

Peer review: lucid opinions and blind comments

Avaliação por pares: pareceres lúcidos e comentários cegos

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ABSTRACT

The academic field requires scholars to carry out, in their *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs, individual or collective research, and present it in officially active journals. These, governed by the rigors of academia, follow similar premises in the evaluation of submitted articles, including double-blind peer review. Supported by the methodology of retextualization—which makes it possible to discuss texts from one sphere (the scientific) through texts from another sphere (the literary, in this case)—, this article gives rise to a reflection, based on the novel *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, by José Saramago, about the insufficiency of opinions and the idiosyncrasy of reviewers.

Keywords: Academic research, scientific journals, evaluation process, retextualization.

RESUMO

O campo acadêmico exige que os estudiosos realizem, em seus programas de pós-graduação *stricto sensu*, pesquisas individuais ou coletivas e as apresentem em periódicos oficialmente ativos. Estes, regidos pelos rigores da academia, seguem premissas semelhantes nas avaliações dos artigos submetidos, entre as quais a *double-blind peer review*. Apoiado na metodologia de retextualização — que possibilita discutir textos de um âmbito (o científico) por meio de textos de outra esfera (a literária, no caso) —, o presente artigo enseja uma reflexão, a partir do romance *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, de José Saramago, acerca da insuficiência dos pareceres e da idiosincrasia dos pareceristas.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa acadêmica, periódicos científicos, processo de avaliação, retextualização.

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THE AUTHOR, THE RISKS, AND A MESSAGE FOR THE REVIEWERS

THE AUTHOR OF this article, a researcher in one of the country's post-graduate programs in Communication, is well aware of the risks he runs by presenting a text of this nature, which proposes to discuss issues related to the process of evaluating articles in journals in his field, using, from the outset, a narrative focus that positions him, throughout his writing, not as He or We, but as the Author, in a conscious choice, which also extends to the way he models his discussion proposal from the outset in this respect, it doesn't go so far outside the acceptable parameters of the standard that governs (and also imprisons) academic articles, as is the less deviant case discussed by Grave et al. (2023) in *O uso de cartas na apresentação de pesquisa científica como possibilidade de insubordinar-se criativamente* (*The use of letters in the presentation of scientific research as a possibility of creative insubordination*), or more daring examples, such as Carrascoza's (2016), at the national level, with his *Suíte acadêmica —Apontamentos poéticos para elaboração de projetos de pesquisa em Comunicação*, a text in which the items of research projects in Communication were conceptualized through a language of high lyrical voltage, which is why he was fiercely opposed by some of his peers, and defended with the same fervor by others. Or, expanding to the international community, the example of researcher Barbara Adam (2018), from Cardiff University (UK), who published in the journal *Time & Society*, the article *Four meditations on time and future relations* the format of calligrams (visual poems)—which generated, as expected, protests from the academic community, especially from purists. Cases of these, of anomie, a concept proposed by Durkheim (2010), are rare, but no progress can be made in any area of knowledge without occasionally questioning the rigidity of standards. Despite not adopting an explicitly disruptive design for his writing, so as not to upset the Opinion givers straight away—an initial strategy to reduce the chance of his article being rejected (in a way, subjected to the coercion of the academic model itself), the Author, with digressions and investments in metalinguistic resources, is not unaware that he will be walking on dangerous ground, although not in a minefield, nor on the entirely paved road of this journal's guidelines.

The methodology that will guide him is centered on retextualization (Bettetini, 1996) —the way in which it is possible to discuss a subject from the scientific domain—the process of evaluating articles submitted to journals—from the text of another domain, in this case the literary one—precisely the fictional work *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, by José Saramago.

SHORT JOURNEY INTO THE SUBJECT

One of Saramago's most expressive novels, *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* was originally published in 1995 and tells a harrowing story, full of violence and terror, centered on an epidemic of blindness that begins, according to the narrative, with a man in a city, in front of a traffic light, when he suddenly loses his sight and cries out in despair, seeing everything in white. Immediately taken by his wife to an ophthalmologist, the latter cannot find a cause to explain the unexpected and dramatic change. He needs to study the case in depth, which will not be possible because, in a very short time, other people are going blind, including the doctor himself, and the disease is spreading around the world, inevitably reminding this author and his reviewers of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit humanity everywhere on the planet, more than a quarter of a century after the publication of the aforementioned work. It's not long before the government, as a way of curbing the disease, incarcerates the blind in buildings, and into one of these spaces the ophthalmologist's wife (pretending to be blind to accompany her husband) is taken—and she then becomes the protagonist of the story: without explanation, she remains invulnerable to the disease, an eyewitness, and a lonely one, to the chaos that will ensue within the confines, and also outside, of the four walls in which most of the book's plot unfolds.

The protagonist's condition, the only one who doesn't lose her sight, as opposed to all the other blind characters, prompts the author to point out its similarity to the peer review process of the scientific community, precisely the so-called *single blind peer review*, in which the opinion givers (also called reviewers) know the author of the text being analyzed, but the author doesn't know who is evaluating it. The doctor's wife is in the position of peer reviewer (she sees the movements of the blind) and the blind are, by analogy, in the place of the author (who doesn't know who sees him). It should therefore be mentioned that the submission of articles to congresses in the field of Communication, even some with an international dimension, adopt this form of review. The author doesn't know who is evaluating them, but the opinion giver knows who the author of the text to be reviewed is, the institution to which they belong, the postgraduate program in which they work (sometimes even the quadrennial grade given by Capes), some of their bibliographic data and other metrics that, with their name, it is possible and easy to search for on the Lattes Platform. The author may assume that the coordinator of the WG to which they sent their article is the opinion giver, but they have no way of proving this. What worries the Author is that, like other fields, the academic sphere is an arena of conflict, in which access to so-called "privileged information" can result in benefits for some and harm for others. It is no coincidence that this model, in practice, is

one of the key elements in the production system of predatory journals, which offer, according to the Author's research, endorsed by the research of Andrade *et al.* (2023), almost immediate approval of articles, through a false evaluation process, because, in truth, the reviewers know who the author is (who pays for the publication) of the text, which results in an undeniable weakening of scientific work.

It is for this reason, of course, that the *double-blind peer review* (the author does not know the identity of the reviewers and vice versa) has become an unavoidable guideline for academic journals, as it reduces the possibility of bias in the analysis, due to conflicts of interest, subjectivity and even personal and professional reasons of the reviewers, since internecine disputes are a reality in the circle of science (and in all other circles). Maintaining the confidentiality of an author's gender, race and affiliation is essential to avoid judgments based on the dominant rule or the author's reputation. Only the editor, in this evaluation modality, knows who the author and the opinion givers are and, using the words of Saramago (1995, p. 315), the author states with conviction that it is the editor's responsibility "to have eyes when others have lost them".

As the Author has also been the editor of a scientific journal in the past—and here the opinion givers of this text are called upon to reflect silently, either on their own or as a group, on their dual status (author-opinion giver and opinion giver-editor)—he has no hesitation in saying that he has dealt with disagreements on both sides: authors complaining about indolent and prejudiced opinions, and reviewers (unpaid, as we know) protesting about the short deadline given to them and the need to take the work back for a second reading, due to the changes they requested. Finally, in the precise words of the narrator of *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*: "the sun does not rise at the same time for all blind people, it often depends on the fineness of each person's ear" (Saramago, 1995, p. 195). From this point of view, it is up to the Author, due to his long experience as an Editor, to also remember that, despite the fairness of the evaluation processes of serious journals, sometimes, in the quest for internationalization and a better position in the ranking, editors "covertly" invite foreign researchers to submit articles—and, as we know, if they are not previously approved, they will only undergo a simple revision, usually to adapt them to the journal's standards. In such cases, we have a fake *single blind peer review*, in the name of the distinction and prestige of the invited author. It would be a practice carried out in the dark, or tolerated as a silent trace, in the academic field, of the *habitus*, Bourdieu's concept (2007), to know and remember:

systems of durable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is to say, as a principle of generation and structuring of practices and representations that can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without therefore being the product of obedience to rules. (p. XLI)

Even though it is a reality that is seen but not verbalized, as the doctor’s wife does in the novel (she sees, but sometimes she would also like not to see, just like the blind), the editor is always in the middle of the process, and it is their job, obviously in agreement with the members of the editorial board of their vehicle, to maintain or limit this form of contribution. Or is the editor, as the doctor’s wife defines herself at one point, “the blindest of them all” (Saramago, 1995, p. 188).

OPINIONS; BETWEEN THE VISIONARY AND THE ANACHRONISTIC, THE ACCEPTABLE

It is an acknowledged fact that there is a strong dispute between scholars and their postgraduate programs for resources for their research in the face of a limited supply from public funding agencies. Castiel and Sanz-Valero (2007), in their article *Entre fetichismo e sobrevivência: o artigo científico é uma mercadoria acadêmica?* [Between fetishism and survival: is the scientific article an academic commodity?] clearly point out the situation, which not only persists but has intensified in recent times:

One of the requirements for accessing funding is demonstrating the productivity of research groups, especially in terms of publication in the most reputable academic journals in their respective fields. Thus, the competition extends to the fierce struggle between articles seeking to occupy editorial spaces—the desired outlet for the results of research efforts, but also the need to maintain spheres of prestige and influence. (p. 3042)

Under these circumstances, the evaluation process for journals has become even stricter, and the author, when called upon by journals to issue an opinion, has been instructed to analyze the submission with the maximum voltage of academic rigor. Publishing an article, at or submitting it and waiting sometimes months for the result (when it is not negative), has the connotations of a competition rather than a discussion for the progress of science.

What’s even more shocking is that peers, once they’re opinion givers, turn out to be not only prejudiced judges, but also anachronistic executioners, as in

the case reported in the general press, beyond academic boundaries, of Professor Maria Carlotto, a professor at UFABC, whose research project to obtain a productivity grant received an opinion that denied it because the researcher and professor had not completed a research internship abroad due to pregnancies that “damaged” her career (Folha de S.Paulo, 2023, p.A3). In fact, two recent texts—one by Patrícia Valim (2023), “*Até quando as pesquisadoras-mães serão desrespeitadas?*” [Until when will researchers-mothers be disrespected?]; and the other, by Reinaldo José Lopes (2024), “*Mais espaço para mulheres na ciência*” [More room for women in science]—problematize the structural inequality when it comes to assessing the productivity of women and mothers. This is an issue that is beyond the scope of this text, but which Author would like to remind you of, since its seriousness demands an urgent resolution, and which could well be addressed in the future by retextualizing this same work by Saramago. Not least because the most terrifying chapters are those in which the blind perpetrate rape, sodomy, beatings, etc. on women blinded by the white epidemic, victims of a long line of perversion. If women were (and are) already harassed, unfairly and sometimes criminally neglected in the most varied social spheres, in the plot of *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* women’s dignity is completely buried.

Castiel and Sanz-Valero (2007) go further, examining academic production as a commodity and its authors as professionals seeking distinction:

A scientific article can be seen from the sociological perspective of the dynamics of communities—as the result of a line of research which, alongside its scientific production, also generates symbolic capital. Continuing this argument, an article can take on certain traits as if it were merchandise that will be available in scientific journals. (p. 3044)

Scientific journals therefore become shelves where the articles, the merchandise that scholars produce to disseminate their research, are placed and, of course, the better this showcase is ranked, the higher the score obtained by the researchers—which also impacts the grade of their postgraduate program in the four-yearly Capes evaluations—and, as a result, the greater the volume of their symbolic capital. And what does the accumulation of symbolic capital mean specifically in the academic field? Burke (2023), in *Ignorância: Uma história global* [Ignorance: A global history], emphasizes that, in the sciences and the arts, there is a small group that, because it has knowledge—and, the author adds, knowledge that results in more symbolic capital or not—keeps another, larger group in ignorance. Of course, it is well known that prominent researchers are heavily involved in the evaluation of articles, having the power of validation or

veto in their hands. To give prominence to their peers or opt for their invisibility. To see them as similar or competitors (even rivals).

The Author cites the example of an article he first submitted to a magazine, discussing consumption, both of material goods and symbolic consumption spread through communication, and non-consumption, based on a short story, a literary work, in which a young couple, due to the temporary suspension of electricity in their home, start to consume other objects and other discursive formations (due to the new themes that emerge in the darkness of the nights), leaving the usual ones aside. The magazine rejected the article on the basis of just one opinion, the text of which stated that the proposal to compare a literary narrative, with a vigorous artistic content, with the phenomenon of contemporary consumption in which two antagonistic forces were opposed (the purchase/seizure and the non-purchase/absence of the object) was fully valid, as it sought and carried out an extremely original interdisciplinary effort. However, he claimed that the lack of approximation and incorporation of contemporary theorists (scholars of these issues) had transformed the work into a long interpretative digression of the text, missing important points.

In the text, the author relied on works by Bauman (2004), Douglas and Isherwood (2006) and Rocha (1990), contemporary theorists with relevant studies on consumption, contrary to what was pointed out by the evaluator.

Saramago's novel once again serves as a guide. Once confined in a building by the government, all those who suddenly suffer from white blindness are dominated by the blind by birth, who are more accustomed to the lack of sight, with their other senses dilated for survival in the dark, when in fact the story becomes terrifying—those who suffer from white blindness are raped in the most infamous ways by the blind. Thus, the author leaves the question for the reviewers to reflect on: don't those who claim to have more knowledge end up (wanting to) heading the discussion spaces, the debate tables, the gaining of resources, as Burke (2023) states?

In an excerpt from this disturbing novel, one of the people born blind, in the process of leading the behavior of his peers in relation to violence directed at the women inmates in the building, fires a shot at the protagonist, who challenges the established order (or rather, disorder), but doesn't hit her, and hears from her, in response, the following sentence: "you didn't catch me, said the doctor's wife, and be careful, if you run out of ammunition, there are others out there who also want to be bosses" (Saramago, 1995, p. 188).

The most serious thing, to return to the example, is that although the journal mentioned *double-blind peer review* in its rules, the name of the reviewer was

not deleted from the document sent to the Author, who was embarrassed to learn who had assessed his text.

The same article was submitted to another journal, in the same position in the Qualis ranking of journals, and approved (regularly) by two anonymous reviewers; and the reviews sent by the editor to the Author pointed out various virtues. In Opinion A, the work submitted should be accepted because it presents a relevant reflection on the centrality of the phenomenon of consumption in the contemporary context. By proposing a discussion on consumption based on lessons learned from literary theory and French discourse analysis, using a short story as the object of analysis, the article had found an unusual, particular and little-explored perspective, which proved to be extremely profitable in its more reflective proposal. The very idea of “non-consumption,” derived from theories linked to discourse analysis, was interesting and unusual, but also pertinent for thinking about the role of consumption in contemporary social and cultural dynamics. In Opinion B, although the theme could be seen as timeless, given the link between fictional literature, advertising discourses and consumer habits, the text was current and relevant. There was clarity in the presentation of the objectives, related to the epistemology of consumption—and non-consumption—and its reading in the light of a literary short story. For the textual proposal of understanding consumption (and non-consumption) through literature, the use of literary theory and Discourse Analysis proved to be adequate and sufficient. The theoretical basis dialogued fully with the textual structure, and gave consistency to the reflections brought up in the article. Methodologically, the work carried out a bibliographical review (academic-scientific and literary) and placed them in harmonious conversation. The poetic bias of the writing led to subjective results and reflections that were nevertheless pertinent and intelligible. The closing was restrained, but appropriate to the proposed textual construction. In addition to inviting you to a pleasant and fluid reading, the research was relevant and contributed to the field by highlighting the possibility of using literary works in conjunction with advertising discourses and to understand consumer practices, habits, and behaviors. The text, well-written, was structured in a didactic way, even for wider audiences since it did not adopt an excessively academic bias.

The Author shares a second example with his Opinion Givers (and perhaps with future Readers of this article). He sent an article to one of the most important journals in the field, in which he explored, as in this text, a literary work—a short story in letter format, taken from the work of an American writer, in which she criticizes the verbal and visual information inserted in the packaging of a commodity—in order to discuss the rhetorical tricks of advertising on food

product labels. The first reviewer, in order to reject the submission, argued that the article did not treat the book itself as a commodity, since, in addition to materializing the literary text, it certainly participated in the publishing market (the book used in the article was released in Brazil by Companhia das Letras). It was not understood, even though it was explicit, the method of retextualization adopted by the author, who made the objective of his study clear from the outset. Incidentally, in an excerpt from *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, the quarantined inmates are waiting for their food to be delivered at a certain time and the hungriest ones, when they realize that it has started to rain, burst into tears. The narrator comments:

Some of these blind people are not only blind in the eyes, they are also blind in the mind, and there is no other way to explain the tortuous reasoning that led them to conclude that the food they wanted would not come when it was raining. There was no way of convincing them that the premise was wrong and that, therefore, the conclusion had to be wrong too. (Saramago, 1995, p. 213)

The second evaluator approved the article and, in his long and exemplary opinion, even noted (the author had made it expressly clear) that the text was part of a larger, kaleidoscopic study, noting that, in terms of the degree of scientific contribution, it was a one-off reflection, but in dialogue with previous research by the same author, according to the references to three previous studies. This was not noticed, despite its repetition, by the third evaluator, who was called in for the tiebreaker; he declared that the text was not the result of research; on the contrary, it resembled a free essay.

The author went on to submit it to another journal, which published it after receiving objective opinions (in one of them, the reviewer asked for adjustments, which were then accepted). But not for this reason, and this is a topic for another time, can he say that reviewers, even if they have approved his texts, are not blind to understanding.

A third example, this time involving the Author and a researcher from his PPGCOM, with whom he co-authored an article (and with whom he invariably talks about the quality of reviews), points to another fundamental point for authors, even in the face of rejected submissions, to improve their texts—no longer generalization, but lack of explanation. In other words, the opinion giver emphasized a weakness, not just mentioning it, but proving it (this is what is expected by the scientific method) in the text. In the article, he and the researcher discussed the temporal aspects exploited by advertising (especially in narratives set in the past, but aimed at a future consumer movement in relation to goods),

based on a classic work of science fiction, whose action took place decades ahead of our historical moment. At the beginning of one of the opinions, which vetoed the text, it was said that the work dealt with an important topic in the field of communication: the discourses surrounding advertising campaigns, taking as its starting point a well-known science fiction book on the occasion of the centenary of its author's birth. However, despite the fact that the comparative analysis of advertising campaigns and the novel presented an interesting proposal for dealing with the subject, the article contained some formal shortcomings that made it impossible to publish.

A question from the Author and the researcher, Co-Author, taking advantage of the reviewer's contribution with a view to improving the text and, in a later submission to another journal, having a better chance of approval: what were the formal shortcomings? Unfortunately, the reviewer then turned to other topics in the evaluation and the Author and the researcher remained in the dark, not knowing what shortcomings he was referring to. At the end of the opinion, the reviewer stated that it made no sense to maintain that fiction and its constitutive elements (narrator, characters, time, etc.) were mobilized by the demand for advertising—when Rocha (1990), Carrascoza (2012), Xavier (2015), Palacios and Terenzzo (2016), among other advertising scholars, had already proven the exact opposite. And it wouldn't be necessary—regardless of whether you're an advertising specialist, an academic, or a copywriter who scripts advertising films, even the average viewer is not unaware that the Bombril Boy and other characters in commercials—whose format mimics stories, i.e. invests in narrative elements—are fictitious.

The second opinion also brought up the issue, already mentioned above, of rejecting articles on the pretext that they were not in line with the journal's editorial line or that they were not the results or parts of research. The opinion giver stated that the text was not in line with the theme and scope of, which is more analytical and methodological in nature, favoring articles that were the result of more in-depth research and not just those that emphasized an isolated theme of more elaborate reflections.

It goes without saying that the text submitted was fully in line with the scope of the journal in question, the field of Communication, and that, years earlier, the author had published the inaugural article of this same research, which was already in its final stage.

In this sense, the author would like to make it clear to his peer reviewers, as this is the appropriate place, although he could have done so in the "introduction", that this article is in line with scope and focus of this journal:

intended for the publication of scientific production whose object of study is communication. It welcomes theoretical works, analytical experiments and conceptual formulations on communicative processes, media, mediations and the emergence of interactions in a contemporary society of generalized information. It aims to publish mature, innovative work that seeks to broaden the state of the art of the themes studied and which can therefore have an impact on the field of knowledge.

In addition, the Author declares that the article is a branch of his larger research. This does not prevent him from highlighting the existence and importance of significant individual articles published by notorious professors (then collateral to his broader research), challenged by urgent issues or epistemological clashes, invited to address the work of classic theorists, obliged to reply, or responding to calls for dossiers, among other legitimate motivations. Luckily, in their evaluation process, the blind of understanding were not at work.

It is also worth considering, however, that all major research, whether individual or part of international networks of researchers, is usually published in the form of articles, in line with the productivistic rules that officially govern the academic field. Some, such as those of Observatório Ibero-americano de Ficção Televisiva, coordinated in Brazil by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, are an exception, resulting in entire works, yearbooks, voluminous collections—and their dimension has never been pressed into the limits of an article, even in the usual configuration, and acceptable in the field, of summarizing, through it, its premises and findings.

The advent of the Jabuti Academic Prize, which was recently announced (Righetti, 2024) and will include books, is an initiative that could bring some encouragement to researchers who want to publish their research in a cohesive, long-form format, capable of properly demonstrating the breadth of their thinking and the scope of their contributions. If one of the evaluation requirements of an academic work is its inclusion and social impact (Capes, 2024)—and if it is not published in all its fullness and rigor, but in slices, transformed into literature for the initiated (the other scholars), a crucial step for society to get to know it is for it to reach them. At the turning point of *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, the people regain their sight and the ophthalmologist, already in his apartment with his wife and others who have followed them, asks: “What’s going on outside where you were?” Then, “on the floor below, someone came out onto the landing shouting, I see, I see, from this floor the sun is going to rise over a city in celebration” (Saramago, 1995, p. 309). In the same way, when new knowledge is brought into everyday life, through the dissemination of science, through

publications that impact it, society in general (and the scientific community) will certainly be celebrating.

On another level of the topic in question, associated with the evaluation process, now of professors' projects for their permanence and continuity of studies in their postgraduate programs, the author brings up the case of his current research project, then analyzed by a researcher from outside his PPGCOM, whose opinion underlines these prosaic words: the project "shows very serious gaps, especially considering the institution that houses it". As the gaps are not explicitly pointed out, the Author puts himself in the shoes of the protagonist of the "*ensaio*," lost in the darkness of the confined building. In search of clarity, she suddenly knocks over small boxes while groping around on some shelves:

The noise they made when they hit the ground almost stopped the doctor's wife's heart, They're matches, she thought. Trembling with excitement, she bent down, ran her hands over the floor, found, this is a smell that can't be confused with any other, and the noise of the sticks when we shake the box, the sliding of the lid, the roughness of the outer sandpaper, where the match is, the scraping of the head of the toothpick, finally the sparking of the small flame, the space around it, a diffuse luminous sphere like a star through the mist, my God, the light exists and I have eyes to see it, praise be to the light. (Saramago, 1995, p. 223)

But to the Author, the opinion giver does not leave a single matchstick on the shelves of unfair reviews, even if it has fallen into some hard-to-find crevice. It is quite possible that, if he did, it would be fried by his subjectivity. At least the reviewer's name was covered in white ink, ironically, as in the book epidemic, with the magic touch of Helios Carbex concealer.

FINALLY, WE CAME TO A DECISION

The Author ends his reflection here, which, in a similar way, connects the reader to the e-mail that researchers receive with the title "Editorial decision" and, once opened, brings the inevitable words:

We have reached a decision regarding your submission (name of article submitted);
Our decision is to: Reject the submission according to the opinions below; or
Our decision is to: Approved for publication after corrections.

These opening lines immediately provoke satisfaction or discontent. After reading the opinions, in the event of approval, even if there are requests for

adjustments (sometimes small, sometimes debatable, but which must be met), the author, including the Author, will celebrate the achievement. But when the article is rejected, indignation (fair or not) sets in, especially when the idiosyncrasies of the reviewers are revealed, or the perceived haste, indifference or condescension with which they wrote their reports. Opinion Givers who, everyone in the field knows, have limited time and, among their multiple academic duties (with the addition of bureaucratic ones), also need to do their research, “to score” and remain engaged in their *stricto sensu* programs. And they are also obliged to submit articles to academic journals—experiencing the other side of the game. The following passage from *Essay on Blindness*, the dialog between the doctor’s wife and him, fits well with the purpose of this closing:

Why did we go blind? I don’t know, maybe one day we’ll find out. Do you want me to tell you what I think? Tell me! I don’t think we’re blind, I think we’re blind. Blind people who see. Blind people who, seeing, don’t see. (Saramago, 1995, p. 310)

It is therefore essential that the researcher, both as an author and as a reviewer, knows how to see the other, their peer, as themselves. Similar, at once navigators and castaways. And, not by chance, the author, without wishing to be prescriptive, closes this text with the epigraph that Saramago (1995, p. 9) used to open the novel, from the Book of Advice: “If you can look, look. If you can see, notice.” Here, the verb repair is not limited to perceiving what has been seen, but to repairing, recovering, restoring, if only so that, in the night of time, the text that is humanity itself (and, by extension, the work of academics), demonstrates, in its origin, that it can be corrected and improved, as opposed to the persistent white cloud in the system that governs the “scientificity of science” (Targino, 2020).

In convergence with Saramago’s work, retextualized here, which forces the reader into an individual imaginative experience, those involved in the peer review process must (including the Author and his peer reviewers) stop, close our eyes and see. A *seeing* that, overcoming the dark times that make high productivity a vector for the permanence (or, more precisely, the survival) of researchers in their postgraduate programs, proposes the rescue of lucidity and affection. A way of *seeing* in which the white of the blindness epidemic is an announcement of peace, even though knowledge advances faster when there are disagreements, dissent and nonconformity, like that of the author, who is less concerned about the hypocrisy of the scientific arena than the silence of his peers.

In *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, the blind regains their sight. On the last page of the novel, back at home, the doctor’s wife, the only one who has seen all the

horrors experienced by the characters, as well as the touching actions of solidarity in the painful times of the diegesis, at one point goes to the living room window:

He looked down at the street covered in garbage, at the people shouting and singing. Then she raised her head to the sky and saw it all white, My turn has come, she thought. Sudden fear made her lower her eyes. The city was still there. (Saramago, 1995, p. 310)

The Author draws attention to the adverb “still.” As researchers, sometimes also as editors and reviewers, we are still here, doing science. We can still, like the writers, review and repair our humanity. Yes, but how?

In the words of another of his works, Saramago says that we must have “the clear awareness that only by seeing can we see, although we must not forget that even to see requires learning” (Saramago, 2024, p. 223). May we all learn to see together in the field of Communication! ■

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