

RECOLLECTIONS OF JORGE DE SENA, COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND

Harvey L. Sharrer

University of California, Santa Barbara

I came to UCSB in the Fall of 1968 as an acting assistant professor of both Spanish and Portuguese. Those were the days before MLA job postings were available, when young aspiring PhD candidates merely wrote unsolicited letters to department chairs in hopes an opening might be available and a job offer potentially forthcoming. In my case, a PhD candidate at UCLA working on my thesis in Spain on Fulbright and Del Amo Foundation fellowships, I wrote 9 letters, 7 of them to universities in California. I received two offers without any formal interview, from UC Irvine and UC Santa Barbara. I chose Santa Barbara because it had, at least on paper, an active Portuguese program with undergraduate offerings in both language and literature, areas that I had included in my own program of studies for the BA and MA at Berkeley and for the PhD in Hispanic Languages and Literatures at UCLA. UCSB's offerings in Portuguese had been originally developed by Samuel Wofsy, a Russian-born immigrant to Brazil and then to the United States. After receiving his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where Jorge de Sena would eventually come to teach after leaving Brazil, Wofsy founded UCSB's Department of Spanish and Portuguese and served as its first chairman, until his death in 1965. When I came to UCSB there was one additional ladder staff faculty member besides myself, John Kelly, a Brazilian and Latin American literature specialist. Since my interests were in European Portuguese and peninsular Spanish, Kelly and I complimented each other and helped round out the department's course offerings.

Two years later and my thesis for UCLA finally completed and successfully defended, our department was continuing to expand and had developed a doctoral program of studies in both Spanish and Portuguese under the umbrella of a degree in Hispanic Languages and Literatures. To help the Portuguese side of the program a senior professor of Portuguese was deemed to be important. I was not privy as to how it came about, but the department invited Jorge de Sena, then a full professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to visit Santa Barbara with the possibility of joining the department and expanding its Portuguese program. I remember that Sena arrived in town, coming across country by train, a 3-day trip, as he preferred not to fly. As I recall, he was not asked to give a

lecture but rather just be interviewed by senior faculty members and meet with administration officials, and he was given the opportunity to explore local real estate possibilities for accommodating the large Sena family. In 1970 when Sena visited, the University of California had no affirmative action policies yet in place nor was job advertising obligatory.

At the time of Sena's visit the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was in considerable political turmoil. As Sena explained it, the problems centered largely around faculty divisions over support for the unionization of graduate teaching assistants. Sena and other colleagues of his were supportive of the teaching assistant side of the issue, whereas other colleagues, many of whom were old-guard Madison PhDs, sided with the campus administration opposed to unionization. In any event, not long after Sena returned to Madison he and his family decided to accept what developed to be a UCSB offer and make the move to Santa Barbara. Sena was not the only Madison professor to leave for California. Two of his department colleagues, both Spaniards, Antonio Sánchez Romeralo and Diego Catalán, also accepted appointments that year at University of California campuses. Sánchez Romeralo went to UC Davis and Catalán to UC San Diego.

My recollections of Sena's first several years at Santa Barbara center largely around his activities in expanding our course offerings and degree programs and his joining a newly developed interdepartmental Comparative Literature Program. He was responsible for creating new degree programs involving Portuguese: an undergraduate major in Portuguese, a MA in Portuguese and a hybrid MA in Portuguese and Spanish, this in addition to the already created PhD in Hispanic Languages and Literatures. In the early 1970s the steps required to get new degree programs approved at the University of California were relatively simple with few bureaucratic hurdles to meet compared to today's more formal requirements. To expand the Portuguese program, including the teaching staff, Sena appealed to the Instituto de Alta Cultura in Portugal, what today is the Instituto Camões, to grant our department one of its *leitorados* or lectureships, with partial financial support also coming from UCSB. The first such lecturer to come to Santa Barbara was Manuel António dos Santos Lourenço, who held a degree in Philosophy from the University of Lisbon and had been serving as a *leitor* in Portuguese at the University of Oxford. Lourenço would later go on to have a distinguished academic career at his home university in Lisbon, until his passing in 2009, but the early 1970s were what we might call his "flamboyant" or somewhat "hippy-like" years about which Sena knew nothing at the time of Lourenço's appointment. However, before Lourenço's arrival in Santa Barbara I learned through Sir Peter Russell, holder of the Alfonso XIII chair of Spanish at Oxford University, that

Lourenço had proven to be a disappointing *leitor*, uninterested in teaching Portuguese language, giving more attention to philandering than to his teaching obligations. I alerted Sena to this information, but the contract with Lourenço and the Instituto de Alta Cultura had already been signed. Lourenço would continue to behave similarly while at Santa Barbara which did not at all sit well with Jorge de Sena and for that reason Lourenço had a short life as our first Portuguese *leitor*. Sena would insist on a more careful vetting of Lourenço's successor. The one chosen was Fernando J. B. Martinho, who held the doctorate in contemporary Portuguese literature from the University of Lisbon and who proved to be a highly dedicated *leitor* for our department before he returned to Portugal to teach at the University of Évora and later the University of Lisbon. In addition to the Instituto de Alta Cultura lectureship, Sena also developed a systematic program of outreach to Portuguese communities in Northern California and the Central Valley, visiting Portuguese social clubs and promoting Portuguese culture and at the same time boosting UCSB as a place for students of Portuguese ancestry to study. This outreach program would expand to a larger community through the creation of a Portuguese Summer Institute at UCSB with students living together at an off-campus sorority or fraternity house rented for the period. Meanwhile, our faculty in Portuguese had been enhanced with the appointment of a Brazilian literature specialist, Frederick G. Williams, one of Sena's PhD students from Madison. Sena hired Williams away from UCLA, replacing John Kelly who moved to the University of North Carolina at Raleigh. For the Summer Portuguese Institute, Williams and his former Portuguese colleague at UCLA, Eduardo Mayone Dias, were the principal instructors, but it also included visiting faculty such as Onésimo Almeida from Brown University. Distinguished scholars and writers were invited to speak to the Institute, among them the prominent Portuguese linguist Luís Filipe Lindley Cintra of the University of Lisbon. Sena and his wife Dona Mécia took very active roles in participating in the Institute's cultural and social life outside the classroom. Students were recruited from throughout North America, many of them returning for more advanced study the following summer. The Institute continued on for many years after Sena's passing in 1978 but sadly came to an end, like a later summer intensive MA degree program in Spanish that our department offered for a number of years.

After Sena's arrival at UCSB he also became an active participant in UCSB's new interdepartmental program of Comparative Literature, taking a leading role in its degree programs and development of its curriculum. Sena's scholarship was very much comparative in nature, with broad interests in European literatures in general, especially French, Spanish and English. Sena would also occasionally teach a course on Spanish literature for the department, rejecting the preference of some

Portuguese literature scholars to ignore the literature of its peninsular neighbor. In due course, Sena's role as a member of our department and the Comparative Literature Program would broaden to become chairman of both the department and the interdepartmental program. He came to relish his role as an administrator, despite it depriving him of hours he would prefer to devote to his creative and scholarly writing and to family activities. He quickly developed a reputation with campus administrators as an imposing department chair, one who wrote long memos with extravagant, baroque-like sentence structure. I recall one graduate dean saying he always dreaded receiving one of Sena's memos but did so with a smile.

My own contacts with Sena during his eight years at Santa Barbara were at both the professional and social levels. He and Dona Mécia loved to entertain and frequently hosted large buffet dinner gatherings at their home on Randolph Road, surrounded by his enormous book collection which now forms part of his *espólio* or archive at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal. Sena and Dona Mécia were also frequent attendees at a UCSB classical music concert series where we would coincide.

On the professional side, Sena supported me as a young assistant professor. He invited me to contribute an article on Portuguese Arthurian texts for the *Grande dicionário da literatura portuguesa e de teoria literária* directed by João José Cochofel.¹ A year or so before his passing Sena proposed to me that we collaborate on a large anthology of medieval Galician-Portuguese lyric and satirical poetry, for one of Sena's preferred Lisbon publishing houses, Edições 70. Although the anthology never came to fruition due to Sena's untimely illness and ultimate passing, we spent considerable time conferring on the selection of texts and a discussion of editorial criteria. Had he lived, I know Sena would have been proud of my accidental discovery in 1990 of a parchment fragment containing seven of King Dinis' of Portugal's love songs with musical notation.² On one occasion Sena also asked me to comment on drafts of several articles that he had been invited to contribute for a new, 15th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a general article on Portuguese literature and the other devoted to Luís de Camões. Although I suspected he had asked me to review the two drafts with the expectation that I would correct any flaws in his English, I don't think he imagined I would also critique some of their

¹ Harvey L. Sharrer, "Bretão, Ciclo," *Grande Dicionário da Literatura Portuguesa e de Teoria Literária*, ed. João Cochofel, Lisboa, Iniciativas Editoriais, 1980, vol. 2, pp. 148-155.

² Harvey L. Sharrer, "Fragmentos de sete *cantigas d'amor* de D. Dinis, musicadas--uma descoberta," *Literatura Medieval: Actas do Congresso da Associação Hispânica de Literatura Medieval*, ed.. Aires Augusto Nascimento and Cristina Almeida Ribeiro, Lisboa: Edições Cosmos, 1993, vol. 1, pp. 13-29.

content and do so negatively. In his scholarly books and articles, Sena sometimes had a tendency to be highly critical of opinions and views held by other contemporary scholars and did not hesitate to do so by name and with acerbic language. That was the case with the articles for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and I informed him orally but as gently as I could that attacking the views of other scholars in an encyclopedia forum would probably not meet with the publisher's approval. Fortunately for me, Sena took the criticism well and revised his drafts accordingly, although, as Dona Mécia has explained in print, additional changes made by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* editors met with Sena's strong indignation.³

Jorge de Sena was also instrumental in my obtaining tenure at this university. My scholarly output had been delayed initially by my arriving at UCSB without having finished my dissertation. It would be further hampered in 1975 by the theft at Galeão International Airport in Rio de Janeiro of my briefcase carrying an annotated revision of a photocopy of my dissertation, intended for eventual publication, as well as a 400-page typewritten transcription of a manuscript containing a Spanish translation of the 13th-century French prose romance *Lancelot du Lac*, for which I had no back-up photocopy, given the expense at that time of making photocopies while on a partial sabbatical salary. Despite this set back, I turned to other research projects and eventually had sufficient publications or work in press to warrant a consideration of my tenure case. Sena was department chair at the time and did his fullest to obtain letters in strong support from outside referees. University of California policy then stipulated that the content of such letters could not be made available to the candidate with just the identity of the writer redacted, but in my case Sena was not deterred by that policy, even expressing to me how he intended to rebut a negative comment in one of the referee's letters he had received. When Sena was ultimately informed of the campus administration's decision to indeed grant me tenure, he took it upon himself to give me the news in person, coming to the classroom where I was teaching and making the announcement there in front of the students. Although I was somewhat embarrassed by such action, it revealed Sena's personal commitment to my case and desire to let me know as soon as possible that the outcome was a positive one.

Sena's health would, unfortunately, take a bad turn. After successfully recovering from a cardiovascular incident, in early 1978 he was diagnosed with a form of lung cancer. He asked me to take over in the spring as acting chair of the department which I did, although reluctantly, just having

³ Mécia de Sena, "Introdução," in Jorge de Sena, *Amor e Outros Verbetes*, Lisboa, Edições 70, 1992, pp. 9-12 (11-12).

been granted tenure. When he was on his deathbed at Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara, I remember him extending his hand to me, and when I clasped it he asked me to assume the chairmanship of the department upon his passing. Several days later, on June 4th, when some of us, friends and UCSB colleagues, were outside his hospital room, the sad word came out from family members that Jorge de Sena had left us.

Some months later, with the assistance of Dona Mécia, Fred Williams and I organized a colloquium in memory of Jorge de Sena, ultimately publishing the papers in a collective volume.⁴ Also with Dona Mécia's help, an appeal was made to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, specifically to its Administrator, Dr. José Blanco, long an admirer of Sena's poetry, for financial support to continue Jorge de Sena's accomplishments at UCSB in advancing Portuguese language and culture. The Department and the then UCSB Chancellor, Robert Huttenback, an historian of the British Empire, initially sought the creation of an endowed chair in Sena's name, but at that time the Gulbenkian Foundation had a policy against that type of endowment. Negotiations were long and arduous but eventually the parties agreed to create an endowed Center for Portuguese Studies bearing Jorge de Sena's name, with UCSB's commitment to appoint a senior professor of Portuguese in the department. Although the Center no longer bears the Jorge de Sena name, the endowment is permanent and the center continues to prosper and it owes much of its success to the Sena legacy. Following the retirement of the Maria Belchior Pontes who succeeded Jorge de Sena as our senior Professor of Portuguese, one of our visiting professors of Portuguese who considered a possible permanent appointment was Maria Alzira Seixo of the University of Lisbon. During her stay at UCSB she organized a volume of studies on Jorge de Sena's novella *O Físico Prodigioso*, which he first published in 1966 while in exile in Brazil. Pressured by Professor Alzira Seixo, I contributed to the volume with an article on medieval themes and motifs that influenced Sena's writing of *O Físico Prodigioso*.⁵

In 2009 the Portuguese government supported the transfer of Sena's remains from Calvary Cemetery in Santa Barbara to the Cemitério dos Prazeres in Lisbon, in the section known as the "Talhão dos Artistas" ('Artists' plot'). Interment took place there on September 9th of that year, preceded by a formal homage ceremony at the Basílica da Estrela, attended by numerous friends and

⁴ *Studies on Jorge de Sena by his Colleagues and Friends: A Colloquium*, ed. Harvey L. Sharrer and Frederick G. Williams, Santa Barbara, Bandana Books, 1980.

⁵ Harvey L. Sharrer, "Temas e motivos medievais em *O Físico Prodigioso*," in *O Corpo e os Signos: Ensaio sobre "O Físico Prodigioso"*, ed. Maria Alzira Seixo, Lisboa: Editorial Comunicação, pp. 85-98.

various family members. I had the honor of making a few remarks before the group gathered at the interment. It was a final farewell to a much-missed friend and colleague.

By way of closing my remarks, in 1994 I had the pleasure of directing the doctoral dissertation in Comparative Literature at UCSB of Sena's eldest daughter, Isabel, now a professor at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Just yesterday I received an e-mail from a friend of Isabel's, Leslie Bary, a professor at the University of Louisiana and daughter of David Bary who preceded Jorge de Sena as our department chair. Leslie Bary was not aware of our colloquium being held today, but by coincidence her e-mail contained an attachment of a photograph which I show you here, taken two days ago of a new TAP Air Portugal airplane (Airbus A321 LR CS-TXB) bearing the name Jorge de Sena with Isabel de Sena standing beside it. Perhaps one day we will be lucky enough to fly on the Jorge de Sena. That would be a thrill!

