

The novel is presented as the testimony of Pereira, a modest journalist and editor of the cultural section of the Lisbon newspaper Lisboa, who recounts events that occurred in Portugal in the late 1930s. One day, he receives an article from Monteiro Rossi, a young man who, having just completed his studies in philosophy, decides to pursue a career in journalism. Pereira soon meets both Monteiro and his girlfriend, Marta, and this acquaintance gradually transforms his previously quiet life. A widower who still occasionally speaks to a photograph of his late wife, Pereira leads a secluded existence, translating French classics into Portuguese and focusing solely on literary subjects, even as the world around him undergoes profound change. Against the backdrop of his daily routines – trips to the newspaper office, lunches at the café – the contours of Salazarist fascist Portugal emerge: graffiti supporting Portuguese volunteers in Spain, fascist public ceremonies, petty denunciations, and censorship.

Pereira encounters Monteiro as a young, idealistic, and politically aware man, a communist, along with his friends, who are conscious of the need to strengthen the international brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War. They act against Franco, aware that his victory would ensure the perpetuation of the Salazarist dictatorship in Portugal. Although Pereira tried to confine his work at the newspaper to cultural columns and dedicate himself primarily to literary translation, circumstances gradually made such detachment increasingly impossible. The turning point came one evening when three armed men burst into his apartment, identifying themselves as members of the political police. From that moment, maintaining distance from politics was no longer an option. The men were looking for Monteiro Rossi. When they found him in Pereira's apartment, they beat him to death and warned Pereira to remain silent about what had happened. Silence, however, proved impossible. Pereira not only wrote an obituary for the young man but also ensured that the article was published in the newspaper Lisboa, thereby exposing the political murder and ultimately going into exile.

In addition to being presented as a testimony, as indicated in the subtitle of the original edition, the novel is notable for its intriguing narrative perspective. The events are filtered through a narrator who conveys what Pereira recounts, creating a layered storytelling effect: readers are simultaneously aware of Pereira's voice and of the intermediary through whom it is delivered. The

novel opens and closes with the titular phrase, “Pereira Maintains” (or “Sostiene Pereira” in Italian), which recurs throughout the text. This repetition reinforces Pereira’s attempt to assert his account of events as he narrates them to a silent witness or interrogator, highlighting both the personal and political weight of his testimony.

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