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An Unwritten Novel
Fernando Pessoa's
The Book of Disquiet
by
THOMAS J. COUSINEAU



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For Charlotte, Sophie, Sebastien, and Madeleine

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Preface

An Unwritten Novel offers the general reader, as well as students and teachers of modernism, an "Ariadne's thread" that will help them to find their way through Fernando Pessoa's labyrinthine masterpiece, *The Book of Disquiet*. The thread itself is woven from the double-stranded observation made by Bernardo Soares (its putative author) that "Anything and everything, depending on how one sees it, is a marvel or a hindrance, an all or a nothing, a path or a problem."

The "marvel-hindrance" that pervades *The Book* from beginning to end (despite its having neither a beginning nor an end but, rather, an endlessly recurring middle) is the loss of a stable and reassuring vision of the world and of one's place within it. Soares's discovery that he is actually an "exile" where he had thought himself to be a "citizen" produces throughout *The Book* expressions of hopeless nostalgia as well as daydreams of a paradise regained. "Once upon a time" echoes repeatedly as its signature refrain, but the disquiet to which it gives expression remains as obdurate as ever.

One possible solution to this predicament is to attempt to fill the void left by the collapse of inherited beliefs with a substitute faith. This leads Soares's contemporaries, who are incapable of worshipping the God of their ancestors, to erect a compensatory, yet bogus, "cult of humanity" and Soares himself to attempt, albeit with equally unconvincing results, to erect a cult of the "superior man," which he readily joins. The other solution is to treat this misfortune as an opportunity to devise a new mode of writing that is not tainted with nostalgia. At first glance, Soares appears ill-suited to such an undertaking. A mere assistant bookkeeper in a commercial enterprise, he seems to lack the most rudimentary literary gifts. By his own admission, he can't write poetry and, on the evidence of his "factless autobiography," he can neither create believable characters nor write convincing dialogue and narration. As though that weren't enough, his aesthetic ideal – which he can't possibly duplicate – is found in such monumental achievements as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Fortunately, however, the various "hindrances" by which Soares is beset go hand-in-hand with the "marvel" that is *The Book* itself. Like the "aged man" in William Butler Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," *The Book* is a "paltry thing" whose soul nonetheless manages to "clap its hands and sing, and louder sing/For every tatter in its mortal dress." However, rather than finding consolation, as Yeats does, in the vision of himself as a "golden bird," Soares, a self-described "building in ruins," produces an incongruous masterpiece in which the diminishment that he experiences as a personal crisis coexists with an artistic achievement in the form of what he calls "greater completeness."

Ordinarily, a novelist achieves the effect of completeness by assembling the various parts of his novel so that they contribute to an organized whole. Details of place, for example, are gathered in a way that creates a setting; episodes are arranged in a logical sequence to form a plot; the protagonist is part of a larger human community; dialogue and narration each makes its distinct contribution to the novel as a whole; and the roles of the protagonist, who experiences events, and the author, who produces the work in which they are represented, are clearly distinguished as well. In *The Book*, however, all five of these narrative elements are "unwritten." Lisbon is scarcely present as its setting and the three details that are mentioned—office, rented-room, and neighboring streets—are only minimally described. Plot dissolves into a series of events that do not cohere into a sustained action. Soares lives in nearly complete isolation from his fellow Lisboetas; both narration and dialogue virtually disappear, as does the distinction between the author and the protagonist.

Each of these "mutilations" of a properly written novel, however, prepares the way for a compensatory form of "greater completeness." On the level of setting, the office, the room, and the neighboring streets become gateways to the infinite. The episodic events that never cohere into a unified plot achieve the intensity of "modest apocalypses" which acquire an aura of timelessness. Soares, an undistinguished bookkeeper who records his company's accounts in a ledger, metamorphoses into a writer through whom the works of his great predecessors—including Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton—are uncannily revived, albeit in the incongruous form of an "unwritten novel." The eclipse of narration and dialogue leads to the emergence of a form of writing—what Soares calls "the written voice"—that hovers uncannily between speaking and silence. Finally, the blurring of the distinction between the author and his protagonist produces a hybrid, indeterminate form of authorship that has led some readers of *The Book* to attribute it to Pessoa/Soares.

The most intriguing aspect of the relationship between the mutilation which is, for Soares, a personal

predicament and the dismemberment of inherited novelistic conventions that leads to greater completeness is that it cannot be interpreted as the expression of a conscious authorial intention. This is partly because we are not quite sure who actually wrote (or didn't write) *The Book*, but also because neither Pessoa nor Soares actually wanted to produce a work that was merely a hodge-podge of fragmentary texts. Pessoa admired the architectural perfection of the great epic poems and achieved something resembling it, albeit on a much smaller scale, in his symbolist epic entitled *Message*. Curiously, it was when they renounced—or, more accurately, were deprived by a combination of their sheer inability to write a novel and the circumstance of Pessoa's untimely death at age forty-seven—the brilliant mastery of one's materials that they admired in Virgil and Dante and which Pessoa had displayed so impressively in *Message*, that Pessoa/Soares created—or, more accurately, had created for them—if not the most perfectly constructed of modernist masterpieces, then certainly one of the most sublime.

“I wonder if my apparently negligible voice might not embody the essence of thousands of voices, the longing for self-expression of thousands of lives, the patience of millions of souls resigned like my own to their daily lot, their useless dreams, and their hopeless hopes.”

-*The Book of Disquiet*

Introduction: The Sheltering Ruins

"In your ruins, I find shelter."

-Samuel Beckett to E. M. Cioran

BERNARDO SOARES, WHOM Fernando Pessoa would eventually designate as the author of *The Book of Disquiet*, describes himself as "the ruins of buildings that were never more than ruins." One cannot imagine a more apt description, not only of Soares himself, but also of the "factless autobiography" that he wrote. Soares provides an historical context for the verbal ruins that Pessoa's editors would assemble following his death when he tells his readers that "I was born in a time when the majority of young people had lost faith in God, for the same reason their elders had it – without knowing why" (11). He elaborates on the emotional and practical consequences of this loss in Text 175, which begins "The generation I belong to was born into a world where those with a brain as well as a heart couldn't find any support" (156).

This historicizing of his predicament takes on a more personal cast when Soares relates his experience of abandonment to the death of his parents. Of his mother, he says: "She died when I was one year old. My distracted and callous sensibility comes from the lack of that warmth and from my useless longing after kisses I don't remember. I'm artificial. It was always against strange breasts that I woke up, cuddled as if by proxy" (32). To this experience of loss, he adds the suicide of his father: "My father, who lived far away, killed himself when I was three, and so I never met him. I still don't know why he lived far away. I never cared to find out. I remember his death as a grave silence during the first meals we ate after learning about it" (32). He casts the loss of his father as an event having cosmic resonances when he declares: "I feel as if I'd lost a benevolent God, as if the Substance of everything had died" (163). As he repeatedly laments throughout *The Book*, Soares no longer feels that he occupies a clearly defined and secure place within the order of creation or, for that matter, in the city of his birth: "In this moment of seeing, I suddenly find myself isolated, an exile where I'd always though I was a citizen" (40).

Soares's predicament leads to frequent attacks of nostalgia; so susceptible is he to them that they can be provoked by his losing even the most insignificant things: "The miserable rented room where I lived for a few months, the dinner table at the provincial hotel where I stayed for six days, even the sad waiting room at the station where I spent two hours waiting for a train – yes, their loss grieves me" (173). The extremity of his suffering is perhaps best illustrated by the curious form of sadness caused by his reading Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* : "One of my life's greatest tragedies is to have already read *The Pickwick Papers*. (I can't go back and read them for the first time.)" (234). He likewise admits that nostalgia can even be aroused by losses that he did not sustain—"I feel sad because of whom I never was, and I don't know with what kind of nostalgia I miss him" (171)—as well as by those that he does not remember: "What cortèges from my past cause a tedium of unremembered splendours to cradle my nostalgia?" (333).

At one point, his experience of loss leads Soares to wonder "if we weren't in fact other beings, whose *greater completeness* we can sense today, incompletely, forming at best a sketchy notion of their lost solidity in the two dimensions of our present lives, mere shadows of what they were" (172; my emphasis). In Text 198, entitled "Holiday Notes" and describing a walk along "the forever deserted beach," something resembling his own "other being" seems to return to him when he observes "a tremulously slanting blue in the distance [. . .] gathering into itself all undertows, all return journeys to that original freedom, all nostalgias for God, all memories (like this one, shapeless and painless) of a prior state, blissful because it was so good or because it was different, a body made of nostalgia with a soul of foam, repose, death, the everything or the nothingness which—like a huge ocean—surrounds the island of castaways that is life" (174).

In contrast to these spontaneous, unprompted returns of his "other being," Soares's conscious efforts to repair his mutilated self prove, on the contrary, to be inadequate, thus leaving him in the frustrating predicament of a man who "clings to his bed as to the mother he lost, and fondles the pillow as if his nursemaid could protect him from people" (358). He detects signs of comparable futility in the effort of those members of his generation who strive to build a new myth that will stand in place of the now-ruined certainties that had been provided by traditional religious belief:

I reasoned that God, while improbable, might exist, in which case he should be worshipped; whereas Humanity, being a mere biological idea and signifying nothing more than the animal species we belong to, was no more deserving of worship than any other animal species. The cult of Humanity, with its rites of

Freedom and Equality, always struck me as a revival of those ancient cults in which gods were like animals or had animal heads. (11)

Despite his misgivings about the atavistic practices of his contemporaries, Soares himself naïvely indulges in a bit of delusional myth-making when he constructs a cult of the "superior man." In Text 149, after recalling some of the classic definitions of human beings, he launches into a lengthy discussion of the hierarchical distinctions among men, in the course of which he quotes approvingly Haeckel's misanthropic remark that "while it's difficult to formulate a definition of what distinguishes man from animals, its' easy to differentiate between the superior man and the common man" (132). He then applies this observation to himself in a highly gratifying way: "Between me, whose rank is low among thinking men, and a farmer from Loures, there is undoubtedly a greater distance than between the farmer and, I won't say a monkey, but a cat or dog" (132–3). In a similar vein, he dismisses humanity itself "as merely one of Nature's latest schools of decorative painting" (144) and expresses his contempt for a workers' demonstration, which he judges to be the work of "a teeming and rowdy group of animated idiots" (146).

Intriguingly, it is not the effort to regain his lost eminence but his readiness to "lose" it even more, as it were, that leads to some of the most compelling and persuasive writing in *The Book*. By further diminishing his already diminished self, rather than struggling rather pathetically to refashion himself as a superior man, Soares experiences the uncanny return of his "other being"; self-deprecation succeeds, in effect, where self-glorification had failed. We notice this reciprocity between diminishment and what Soares had called "greater completion," for example, in his admission that "All I've had has amounted to my not knowing how to search, like a feudal lord of swamps at twilight, solitary prince of a city of empty tombs" (189) and that "My castles were made of old, grubby playing cards from an incomplete deck that could never be used to play anything; they didn't even fall but had to be knocked down by the impatient hand of the old maid [. . .]" (54). In such passages as these, we experience—not his personal effort to hide his dereliction behind the dubious assertion of his superiority—but his aesthetic decision to use loss itself as the material he transforms into an ironic form of expression that is more complete precisely because it is also more ruined.

In obedience to the principle of reciprocity that is at work here, Soares alludes to his magnificent prose in incongruously self-diminishing fashion when he tells us that "In my arranging and rearranging of images I'm like a child using newspaper to dress up as a king, and in the way I create rhythm with a series of words I'm like a lunatic adorning my hair with dried flowers that are still alive in my dreams" (169). The self-effacing aspect of this alternative path to greater completeness—obviously apparent in his mocking comparison of himself as a writer to a would-be king and a lunatic—emerges again in his dismissive references to his writing as "random impressions" (20) and "haphazard musings" (21) as well as in the more extended appraisal of its putative insignificance that he offers in Text 155:

Lost and idle words, random metaphors, chained to shadows by a vague anxiety . . . Remnants of better times, spent on I don't know what garden paths . . . Extinguished lamp whose gold gleams in the dark, in memory of the dead light . . . Words tossed not to the wind but to the ground, dropped from limp fingers, like dried leaves that had fallen on them from an invisibly infinite tree . . . Nostalgia for the pools of unknown farms . . . Heartfelt affection for what never happened . . . (139)

It is precisely such slightings of both himself and his writing, rather than his spurious claims of superiority, that qualify Soares for inclusion in a group whose members, like himself, combine marginalization with greatness:

Some govern the world, others are the world. Between an American millionaire, a Caesar or Napoleon, or Lenin, and the Socialist leader of a small town, there's a difference in quantity but not of quality. Below them there's us, the unnoticed: the reckless playwright William Shakespeare, John Milton the schoolteacher, Dante Alighieri, the tramp, the delivery boy who ran an errand for me yesterday, the barber who tells me jokes, and the waiter who just now demonstrated his camaraderie by wishing me well, after noticing I'd drunk only half the wine." (28)

The idea of a loss that produces an experience of greater completeness is perfectly illustrated by a poem written in 1929 entitled "Note" and attributed to Alvaro de Campos:

My soul has broken like an empty vase.

It has fallen exceedingly downstairs,
Fallen from the hands of the careless maid,
Fallen, smashed into more pieces
than there was china in the vase.
Nonsense? Impossible? Who knows?
I have more sensations than I had when I felt my old self.
I am a scattering of shards on a doormat to be shaken.
I made a noise on landing like a vase breaking.
The gods that there are lean over the banister,
And stare at the shards their maid has made of me.
Don't let them be angry with her.
They are tolerant with her.
What was I but an empty vase?
They look at the shards, foolishly conscious,
But self-conscious, not conscious of them.
They look and smile,
Smile tolerantly at the maid who could not help it.
The great stairway stretches, carpeted with stars.
A shard glitters, turned shiny side out, among the planets.
My work? My chief soul? My life?
A shard.
And the gods look at it especially,
for they don't know why it is still there
(*A Centenary Pessoa* 98-9).

What is most striking here is the way that an initial impression of loss—which then continues as the dominant note throughout the greater part of the poem—coexists with the implication that the dropping of the vase has led not only to loss but also to a reshaping of space into a pattern—conveyed by the images of the staircase as "carpeted with stars" and of the shard itself as "glitter[ing], turned shiny side out, among the planets"—whose completeness exceeds the finished form that the vase possessed before it was dropped. What had hitherto been just an ordinary vase has now—thanks to its being "smashed into more pieces than there was china in the vase"—become the scattered parts of a sheltering pattern. This ambiguous reciprocity between ruins and shelter is also at work in the conjectured identification between the broken shard and an encircling triad: "My work? My chief soul? My life?"

We may think of *The Book* itself as also having resulted from a comparable kind of shattering. The earliest of the writings that would eventually be included in it were in the form of a comparatively coherent prose poem entitled "In the Forest of Estrangement." When considering the direction in which *The Book* evolved from these early writings, we notice the tendency to incorporate the sort of realistic details drawn from daily life that would not have found their place in the work that Pessoa originally conceived. Brief evocations of "this sorrowful world" (420), "life and its ways" (421) are replaced by accounts of a dinner in a neighborhood restaurant, during which he observes a fist-fight in the street below, and evocations of the nondescript street on which the equally nondescript rented room where he spends his solitary evenings is located. In addition, we notice that *The Book* contains any number of commonplace prosaic sentences that would not have been at home in the loftier linguistic realm inhabited by "In the Forest of Estrangement."

Soares himself argues on behalf of the greater amplitude of prose—its ability to incorporate experiences that poetry would exclude—in Text 227, which begins with his admitting the personal nature of his bias in favor of prose: "I have no choice, because I'm incapable of writing in verse" (197). He then shifts to a more objective and universal justification, arguing, for example, that the rhythmic requirements of poetry are "checks, constraints, automatic mechanisms of repression and censure" while "In prose we speak freely. We can incorporate musical rhythms, and still think. We can incorporate poetic rhythms, and yet remain outside them. An occasional poetic rhythm won't disturb prose, but an occasional prose rhythm makes poetry fall down" (197). He continues by claiming that "prose encompasses all art," that "in a perfect, civilized world

there would be no other art but prose," and that prose embodies "gestural subtleties carried out by a great actor, the Word, which rhythmically transforms into its bodily substance the impalpable mystery of the universe" (198).

Soares stresses the appealingly unsystematic quality of his prose style when he remarks that, although he had the "perverted desire to adopt a system and a norm," he actually wrote "before having the norm and the system." This reflection is then immediately followed by the statement of two principles that elaborate on his rejection of system, including, presumably, the formal constraints of poetry: "1) to express what one feels exactly as it is felt—clearly, if it is clear; obscurely, if obscure; confusedly, if confused—and 2) to understand that grammar is an instrument and not a law" (81). This leads him to speculate that the novel—the freest and most prosaic of literary genres—"is a more perfect life and reality, which God creates through us. Perhaps we live only to create it" (171).

The additional freedom that Soares achieved by resorting not only to prose but to fragmentary prose—"the ruins of buildings that were never more than ruins," as it were—may remind us of the role played, throughout history but especially in the modernist period, by literary works that were intentionally—rather than accidentally—created as fragments. In her *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*, Elizabeth Wanning Harris provides some useful details regarding this practice. As Harris reminds us, the fragmentary style is by no means Pessoa's own invention. Both Friedrich and August Wilhelm von Schlegel as well as Novalis were writing fragments in the 1790s. She also includes in her survey such unfinished and, perhaps with even greater pertinence to *The Book*, unfinishable poems as Wordsworth's *Recluse*, Keats's *Hyperion* poems, and Byron's *Don Juan*.

Likewise, Harris's inclusion in her survey of Petrarch's *Rime Sparsa*, of which she says that "although incomplete, with no narrative frame, they are classical fragments of a novel" (14) encourages us to think of their author as a precursor to the heap of fragments that are Soares's "unwritten novel." Yet another intriguing precedent emerges in Harris's discussion of the legend according to which Orpheus continued to sing after he had been decapitated, which, as she rightly observes, implies "a connection between poetry and the shattering of the self, between song and disintegration" (15). Although Petrarch never refers explicitly to the scattering of Orpheus's body, Harris maintains—in a remark that fits *The Book* perfectly after, *mutatis mutandis*, we have replaced "poems" with "prose"—that he reenacts this dismemberment implicitly in the scattered poems that he has left behind: "Collecting them in a manuscript or a volume is the only reintegration he can achieve, a poetic gathering that simultaneously acknowledges the persistent scattering of poems, bodies, and selves" (20).

Christine Froula's analysis of the prominence of fragments and unfinished drafts in modernist writing provides a useful transition from the historical period that is the focus of Harris's study to the one in which Pessoa wrote *The Book*. As Froula observes, many of the major artists of this period created "forms that oppose [however artfully] the monumentality of traditional forms" (114). She illustrates the emergence of indefiniteness as a characteristic feature of modernist writing by taking the example of Ezra Pound's Cantos, of which she observes that the titles of early volumes—*A Draft of XVI Cantos* (1925), *A Draft of the Cantos 17-27* (1928), and *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1931)—"suggest that Pound initially intended to complete a finished work" but that his "assumption that his experimental modernist form would evolve toward the monumentality and stability of classical epic art was probably defeated" (115). She concludes with a remark that implies an intriguing parallel between *The Cantos* and the posthumous fate of *The Book*: "the history of the Cantos is full of contingencies that are not foreclosed by Pound's death but continue through the agency of editors, publishers, heirs and literary executors" (117).

Despite the fragmentary form in which he was to leave *The Book*, however, Pessoa himself frequently stressed the fundamental importance of *construction* to the value of a literary work. He claimed, for example, that the structure of the Pindaric Ode is not merely a literary convention, but, rather, an axiom of the human spirit and complained that the structured literary forms inherited from Pindar "has had very careless handling at modern hands." He specifically blamed the romantic movement for this state of affairs because it "has indisciplined the capacity of constructing which, at least, low classicism had." He likewise has construction in mind when he observed Shakespeare's "fatal incapacity to visualize organized wholes" and praised Milton, as "the great Master of Building in poetry" (*Always Astonished* 35). Soares, in his turn, resorts

to the metaphor of building when he praises the "structure, which the architect must make out of given, hard, external things, and which we build with rhythm, hesitations, successions, and fluidities" (198). So pleased is he with his own (purely imaginary) feats of organization that he claims:

I've undertaken every project imaginable. *The Iliad* composed by me had a structural logic in its organic linking of epodes such as Homer could never have achieved. The meticulous perfection of my unwritten verses makes Virgil's precision look sloppy and Milton's power slack. My allegorical satires surpassed all of Swift's in the symbolic exactitude of their rigorously interconnected particulars. How many Horaces I've been! (249)

His close attention to aspects of construction both large and small is clearly implied by the three tenets of his doctrine of "sensationism":

The first is that art is supremely construction and that the greatest art is that which is able to visualize and create organized wholes, of which the component parts fit vitally into their places . . . The second is that, all art being composed of parts, each of those parts must be perfect in itself . . . The third tenet of sensationism, qua aesthetics, is that every little fragment which builds up the part of the whole should be perfect in itself. (*Always Astonished* 40)

In a remark having obvious pertinence to his own failed project, Pessoa criticizes those symbolist poets who, "being temperamentally incapable of creating either great organized wholes or even (as the Romantics) large eloquent stretches, put their activity into the eggshell (nutshell) of producing beautiful individual lines or very short perfect lyrics." His overall judgment of their achievement is, quite dismissively, that it "is beautiful indeed, when it is beautiful, but it is dangerous to fall under the impression that that is anything but the lowest part of art" (*Always Astonished* 40).

Echoing Pessoa's praise of construction, Soares offers a number of tributes to the ideal of a completed work and to the "ambivalent envy, a disdainful admiration, an incoherent mixture of mixed feelings" (82) that its achievement by others arouses in him. He invokes this goal in especially compelling terms when he exclaims: "Ah, to be able to construct a complete Whole, to construct something that would be like a human body, with perfect harmony among all its parts, and with a life, a life of unity and congruency, uniting the scattered traits of its various parts!" (248). He marvels at the complete sentences that he was once able to write in French (188), and, in a mocking allusion to his now-diminished powers of construction, he complains that he's floating "among the dreams of someone who didn't know how to complete me" (227).

Pessoa and Soares's ambivalent attitude toward wholeness and harmony—their wanting a "dome" that is, as it were, both sheltering and ruined leads, in the case of *The Book* to a work that manages to imbue its scattered fragments with subliminal forms of construction. We notice the blurring of the distinction between ruins and shelter, for example, when Soares, thinking about the words that he writes, says that they "make me smile, but my heart is ready to break—to break like things that shatter into *fragments*, *shards*, and *debris*" (347; my emphasis), a remark in which he combines the breaking of things with the shaping of a pattern in the form of a verbal triad created by a sequence of nearly synonymous words.

Soares achieves a similar effect when he says of those who, like himself, suffer the predicament of having to "live without knowing how to have life" are—in obedience to the principle whereby everything must coexist with its opposite—are compensated by the gift of what he calls "esthetic contemplation," which makes them "*Impassive* to the solemnity of any and all worlds, *indifferent* to the divine, and *disdainers* of what is human" (11; my emphasis). Various of Soares's faltering bodily parts are shaped into yet another completed triadic pattern when he alludes to "my odiously impressionable *brain*, in my thin *skin*, in my hypersensitive *nerves*" (233; my emphasis). He once again enlists his body as the setting in which ruins and a sheltering form will coexist when he compares his sense of the futility of life to "an indisposition originating in some organic abyss such as the stomach, liver or brain" and then, a moment later, declares: "All of me hurts: memory, eyes, and arms" (369).

The triadic patterns that we notice on the level of individual phrases and sentences—in which the co-presence of form and formlessness contributes to what Soares calls "the geometry of the abyss"—also appear in the general design of *The Book* as a whole in the sense that the otherwise scattered fragments that it comprises tend to recompose around the symbiotic processes of experiencing, thinking, and dreaming. Soares alludes to all three of them when he speaks of his having "a profound awareness of *feeling* . . . A

sharp mind that only destroys me, and an unusual capacity for *dreaming* to keep me entertained" (21; my emphasis). Certain texts are devoted to a single one of these activities. Text 26, for example, is devoted to the *feeling* aroused by his watching and listening to a group of girls: "The girls came around the bend in a large group. They sang as they walked, and the sound of their voices was happy. I don't know who or what they might be. I listened to them for a time from afar, without a feeling of my own, but a feeling of sorrow for them impressed itself on my heart" (29).

Texts devoted exclusively to *thinking* are especially abundant. Text 11, for example is in the form of an epigrammatic reflection: "We never know self-realization. We are two abysses—a well staring at the sky" (20), and Text 207 offers a brief yet penetrating demystification of romantic love: "It's not love but love's outskirts that are worth knowing . . . The repression of love sheds much more light on its nature than does the actual experience of it. Virginity can be a key to a profound understanding. Action has its rewards but brings confusion. To possess is to be possessed, and therefore to lose oneself. Only the idea can fathom reality without getting ruined" (235). Text 273 subjects history to an equally ironic examination: "Nothing is ever sure in history. There are periods of order when everything is contemptible and periods of disorder in which all is lofty. Decadent eras abound in mental vitality, mighty eras in intellectual weakness. Everything mixes and criss-crosses, and truth exists only in so far as it is presumed" (235).

Text 156 records a *dream* in which Soares imagines himself as "the pageboy of tree-lined paths that weren't enough for the soaring moments of my blue peace" and then continues with a vision in which "ships in the distance completed the sea that lapped my terraces, and in the clouds towards the south I lost my soul, like an oar dropped in the water" (139–40). In Text 272, he dreams of a "Pantheon" in which "there's room for all the gods that mutually exclude each other; all have their throne and the sovereignty. Each one can be everything, for here are no limits, not even logical ones, and the mingling of various immortals allows us to enjoy the coexistence of diverse infinities and assorted eternities" (235).

The interweaving of experiencing, thinking, and dreaming within the same text likewise imbues the ruins that Pessoa left behind at the time of his death with a virtual completeness that contributes, in its turn, to the effect of "sheltering ruins." Text 41, for example, begins with Soares attempting to find within himself "the sensations I *feel* before these falling threads of darkly luminous water that stand out from the grimy building façades and especially from the open windows" (42; my emphasis). His mood then induces in him the disillusioned *thought* that "All the pent-up bitterness of my life removes, before my sensationless eyes, the suit of natural happiness it wears in the random events that fill up each day. I realize that, while often happy and often cheerful, I'm always sad." This leads him to find relief from self-awareness in a compensatory *dream*: "To be something, anything that doesn't feel the weight of the rain outside, nor the anguish of inner emptiness . . . To wander without thought or soul—sensation without sensation—along mountain roads and through valleys hidden between steep slopes, into the far distance, irrevocably immersed . . . To be lost in landscapes like paintings . . . A coloured non-existence in the background . . . " (42).

Text 51 begins with the *feeling* provoked in Soares by an impression: "The black sky to the south of the Tagus was an evil-looking black in contrast to the vividly white wings of the gulls that flew around restlessly" (50). It then turns to a *thought*: "At empty and imponderable times like this, I like to employ my thoughts in a meditation that's nothing at all but that captures, in its void transparency, something of the desolate chill in the cleared-up day, with the black sky in the background, and certain intuitions—like seagulls—which evoke by way of contrast the mystery of everything shrouded in darkness" (51). It shifts once again, this time to "the graphic clarity" of a *dream* in which he sees "A landscape for hunters and anxieties" which eventually transforms into "nothing but a slow falling of night, with the whole of space gradually turning the colour of the darkest clouds, which little by little would vanish into the abolished mass of sky" (51). The text then concludes with a return to a variant on the impression with which it began: "I gasp and wake up. The man who passes me under the arcade by the Stock Exchange stares at me warily, without knowing why. And the black sky, closing in, pressed even lower over the southern shore" (51).

Text 29 offers a variant of this pattern in the form of a feeling-dream-thought sequence. It begins, as did Text 51, with an impression that leads to a *feeling*: "As the last drops of rain began to fall more slowly from the rooftops and the sky's blue began to spread over the street's paving-stones, then the vehicles sang a different song, louder and happier, and the windows could be heard opening up to the no longer forgetful sun." He

then shifts to *dreaming*: "I paced from one side of the room to the other, dreaming out loud incoherent and impossible things—deeds I'd forgotten to do, hopeless ambitions haphazardly realized, fluid and lively conversations which, were they to be, would already have been." Recognizing, however, that his dream is nothing more than "this reverie without grandeur or calm " and that the words he spoke "multiplied in the echoing cloister of my inglorious isolation" leads him to *think* with ironic lucidity on his risible condition: "Seen from the outside, my human figure was ridiculous like everything in its intimacy. Over the pyjamas of my abandoned sleep I'd put on an old overcoat, habitually employed for these morning vigils. My old slippers were falling apart, especially the left one" (31).

Each of the chapters that follow explores the ways in which Soares produces a parallel effect of greater completeness by un-writing the elements of a conventionally written novel—including setting, plot, character, and narration—in such a way as to create reciprocities between the actual ruins that result from this operation and the sheltering, albeit virtual, wholeness with which they become interchangeable. The first chapter, entitled "Paradise Remade," contrasts the reliance on hierarchical order that underlies the "remaking" of Lisbon as a magnificent imperial city in Pessoa's guidebook, *Lisbon: What Every Tourist Should See* and the return to "sacred beginnings" from which the setting of *The Book of Disquiet* emerges. In his guidebook, Pessoa begins by offering a panoramic view of the city as a whole and then details the specific contribution made to its overall harmony by each of the distinguished monuments and public spaces that he singles out for special mention. In *The Book*, on the other hand, Soares subverts the distinction between the whole and its subordinate parts in a way that allows such details of setting as the undistinguished neighborhood that he never leaves to become, as it frequently does, interchangeable with the infinite. The Tagus River becomes "a boundless Atlantic" (178), the street on which he lives becomes the setting in which, as Soares tells us, "[I] have my infinity" (103), and a sunny day transforms a narrow street into an open field (35). Such *partial* things as the shadow of a tree, the sound of water falling into a pool, and the grass of a trimmed lawn become "the *whole* universe" (97; my emphasis).

The chapter entitled "A Show without a Plot," begins by pointing out that, like setting, a coherent main action relies on the subordination of individual episodes to the plot as a whole. After briefly mentioning Pessoa's fundamentally non-Aristotelian concept of "static theater"—as well as its usefulness to our understanding of his one completed play, entitled *The Mariner*—I point out that Soares's apparent dismissal of this kind of vertical ordering prepares for the emergence in *The Book* of a virtual double-plot: one pointing towards the immobility of death, the other towards the stasis of art. As was true with the setting of *The Book*, so also with its plot, Soares's originality consists in his making interchangeable what is normally kept distinct. The tiniest—most momentary and otherwise most negligeable—detail will suddenly expand into a boundless vision of the ultimate end of things. This vision will ambiguously illustrate both Sigmund Freud's assertion, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that "the goal of all life is death" and Stephan Mallarmé's complementary claim on behalf of art that "Life exists to become a book."

The chapter on character, entitled "Shadows of Gestures," begins by noticing that, the actual human community of which Soares is a part—the commercial enterprise in which he works as an assistant bookkeeper—plays only a marginal role in his "factless autobiography." Much more central to *The Book* are two comparatively boundless groups: first, the multitude of unnamed "other people" whom he envies for a variety of reasons, ultimately because "he is not them" and, second, his literary predecessors whose monumental works provide the inspiration that will lead to the construction of his "sheltering ruins." In the first of these relationships, Soares's struggle to achieve a variously embodied prize (the simplest illustration of which is the "nubile girl" that he imagines encountering on the streets of Lisbon) leads him into fruitless competition with superior adversaries (the nubile girl has, he assumes, a boyfriend whom she prefers to him). It follows that relationships in this group are *reciprocal* (Soares's desire is mirrored by someone else's) but also *adversarial* (the prize goes to only one of them). With respect to the second of these groups—comprising a virtually limitless host of precursors that includes, most notably, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Antonio Vieira, Walt Whitman, etc., etc.—relationships are *both* reciprocal *and* cooperative; Soares acquires the prize of literary achievement from his precursors by imitating them in a way that produces a strikingly individual work.

The fourth chapter, entitled "The Untrammeled Word," begins by noticing that Soares almost entirely

dispenses with dialogue and narration as he writes his "factless autobiography"; he rarely speaks to anyone and hardly ever has a story to tell. On the other hand, the words that communicate his "factless autobiography" to his readers tend to coalesce around three reciprocal pairings: writing and speaking, prose and poetry, and the universal and the particular. Writing is not simply an alternative to speaking in *The Book*; rather, it joins with it to create a kind of "silent monologue," which, as Soares recognizes, is not only his own individual voice, but the larger voice of humanity as a whole. Prose, in its turn, rather than simply replacing poetry as the medium in which *The Book* is written, mingles with it to create a more "sheltering" form of writing than poetry alone is capable of offering. Finally, the antithesis between what Soares calls the "Babelish" language of particularity and the "Adamic" language of universality gives way to an alogical symmetry.

The final chapter, entitled "The Daedalus Complex," begins by presenting the story of Daedalus as the classic illustration of the godlike artist who displaces a form of suffering that could potentially be his own upon a surrogate (successively the Minotaur and Icarus) and then successfully completes an undertaking (the building of the labyrinth in which the Minotaur will be imprisoned and the fashioning of the wings with which he returns to his home in Athens) that distances him even further from his surrogate. After discussing the presence of this scapegoating pattern in Canto XXVI of Dante's *Inferno*, which tells the story of Ulysses's doomed journey, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," I point to two crucial ways in which *The Book* departs from it. First, Pessoa deprives the artist of his superiority over his surrogate in such a way that the creativity of the one and the suffering of the other become indistinguishable. Second, by failing to bring this major project of his literary career to a successful completion, Pessoa has left behind an unwritten masterpiece which replicates, rather than distancing itself from, his surrogate's unlived life.

Chapter One: Paradise Remade

"If there could at least be a paradise made of all this, even if only for me."

THE BRITISH NOVELIST Gabriel Josipovici begins his essay on Pessoa by remarking that "When I think of what is most radical in the literature of the past hundred years, of what embodies most clearly the essential spirit of modernism, I think of five grey-suited gentlemen: Constantin Cavafy, Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa, and Jorge Luis Borges. Each belongs to a city and has made that city his own: Alexandria, Prague, London, Lisbon, Buenos Aires" (27). Yet, as Alfred MacAdam reminds us in the preface to his translation of *The Book of Disquiet*, Lisbon itself actually plays only a marginal role in Soares's "factless autobiography," unlike Dublin, of which James Joyce gives us such precisely detailed descriptions in *Ulysses*. MacAdam then astutely relates *The Book*, not to the actual city in which it is set, but to the imaginary realm that Jorge Luis Borges created in his short story "The Library of Babel."

Both *The Book* and "The Library of Babel" provoke uncanny effects by treating open and enclosed spaces as though they were interchangeable. Borges blurs the distinction between them in the opening sentence of his story, which reads: "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries" (*Labyrinths* 51). The reciprocity thus created recurs in the narrator's later claim that "my grave will be the fathomless air; my body will sink endlessly and decay and dissolve in the wind generated by the fall, which is infinite" (52). He then combines the enclosed geometrical figure of the hexagon with indefiniteness in a rewriting of the mystical definition of God: "*The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible*" (52). A limited set of letters and punctuation marks, in its turn, combines to produce an indefinite multiplicity of books: "he deduced that the Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols" (54). Throughout the entire story, the labyrinth itself is implicitly present as a space that, while enclosed, nonetheless invites a potentially infinite number of possible meanderings.

This subversion of the logical distinction between the greater and the lesser as well as between the open and the enclosed—which permits the boundless universe to be contained within the restricted space of the library and, conversely, the library to become boundless—receives yet another uncanny inflection when we learn of the theory according to which somewhere within the library there exists a "total book," which the narrator describes as "the formula and perfect compendium *of all the rest*" (56). A concluding footnote offers what may be a plausible rationale for this idea: "Letizia Alvarez de Toledo has observed that this vast library is useless: rigorously speaking, a *single volume* would be sufficient, a volume of ordinary format, printed in nine or ten point type, containing an infinite number of infinitely thin leaves" (58).

The Book of Disquiet contains, if not an infinite number of pages, then certainly hundreds of separate pages that, if published as a boxed rather than as a bound edition, could be arranged in virtually infinite combinations. Like the narrator of "The Library of Babel," Soares himself combines a bounded geometric figure with the indefinite when he describes himself as "the center that exists only in the geometry of the abyss" (228). Like the library itself, his fourth-floor rented room expands until it "becomes" the universe and, like the "total book," the smallest of his fragments becomes "the formula and perfect compendium" of the hundreds of disparate texts that Pessoa left behind at the time of his death.

Again like Borges's narrator, Soares explicitly invokes the image of the labyrinth at several points in *The Book*. In one allusion, he expresses his desire "To cease, to be the ebb and flow of a vast sea [. . .] the ocean spray of far-off fountains, and all the uncertainty of parks at night, lost in endless tangles, natural labyrinths of darkness!" (33). In another, he yearns to "shake off this state of suspension" that seems to keep him from contact with his true self and to discover "a more intimate thinking, a feeling that's more mine, a will lost somewhere in the labyrinth of who I really am" (115). The city of Lisbon itself acquires a labyrinthine aspect in the midst of Soares's nocturnal wandering: "I don't know why, but I'm troubled by this objective network of wide and narrow streets, this succession of street lamps, trees, lighted and dark windows, opened and closed gates—heterogeneously nocturnal shapes which my near-sightedness makes even hazier, until they become subjectively monstrous, unintelligible and unreal" (191).

This resemblance between the Lisbon of *The Book* and Borges's library is alluded to at least indirectly by many critical comments on Soares's "unwritten novel." Françoise Laye, for example, points to the ease with which Soares moves back and forth between a realistic and an imaginary portrayal of Lisbon, which she traces

to its source in "a boundless narcissism that creates a constant back and forth movement between Pessoa as the creator and Soares as his creature" (12). Washington Dener dos Santos suggests an even closer identification when he describes *The Book* (in a way that will remind us of Borges) as an expression of its author's "interior labyrinth" as well as of the "regular geometry of the city" (77). Soares himself substantiates this idea of his inhabiting a recognizably Borgesian realm when he remarks that he can "dream simultaneously of a real sunset over the real Tagus River and a dreamed morning on an inner Pacific Ocean" (435) and that "it's the fifth corner [of the world] that I travel in, and it belongs to me" (123). The narcissistic motivation underlying his imaginative refashioning of the real world especially comes to the fore when he exclaims "If there could at least be a paradise made of all this, *even if only for me*! If I could at least meet the friends I've dreamed of, walk along the streets I've created, wake up amid the racket of roosters and hens in the early morning rustling in the country house where I pictured myself" (90; my emphasis).

Before looking more closely at the blurring of the boundary between the real and the imaginary that permeates *The Book*, let us recall that Pessoa remade Lisbon as a "paradise regained" in not one but two prose works, the other being a little guidebook entitled *Lisbon: What Every Tourist Should Know*. Pessoa's native city, as portrayed both in *The Book* and in *Lisbon*, fulfills—albeit, in two completely contrasting ways—the aspiration to which Soares gives voice when he evokes the experience of being alone in a normally crowded place: "We suddenly have a feeling of *absolute ownership*, of vast and effortless dominion, and—as I said—of relief and serenity" (338; my emphasis). Both Soares and Pessoa's model tourist "own" Lisbon in highly gratifying ways. To begin with, the existence of other living people is significantly marginalized in both works. In *The Book*, they are, with few exceptions, reduced to an anonymous and insignificant mass. As Rhian Atkin has observed, "while Lisbon is purportedly what inspires Soares's writings, his introspective, self-indulgent attitude and his rejection of action actually mean that the physiognomy of the city is largely overlooked, and its inhabitants are grouped together with little attention to any particularly *lisboeta* traits that they may have" (159).

We may remember, in this respect, Soares's tribute to "the stillness of early summer evenings downtown, and especially the stillness made more still by contrast, on the streets that seethe with activity by day" (13) and his description of his ability, in the midst of his routine bookkeeping activities in the office of Vasques's company, to have a vision that conflates open and enclosed spaces and in which he shares "the sublime feeling of a monk in the *wilderness* or a hermit in his *retreat*, acquainted with the substance of Christ in the *sands* and in the caves of withdrawal from the world" (15; my emphasis). The guide who conducts the tour in *Lisbon* is, like Soares, a nearly solitary figure, his only companion being the tourist himself. Every other inhabitant of the city—including the various artists and political figures whose achievements he celebrates—has been dead for years if not centuries. The virtual effacement of daily *events* in both works also contributes to this effect. Nothing except sightseeing actually happens in Pessoa's guidebook. In *The Book*, events, such as they are, tend to alternate between long stretches of tedium and sudden, visionary moments, neither of which have any direct connection with the daily life of the other inhabitants of Lisbon.

Rogelio Orónez Blanco explains in his introduction to Béatrice Verne's French translation of Pessoa's guidebook that its author's idealizing portrayal of the city of his birth was inspired by his recognition of the greatly diminished role played by Portugal on the world stage, a circumstance of which he became particularly aware during his childhood years in Durban, where "he was able to observe the abysmal ignorance that prevailed with respect to the historical importance of the Portuguese people, which led him to think seriously of writing a guide which would restore his country to its rightful place" (11).

Given this implied ambition, it is not surprising that Pessoa makes constant use of strategies—particularly, his constant resort to superlatives—that effectively imbue public monuments, historical figures, and creative artists with a resplendent aura that places them at the summit of a pervasively invoked hierarchical order. Not only is Lisbon encircled by seven literal hills; it is, as well, teeming with innumerable *figurative* pinnacles of human greatness and artistic achievement. The gallery of great creators begins with Brother João Turriano, who devised the plans of the Bugio Lighthouse. The strategy of praising past glories is sounded here by the remark that the Tower of Belém is "a magnificent specimen of sixteenth century military architecture, in the romanic-gothic-moorish style" (11), high praise to which Pessoa will return in his later remark that it is the "one of the finest monuments in Lisbon and one of the most expressive memories of Portuguese military and

naval power" (60). The superlative mode at work here continues in the observation that the Tagus River is "one of the *largest* natural ports in the world, with ample anchorage for the *greatest* fleets" (11; my emphasis).

Pessoa then proposes to serve as the tourist's "cicerone," one who will show him "the monuments, the gardens, the more remarkable buildings, the museums—all that is in any way *worth* seeing in this marvelous Lisbon" (12–13; my emphasis). He rarely misses an occasion to boast of the larger-than-life dimensions of each of these points of interest, taking note, for example, of the Royal Pantheon of the House of Braganza, whose corridor alone measures "17 metres long and 4 1/2 wide" (28). Evidence of Pessoa's patriotic ambition may also be noted in the passages relating to the National Museum of Contemporary Art, whose "fine paintings and sculptures dating from 1850 onwards" are the work of dozens of artists whose names he only too willingly shares with the tourist. These, along with the sculptures, drawings, and water-colours that also contribute their individual excellences to the glory of the collection as a whole lead him to conclude that "There is, in fine, much to see and to admire in the museum, which is fitly installed" (37), a comment that underlines the importance of respect for both hierarchy and proportion.

The cicerone's description in *Lisbon* of the National Library, unlike Borges's of the Library of Babel, is firmly grounded in empirically observable details that are designed to elicit—not the dizzying experience of the *uncanny* that we remember from the Borges story—but the comparatively mundane experience of heightened *admiration*. We learn—among other eminently plausible as well as doubtlessly impressive features—that it "has 11 rooms and 14 passages, on two floors, and contains 360,000 volumes." The quantitative measure of the library's excellence is matched by the *qualitative* when the cicerone tells us that the upper floor houses "the very important Reserved Book room, which contains the rarer works, real bibliographic relics, some unique copies, specimens of rare binding and illustration, manuscripts, coins, and many written documents of all kinds, all of which form a bibliographic collection worthy of the greatest possible care" (38). This strategy of convincing the tourist as to the special excellence of the sites to which his attention is drawn reappears in his praise of the Archeological Museum, which, along with containing innumerable historically important objects, is also graced with a principal entrance which, "formed by a doorway with six ogive arches, is one of the finest of its time" (42).

We notice, furthermore, that the cicerone takes pride, not only in the remarkable dimensions and special excellence of each of the sites to which he calls the tourist's attention, but in the aesthetically pleasing *whole* to which each part contributes. This is noticeably true, for example, of his description of the Praça do Commercio:

It is a vast space, perfectly square, lined on three sides by buildings of uniform type, with high stone arches [. . .] The fourth, or South side of the square is formed by the Tagus itself [. . .] In the center of the square stands the bronze equestrian statue of King José I, a splendid sculpture by Joachim Machado de Castro, cast in Portugal, in a single piece, in 1774 [. . .] On the North side of the square, facing the river, there are three parallel streets; the middle one issues from a magnificent triumphal arch of great dimensions, indubitably one of the largest ones in Europe. (15–16)

A similar attention to wholeness and harmony leads him to regret (in a remark that may be taken as an amusing, although doubtlessly unintended, allusion to *The Book* itself) that the Lisbon Cathedral, which had been damaged by several earthquakes, has been "very badly restored, since its present state shows the lack of a definite plan on the part of the several 'restorers.'" He hopes that the restoration undertaken by António Couto "will put some artistic unity into the cathedral" (32–33). A bit later in the tour, the Monastery of the Jerónimos elicits, by contrast, the cicerone's unconditional praise as "the most remarkable monument which the capital contains" (54). He reminds us of the contribution made by *quantity* to the unforgettable impression that the monastery creates via his mention of the stone-work, which is "full of niches, of statues, of reliefs, arms and emblems." Shifting his attention to *quality*, he then praises the "exquisite harmony" of the aggregate, which itself testifies to the presence in Portugal at the time of its construction of "the greatest masters of stone-work, both national and foreign" (54–55).

In keeping with its focus on specifically urban forms of human achievement, *Lisbon* rigorously restricts mention of the natural world to descriptions of the city's formal gardens. For the cicerone, "nature shows us many of her choicest specimens" (48) only on those limited occasions when the "finest gardens" become the

object of his attention. Especially relevant examples include the Campo Grande, which, we learn is "one of the finest parks in the city [. . .] over a kilometer in length and about 200 metres broad throughout" and containing "valuable specimens of exotic trees, ornamental plants, flowers, etc." (25) and an unnamed garden, also praised as "one of the finest gardens in Lisbon," which "contains some fine specimens of trees, the most remarkable one being a spreading cedar, the branches of which, resting on iron-work, cover ground enough to hold some hundreds of persons" (44).

The Lisbon to which the cicerone pays such superlative homage in his guidebook is, to be sure, the same city in which Bernardo Soares lives, works, and writes—but seen from an entirely different perspective. Soares alludes repeatedly to the tedium of his daily life, which is never relieved by the inspiring sight of a magnificent historical monument or an impressive public square. In place of such touristic attractions, we find frequent mention of such utterly *unworthy* places as the office in which he works, the restaurant in which he meets the stranger, the tavern across the street, the fourth-floor rented room from whose window he gazes, and the barbershop in which he learns of the barber's death. The great historical figures—whose devotion to the active life led to the rebuilding of Lisbon out of the rubble left by the 1755 earthquake—are replaced by Bernardo Soares, an assistant bookkeeper who regularly expresses his disdain for "men of action." The note of patriotic pride that echoes throughout *Lisbon* is likewise replaced by Soares's "disquiet."

Although he suffers from attacks of anxiety unknown to the cicerone, Soares possesses remarkable literary gifts that give him access to blissful experiences that are not, on the evidence of the guidebook, available to even the most elated of tourists. The pleasure afforded to the tourist depends upon conventional judgments of comparative worth that allow the cicerone to establish *hierarchies* of merit. Soares's bliss, by contrast, is generated by uncanny *reciprocities* between the worthy and the worthless. In *Lisbon*, the most admirable monuments and public spaces are placed on a *pinnacle*, whereas in *The Book*, the most negligible object constantly becomes a gateway to the *infinite*.

In *Lisbon*, Pessoa had directed our attention inward: beginning with a panoramic view of the city, he then introduced the tourist to individual buildings, monuments, public gardens, and squares that contribute to its wholeness and harmony. In *The Book*, however, he moves in the opposite direction by treating the panorama as merely part of an immeasurably larger space. Pessoa's tourist arrives in Lisbon aboard a boat that is sailing up the Tagus. From there, he disembarks and begins a journey whose temporal and spatial coordinates are clearly specified: "We shall now ask the tourist to come with us. [. . .] Right in front of the wharf he has just left is the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos [. . .] A little further on [. . .] let us notice this square [. . .] Our car moves on, goes through the Rua do Arsenal, and passes the town hall [. . .] " (12-14). In *The Book*, however, the Tagus is associated with two forms of outward journey: the literal ones undertaken by the Portuguese navigators in the 16th century and the visionary journey that takes place in Soares' imagination as he contemplates the river. At particularly intense moments of reverie, he tells us that "the Tagus is an endless Atlantic and Cacilhas another continent, or even another universe" (111)—a comment that restages from his subjective point of view an experience that was literally true for the Portuguese sailors.

Poetic images such as this one, which shift our attention from real to imaginary voyages, appear intermittently throughout *The Book*. At one point, the Tagus becomes "a blue lake, and the hills of the far shore are a flattened Switzerland" (71) while at another Soares associates it with "distant idylls along streams" (102) and tells us that "the dark reeds by the river sleep coldly in the sunset" (315). One of the most memorable of these images (which unites the river to boundless *time*) occurs when he imagines "great bridges joining the two dark shores of a moonlit river leading to the ancient seas" (426). The specific, bounded river becomes once again interchangeable with the indefinite when Soares, reflecting on the emotional cost of his yearning for impossible things, tells us that "The sensation we come to have of ourselves is of a deserted field at dusk, sad with reeds next to a river without boats, its glistening waters blackening between wide banks" (171–2). The pervasiveness of such images may lead us to surmise that—unlike the tourist, who *arrives* in Lisbon on the Tagus—Soares *leaves* it on a journey—not to the actual England of which Pessoa had dreamed as an adolescent—but to a utopian realm in which boundlessness is the norm: "I have entered, Lord, that port. I have wandered, Lord, over that sea. I have gazed, Lord, at that invisible chasm" (114).

The disappearance of hierarchies based on firmly maintained distinctions between the worthy and the

worthless that notice in *The Book* will become especially apparent if, having in mind the description of the monumental Praça do Commercio in Pessoa's guidebook, we now consider Soares's quite different experience of an unnamed—and otherwise unremarkable—square that he observes from the terrace of an equally uncelebrated café:

From the terrace of this café I look at life with tremulous eyes. I see just a little of its *vast diversity* concentrated in this square that's all mine. A slight daze like the beginning of drunkenness reveals to me the *soul* of things. Visible, *unanimous life* proceeds outside me in the clear and distinct steps of passing pedestrians, in the regulated fury of their motions. In this moment when my feelings are but a lucid and confused mistake, when my senses have stagnated and everything seems like something else, I spread my wings without moving, like an imaginary condor. (373; my emphasis)

Whereas the cicerone wrote about Lisbon with a specific *rhetorical* intention in mind (impressing the reader with an image of the city's grandeur), Soares "unwrites" it in passages such as this one in order to achieve his *poetical* goal of achieving access to "a plane beyond logic and space-time reality [that] is one of our modes of existence, a sensation of ourselves in another dimension of being" (74). The dissolution of the hierarchies so dear to the cicerone enables Soares to declare—as the cicerone certainly could not have—that "In the vast whirlwind where the whole world turns like so many dry leaves, kingdoms count no more than the dresses of seamstresses, and the pigtails of blond girls go round in the same mortal whirl as the scepters that stood for empires" (178).

The reversible relationship between the greater and the lesser, the higher and the lower, the larger and the smaller, etc. that takes us beyond "space-time reality" is memorably expressed by Soares's remark that "Every point of view is the apex of an inverted pyramid, whose base is indeterminate" (86), which clearly transports us to a perceptual and cognitive realm far from the cicerone's conventionally monumental Lisbon. In Soares's Lisbon, apexes that radiate outwards to embrace indeterminate space are both axiomatic and pervasive. At one moment, the apex will be the Tagus and the indeterminate base the infinite sky: "When it's not time, I go to the river to gaze at the river, like everyone else. I'm no different. And behind all this, O sky, my sky, I secretly constellate and have my infinity" (103). At another, the Tagus will be replaced by the narrow street on which Soares lives: "I step over to my window overlooking the narrow street, I look at the immense sky and the countless stars, and I'm free, with a winged splendor whose fluttering sends a shiver throughout my body" (47).

Similar reciprocities emerge when Soares observes that "A sunny day transports us from a café on a narrow side street to wide-open fields" (35) and that "Silence emerges from the sound of the rain and spreads in a crescendo of grey monotony over the narrow street I contemplate. I'm sleeping while awake, standing by the window, leaning against it as against everything" (42). The blurred distinction between the nearby and the distant returns again in his remarks that "the sky's blue began to spread over the street's paving-stones" (31) and that "There is, at this hour, a disquieting harmony, extending from the visible invisibility of everything to the slightly rough wood of the white sill, where my left hand rests sideways on the old, cracked paint" (49). Similar conflations—based ultimately on the reciprocity between part and whole—appear when Soares describes the Tagus as an "endless Atlantic" and speaks of clouds being so huge it seems they'll fill the whole sky" (178) and others that "vanish into the abolished mass of sky" (180). They likewise allow him to declare that "I strolled down the avenue of my small room" (31), that "the silence of the house touches infinity" (34), and that the shadow of a tree, the sound of water falling into a pool, and the grass of a trimmed lawn "are in this moment the whole universe for me" (97). Soares's hazy visual perceptions contribute to this effect when he observes that "right now it seems to me that the landscape is all a fog, and that the buildings are the fog that hides it" (68) and when he informs us that his nearsightedness makes a simple nocturnal street scene seem "monstrous, unintelligible, and unreal" (191) or that, looking out on the city at night, all he sees are things that "are hardly distinguishable in the blackness of the night" (362).

Reciprocities also lead Soares to find "abysses" in highly unlikely urban settings, as when he remarks that "I throw an empty matchbox towards the abyss that's the street . . . not another sound can be heard, except the sound of the whole city" (98) or when he observes that "At the end of the street—a placid abyss where the naked cobblestones are unevenly rounded" (136). Such perceptions as these confirm the aptness of Washington Dener dos Santos Cunha's remark that "the 'real' Lisbon, which is rational and regular, a model

18th century city, the pride of the Marquis of Pombal, a man who had a passion for geometrical forms, becomes, from the point of view of Pessoa/Soares, a text in the form of an *open pit*" (78; my emphasis).

In his essay entitled "Paysages de Fernando Pessoa," Robert Bréchon points to another form of reciprocity between the greater and the lesser—in this case between the indeterminate space of the natural world and the circumscribed space of the city that it contains—when he describes Soares as a "pedestrian of Lisbon" who observes its "*urban landscapes*, skies, clouds, river, and scenes of street life" (100; my emphasis). Soares seems to corroborate Bréchon's metaphor when he says that he would like the city "twice over if I were in the country (378), and, after telling us that he cares for none of the things that are specifically urban or modern about the city—including motor vehicles, telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, or radios—he concludes with a rhapsodic tribute to a highly pastoral version of Lisbon:

None of that interests me, none of it appeals. But I love the Tagus because of the big city along its shore. I delight in the sky because I see it from the fourth floor on a downtown street. Nothing nature or the country can give me compares with the *jagged majesty* of the tranquil, moonlit city as seen from Graça or [Sao] Pedro de Alcântara. There are no flowers for me like the *variegated colouring* of Lisbon on a sunny day. (50; my emphasis)

Whereas in *Lisbon*, the natural world is restricted to the noteworthy gardens that one finds in various parts of the city, in *The Book*, it infiltrates the city as a whole, as when Soares remarks that "I hear the city's first sounds of life rising like flood-waters from that vague place down below, where the streets made by God run this way and that" (358). The sun itself seems to radiate from within Lisbon when he describes the dawn, which "seems to come not from the sun but from the city itself, as if the sunlight emanated from the walls and rooftops" (328). Thanks to the principle of reciprocity, the hills that *encircle* Lisbon suddenly appear *within* the city when Soares observes the city's "jagged majesty, to which we may add such images as "the frozen avalanche of overlapping rooftops" (357) and "the city's uneven, mountainous mass" (68). In Text 83, the flow of the crowd in a downtown square contributes to this effect when it "passes by, changes course, forms pools, divides into streams, converges into brooks" (79).

This alogical blurring of the distinction between the natural world and the city—whereby gardens expand to "become" the city and the encircling hills as well as the distant sun contract to fit within the confines of the city—is paralleled by Soares's frequent crossings of the boundary between nature and the visual arts. The techniques of painting, for example, which one expects to be confined within the circumscribed space of the painting itself, expand to "contain" the natural world at the same time that nature is described in such a way that it appears to contract to the dimensions of a painting. As Françoise Laye has aptly commented, Soares looks upon Lisbon "like an impressionist painter who never tires of detailing its thousand and one nuances, which are like an immense prism that refracts the various lights of 'his' city" (42). It is as though he has—in his own, diffident and unassuming, way—joined the ranks of the Portuguese painters whose "real" paintings are housed in the city's art museum. We see Soares exercising his own artistry when he describes the impression made by a slowly dissipating fog:

Since early morning and against the solar custom of this bright city, the fog had wrapped a weightless mantle (which the sun slowly gilded) around the rows of houses, the cancelled open spaces, and the shifting heights of land and of buildings. But as the hours advanced towards midday, the gentle mist began to unravel until, with breaths like flapping shadows of veils, it expired altogether. By ten o'clock, the tenuous blueing of the sky was the only evidence that there had been fog (176).

In the fragment that follows this one, the impression created by the approach of autumn leads to a more internalized sensation:

It's still not autumn, there's still no yellow of fallen leaves in the air, still none of the damp sadness that marks the weather when it's on its way to becoming winter. But there is a hint of expected sadness—a sorrow dressed for the journey—in our hazy awareness of colours being smattered, of the wind's different sound, of that ancient stillness which spreads in the falling night across the ineluctable presence of the universe. (177)

Soares further dissolves the boundary between a natural scene and a painting when, in two fragments in which the real urban details are indicated only by an initial ellipsis, he shifts to an *imaginary* description of them in painterly terms. In one of these passages, the rooftops of Lisbon, already noted because of their resemblance to avalanches, are then seen from an impressionistic perspective: " . . . on the frozen avalanche

of overlapping rooftops it is a greyish white, damply tarnished by a lifeless brown" (357). In the other, pattern and color once again come to the fore: " . . . the whole ensemble is staggered in diverse clusters of darkness, outlined on one side by white, and dappled with blue shades of cold nacre" (357).

We notice, too, Soares's readiness to use the word "landscape" ambiguously to refer both to the surrounding natural world and to a type of painting:

Whatever it was, the entire landscape was cloaked by a hazy uneasiness made of forgetfulness and attenuation . . . It was hard to tell if the sky was filled with clouds or fog. It was all a torpid haze that was coloured here and there, a greyness with just a hint of yellow, except where it had dissolved into a false pink or had bluely stagnated, though this blue may have been the sky showing through rather than another blue overlaying it (318).

In Text 189, Soares similarly describes a rainy day in a way that may lead us to wonder if this is an actual scene or an impressionist painting: "The air is a veiled yellow, like a pale yellow seen through a dirty white. There's scarcely any yellow in the grey air, but the paleness of the grey has a yellow in its sadness" (166). This painterly metaphor returns in Text 241, entitled "Triangular Dream," in which his description of a light that "had become extremely sluggish yellow, a yellow that was filthy white" and a scene in which "the distance between things had increased" leads him to conclude that "in the *composition* of the space itself, a different interrelationship of something like planes had changed and fragmented the way that sounds, lights and colours use space" (208; my emphasis).

Given Pessoa's fondness for triadic patterns, which we noted in our introduction, it is not surprising that the axiomatic reciprocities between apex and the indeterminate base that proliferate throughout *The Book* tend to congregate around *three* specific locales: the office in which he works, the fourth-floor rented room to which he returns in the evening, and the Rua dos Douradores on which both are situated. Thanks to a reversal to which we have become accustomed, Soares's confinement within a part of Lisbon that was too lacking in distinction to have entered the cicerone's field of vision gives him access to boundless spaces to which his counterpart in *Lisbon* had not thought to direct our attention.

Robert Bréchon has aptly noted, in this respect, that the Lisbon of *The Book*, unlike the city that we find in Pessoa's guide book, is limited almost exclusively to the part of the city that borders the Tagus River:

After his final return from South Africa in 1905, when he was seventeen, Pessoa never again traveled. He hardly ever left Lisbon; and we could even say that he spent the entire rest of his life—that is to say, the next thirty years—within a rather limited space that can be covered by foot. The Sao Carlos Square, where he was born, and the Saint Louis des Français Hospital, where he died, are scarcely a kilometer from each other. The lower city (la Baixa), where he worked is about three kilometers from the Campo de Ourique, where he lived from 1920 until his death. ("Paysages" 100)

Resorting to a metaphor that is especially appropriate, given that Soares works for a textile company, Bréchon refers to the setting for Pessoa's own endless perambulations as a "narrow strip of urban fabric."

The part of this "narrow strip" represented by the Rua dos Douradores becomes even narrower when Soares describes its utter banality:

Yes, I distinctly see—with the clarity of reason when it flashes in the blackness of life and isolates the objects around us that make it up—all that is shoddy, worn-out, neglected and spurious in this street called Douradores which is my entire life: this office that's sordid down to the marrow of its employees, this monthly rented room where nothing transpires but a dead man's life, this corner grocery whose owner I know in the way people know each other, these young men at the door of the old tavern, this toilsome uselessness of the unchanging days, these same characters repeating the same old lines, like a drama consisting only of secrecy, and with the scenery turned inside out . . . (165)

In a later passage, he alludes again to the tavern, while adding such additionally unremarkable details as the "piled-up crates" that clutter the street and the "steady sound of the shoemaker's hammer" (313). At the same time, however, this *narrowing* of the street on which he lives and works coexists—in obedience to the principle of reversal between the lesser and the greater—with its limitless *widening*: "But there is also the universe of the Rua Douradores. Here God also grants that the enigma of life knows no bounds . . . The sunsets, to be sure, are somewhere else. But even from this fourth-floor room that looks out over the city, it's possible to contemplate infinity. An infinity with warehouses below, it's true, but with stars up above" (382).

Moving indoors to the even more restricted space of his office, Soares finds many opportunities that allow him to create co-presences formed by the reciprocity between enclosed and open spaces. His daydreaming in the midst of his office routine begins with commonplace escapist images which he then extrapolates to ever more indeterminate visions: “My days at the office, where I always do the very same dull and useless work, are punctuated by visions of me escaping, by dreamed remnants of far-away islands, by feasts in the promenades of parks from other eras, by other landscapes, other feelings, another I” (153). At times, it is the window of his office that becomes the apex from which he leaps into the indeterminate: “It’s midday in the deserted office, and I lean out of the balcony windows overlooking the street down below . . . My spirit abandons the material dimension. I investigate with my imagination. The people passing by on the street are always the same ones who passed by a while ago, always a group of floating figures, patches of motion, uncertain voices, things that pass by and never quite happen” (127).

At other times, it is the narrowly focused attention required by his monotonous, routine work that transports him to less bounded spaces: “all of a sudden, across the huge columned sheet of my numerary destiny, the old house of my elderly aunts, shut off from the world, shelters the drowsy ten o’clock tea, and the kerosene lamp of my lost childhood, glowing only on the linen-covered table, blinds me to the sight of Moreira, illuminated by black electricity infinities away from me” (35–6). In one especially poetic moment, the unusual name of a particular fabric provides Soares with a quasi-Proustian experience that remains, nonetheless, firmly anchored in the routine activity that provokes it: “In the very act of entering the name of an unfamiliar cloth, the doors of the Indus and of Samarkand open up, and Persian poetry (which is from yet another place), with its quatrains whose third lines don’t rhyme, is a distant anchor for me in my disquiet. But I make no mistake: I write, I add, and the bookkeeping goes on, performed as usual by an employee of this office” (16).

The restricted space of Soares’s fourth-floor rented room, like the Rua dos Douradores and his office, provides him—thanks to a window that serves as his gateway to the infinite—with boundless perspectives. It is, in effect, his alternative to the “pedestal of glory” on which the statue of the Marquês de Pombal may be observed “contemplating his formidable work” (*Lisbon* 22) and the hierarchical order that it represents. At times, this window is merely an aperture that opens upon the street, as when he remarks on the “open coolness” of his window” (31), remembers feeling the rain when he opened it (359), or hears on the other side of it “the chance sound of a late-night car” (207). More often, however, it serves as a portal through which Soares brings the restricted space of his room into contact—perhaps even into union—with the infinite. As Washington Dener dos Santos has observed, “The Lisbon of *The Book* is constructed around the window of Soares’s room from which he conducts a kind of ‘flânerie’” (76). He also suggests—in a metaphor that appropriately combines the aquatic with the labyrinthian—that the window serves as a canal that connects the city itself with Soares’s interior labyrinths. Soares’s window replaces, in effect, the dock along the Tagus from which Alvaro de Campos launches himself in *The Maritime Ode* upon a nautical journey that, like Soares’s, is an entirely virtual one.

In a metaphor that recalls dos Santos’s observation about its connecting him to his “interior labyrinths,” Soares associates his window with the experience of aimless wandering: “And from the window that looks on to myself I contemplate in awe the deep-red sunsets, the wispy twilights of my sorrows without cause, where the dangers, burdens, and failures of my innate incapacity for existing march by in processions of my aimlessness” (332). A slight shift from window to balcony produces the image of a sea voyage: “Even I am sleeping, although my body is leaning over the balcony as over the rail of a ship sailing past an unfamiliar landscape . . . [a rail] which no one has ever cleaned, unaware that one day, if only for a moment, it would have to serve as a deck rail (where there could logically be no dust) of a ship on an infinite sightseeing cruise” (360).

In his own “remaking” of Lisbon following the earthquake of 1755, the Marquess of Pombal drew his inspiration from the plan devised by Christopher Wren for the rebuilding of London after the fire of 1666, but which had been rejected a century earlier by the Londoners themselves because it was such a radical, “modernized” departure from the city that they had known. As Richard Hamblyn has pointed out, Pombal rejected more moderate proposals for the reconstruction of Lisbon “in favour of the more radical raze and rebuild approach, of the kind that Christopher Wren had proposed for London in the wake of the fire, but

which had been overruled in favour of preserving existing streets and property lines . . . Lisbon's rectilinear street plan, which began to be laid out in the early 1760s, owed much of its *spatial grammar* to the century-old London blueprint" (110; my emphasis).

Pombal himself was in the ideal position of a ruler who did not need anyone's approval to forge ahead with his own, aggressively modernizing vision of the "new" Lisbon. He was thus able to create out of its ruins (a resonant word in *The Book*, whose alogical "spatial grammar" closely resembles the one that we find in "The Library of Babel") left by the earthquake a city in which what had been at the center—its religious and aristocratic institutions—is pushed out to the margins and what had been peripheral—its secular and mercantile activity—was promoted to the center. As John R. Mullin tells us, the six plans that were seriously considered "were created with the intent of furthering Pombal's goal of creating a city that reflected new values. The city was to reflect a society in which the citizen, the merchant and the bureaucrat took precedence over the crown, church and nobility. The results were indeed a new Lisbon" (157).

We may surmise that Pombal would have agreed with Soares's assertion that "the only true art is that of construction" (214). With this principle as their common starting point, however, each of them remade Lisbon as a paradise based on equally radical but fundamentally contrasting models. Pombal's creation of a city whose splendor would be celebrated centuries later by Pessoa's cicerone—is repeated in a highly original way by Soares, who subjects it to an equally proprietary process of reconstruction, but one that evokes, not the rise of bourgeois rationality—and the creation of new forms of hierarchy—but the emergence of uncanny reciprocities.

Chapter Two: A Show without a Plot

" . . . life is simply an external picture that includes me and that I look at, like a show without a plot . . . "

WE ARE OFTEN reminded throughout *The Book of Disquiet* of Bernardo Soares's inclination to imbue his self-declared "factless autobiography" with tragic resonances. At times, his resort to this characterization may seem exaggerated, as when he describes the departure of the office boy as "today's vague tragedy" (241). Perhaps it becomes somewhat more plausible when he reflects that "One of the soul's great tragedies is to execute work and then realize, once it's finished, that it's not any good. The tragedy is especially great when one realizes that the work is the best he could have done" (200). He moves closer to the more specifically theatrical meaning of tragedy when, after reviewing the overall insignificance of his life—in which, rather than dying, he merely "terminates, wilts, devegetates"—he suspects that "not even this tragedy of negation can be staged to applause" (44). The possibility that Soares may have a specifically Greek tragedy in mind is suggested by the dozens of allusions to fate and destiny that appear throughout *The Book*. He tells us, for example that "My life's central tragedy is, like all tragedies, an irony of Fate" (164), an idea that appears as well in his references to "the iron hand of an abstract Fate" (158), to fate as "the intellectual monster that is everything" (112), and to his destiny as "having pursued me like a malevolent creature" (169).

The Book is not, to be sure, a tragedy as understood by Aristotle, who defines it in his *Poetics* as "an imitation of a noble and *complete* action, having the proper magnitude" (11; my emphasis). After observing that a tragedy has "six parts in accordance with which, as a genre, it achieves its particular quality: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and melody" (12), he confers primacy of plot when he stipulates that "the most important of these parts is the arrangement of incidents" (12). In an argument whose relevance to our discussion of the disappearance of plot and its replacement by "show" in *The Book* will become clear, he contrasts the plot with "spectacle," of which he says that it "attracts our attention but is the least artistic and least essential part of the art of poetry" (14). In his discussion of the contribution of each of its phases to the plot as whole, Aristotle insists that they must be arranged in a sequence that is both logical and chronological. After explaining that completeness requires a beginning, a middle and an end, he then explains the relationship of each of these parts to the plot as a whole:

By a 'beginning' I mean that which is itself not, by necessity, after anything else but after which something naturally is or develops. By an 'end' I mean exactly the opposite: that which is necessarily after something else, either necessarily or customarily, but after which there is nothing else. By a 'middle' I mean that which is itself after something else and which has something after it. The beginning does not result of necessity from something previous to it but something will necessarily follow from it; the middle has both something before and something after it; the end, which is produced by what preceded it, is followed by nothing. (14)

He concludes his analysis with an observation that highlights the distinction between classical tragedy and *The Book*: "It is necessary, therefore, that well-constructed plots not begin by chance, anywhere, nor end anywhere, but that they conform to the distinctions that have been made above" (14).

Pessoa's rejection of Aristotle's championing of plot is perhaps most apparent in his defense of what he calls "static theater":

I call it static theater when action does not constitute the dramatic plot, that is to say, when characters not only do not act—because they neither move around nor talk about moving—but do not even have feelings that might lead to an action; in short, there is no conflict and, strictly speaking, no plot. It will be said that this is not theater. But I think it is, for it is my belief that the theater has a tendency toward being simply lyric theater in which plot derives neither from action nor the movements and consequences of action—but, much more comprehensively, reveals the soul through exchanges of words and creation of situation . . . It is possible to reveal souls without action. It is possible to create situations of inertia, moments of soul without doors or windows to reality. (qtd. Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa* 65)

Static theater is well exemplified by Pessoa's play *The Mariner*, in which a "situation of inertia" is obviously present in the coffin which contains the corpse of "a maiden in white." A parallel form of inertia is conveyed by the immobile geometry of the setting, which includes "a room in an ancient castle and that appears to be round" in whose precise center the coffin has been placed; four candles, each of which is placed at a corner of the coffin; a vertically rectangular figure in the form of a "tall and narrow window" that echoes the horizontally rectangular form of the coffin; "two distant mountains" between which we see "a small patch of

ocean;" and the triangular and chiastic positioning of the three sisters, two of whom are seated on either side of the window while the third sits facing it.

"The moments of soul" implied by these geometrical figures that mimic the immobility of the corpse of the maiden prepare us for the "static drama" of the play itself, which will remind us, not of the linear dramatic action of a Greek tragedy, but of the echoing pattern of its choral odes (precisely the "spectacle" that Aristotle had characterized as "the least essential" of its elements). Pessoa sets the triangular pattern formed by the three sisters in "static motion," as it were, by having them engage in a conversation that shifts among them in a way that tends to turn back upon itself. In this way, their carefully organized exchanges offer us in embryonic form the "revolving triads" that, as we noted in our introduction, proliferate in *The Book*. The first of the eight sections of their ode (which are separated from each other by a pause) begins with the first sister announcing that "the hour hasn't struck yet," to which the second sister counters that "We couldn't have heard it. There are no clocks around. It should be morning before long," which elicits from the third sister the rejoinder that "No – the horizon is black."

A second phase of their conversation is then initiated by the first sister's suggesting that they should "pass the time by telling stories of what we've been" which elicits from the second the objection that "No, let's not talk about that. And besides have we been anything?" to which the first replies that "in any case it's always beautiful to talk about the past." Each of the subsequent sections is generated by the various combinations made possible by this three-part chorus, whose number of speakers allows Pessoa (as merely two would not have) to create both linear and circular patterns which themselves combine to produce the effect of "static movement." As we shall eventually see, this strategy of abandoning linear plot and replacing it with two forms of inertia—one associated with death, the other with aesthetic patterns that mimic it—provides an invaluable key to our understanding of what we will eventually call the "double-plot" of *The Book*.

Soares implicitly suggests the applicability of the concept of static theater to his "unwritten novel" when he characterizes life itself as "a show without a plot (169), an idea that reappears in such additional observations—all of which attribute a prominent role to the "spectacle" that Aristotle had so preemptively dismissed—as "We're something that goes on during the show's intermission" (63), "We live an intermission with band music" (83), and we "cross the stage as walk-ons who don't speak" (147). His non-Aristotelian dismissal of action, which is plainly on display throughout *The Book*, comes especially to the fore when he announces that "I cultivate hatred of action like a greenhouse flower" (99), likens humanitarian action to "rubbish dumped out of a window right on top of me" (143), refers dismissively to men of action as "involuntary slaves" (145), affirms that "to act with others is a metaphysically morbid impulse" (184), and, resorting to an intriguing nuance, describes himself as "venturing without acting" (179).

Soares further marginalizes the organized action of a conventionally plotted novel by confining it largely to the business transactions conducted by his boss Vasques: "Today my boss, Senhor Vasques, closed a business deal that brought a sick man and his family to his ruin. As he negotiated the deal he completely forgot that this man existed, except as the opposing commercial party" (258). One can easily imagine examples of what a "real" novelist would have made of such materials. Soares, however, allows Vasques only perfunctory appearances in his narrative. Similarly, while references to Caesar and the Argonauts remind us of conquests carried out on a much larger and more "noble" scale than what Vasques achieves, they are never accorded more than passing mention in *The Book*.

Soares tends to replace noble as well as completed forms of action with what, in describing a banal fist-fight on the street, he calls "a modest apocalypse" (153), which clearly possesses neither the magnitude nor the completeness prescribed by Aristotle. In the "show without a plot" to which such apocalypses do contribute, we observe the presence of an uncanny boundlessness in which the hierarchical distinction between noble and banal actions is replaced by the reciprocity between the trivial and the immense. Thus, "a nearby truck produces a thundering sound" (102), literal thunder evokes the apocalypse (117), and the restaurant waiter's "modest" remark to the effect that he hopes that Soares, who is apparently ill, will feel better leads to the apocalyptic response that "the trumpet blast of this simple phrase relieved my soul like a sudden wind clearing the sky of clouds" (27). In such a world, even something as routine as the end of a rainstorm can produce vastly disproportionate effects:

After the last drops of rain began to fall more slowly from the rooftops and the sky's blue began to spread

over the street's paving-stones, then the vehicles sang a different song, louder and happier, and windows could be heard opening up to the no longer forgetful sun. From the narrow street at the end of the next block came the loud invitation of the first seller of lottery tickets, and nails being nailed into crates in the shop opposite reverberated in the limpid space. (31)

To this, we may add Soares's description of another rainstorm, which he characteristically expands into a vision in which "a glass dome shatters on high into large bits" (103), and his account of the routine events that he observes on a Sunday morning in an unnamed church that concludes with his comparing them—in a way that, once again, transforms the trivial and the immense into reciprocities—to "a slumber of mysteries and battlements" (128).

We notice yet another departure from Aristotle in the proliferation throughout *The Book* of aimless *movements* that are not parts of a completed *action*. These appear, for example, in passages that describe Soares's wanderings as well as in descriptions of pedestrians that liken their convergings and divergings to the movement of water in a stream (79). Text 463 concludes with a superb passage in which life itself, rather than being fitted to the constraining requirements of a plot, is described as passing by "like a stream flowing silently under forgotten trees" (381) and in which the soul is likewise invited to undertake a plotless journey: "Go uselessly by, pointlessly by, consciousness conscious of nothing, a hazy flash in the distance amid clearings in the leaves, coming from and going to we don't know where! Go, go, and let me forget!" (381).

This image of the purposeless journeying of the soul reappears when Soares describes moments when "I launch once more like a paper boat onto the waters of sleep, and once more I return to the fading illusion that cuddles my hazy consciousness of the morning now emerging amid the sounds of the vegetable carts" (103). At another, he describes his passage through life in terms of a perfectly volitionless waiting that concludes in a way that is entirely lacking in the reversal and recognition that Aristotle associated with plot: "I see life as a roadside inn where I have to stay until the coach from the abyss pulls up . . . I'm sitting at the door, feasting my eyes and ears on the colours and sounds of the landscape, and I softly sing—for myself alone—wispy songs I compose while waiting" (12–13).

Soares's predilection for inertia firmly, as well as amusingly, asserts itself whenever he finds himself seated in a moving train or tram. At such moments, stasis, which applies literally to his sitting position, infiltrates movement itself. Thus, although he looked forward to a business trip to Cascais, he discovers that "on actually going out there, I lost myself in abstract contemplations, seeing but not seeing the riverscapes I'd looked forward to seeing, while on the way back I lost myself in mentally nailing down those sensations" (23). Similarly, in Text 298, he describes a ride on a tram in which he abolishes any sense of sequential movement by focusing his attention entirely on the way that his immediate sensations lead to a boundless perception:

I'm riding on a tram and, as usual, am closely observing all the details of the people around me. For me, these details are like things, voices, phrases [. . .] I see beyond all this to the private lives of those who live their social existence in these factories and offices. The whole world opens up before my eyes merely because in front of me—on the nape of a dark skinned neck whose other side has I don't know what face—I see a regularly irregular dark-green embroidery on a light-green dress. I get off the tram dazed and exhausted. I've just lived all of life. (253)

In the text that immediately follows, he similarly describes the brief train ride from Lisbon to Cascas as a "vast journey" because, even though "it all happens in a moment," his capacity "for simultaneously feeling various and sundry sensations," leads him to compress into this moment the lives of all the inhabitants of all the houses that pass by (254).

One of the more memorable allusions to Soares's "motionless journey" appears in Text 45, in which, imagining a state of perfect repose and contentment, he begins by describing it in terms of inertia: "To goldenly stagnate in the sun, like a murky pond surrounded by flowers." A moment later, however, he shifts to a metaphor that foregrounds movement: "To be in the whirl of the worlds like dust of flowers, sailing through the afternoon air on an unknown wind and falling wherever it falls, lost among larger things" (46). A similar effect is achieved when he tells us that "I promenade my destiny that goes forward though I don't go anywhere" (44). A particularly charming allusion to the idea that one can travel without ever going anywhere occurs when Soares imagines himself as "a child sailing paper boats in a cistern on the farm" (77). He enlists the image of the road to express his yearning for a "static journey" once again when he says: "If only we could

have a road connecting a place no one ever leaves from to a place where no one goes!" He then dreams of a road that, having no beginning or end, "would sublimely remain as only the middle stretch of a road" (278).

Soares likewise creates the effect of a "motionless journey" by writing sentences whose forward movement forms circular patterns. In Text 1, for example, he proposes three parallel phrases that describe the situation of those who, like himself, are unable to live: "as *impassive* to the solemnity of any and all worlds, *indifferent* to the divine, and *disdainers* of what is human (11; my emphasis). In this case, we notice the nearly synonymous terms that form the triad, with an asymmetry produced by the shift from predicate adjectives in the first two terms to a predicate noun in the third. Text 127 begins with two series of negations that circle around a first-person pronoun: "I don't get indignant [. . .] I'm not resigned [. . .] I don't hold my peace [. . .] I'm neither strong, nor noble, nor great" (116). A similar effect is achieved with a third-person pronoun as the apex from which three synonymous verbs radiate: "Whoever lives like me doesn't die: he terminates, wilts, devegetates" (44). A description of his spiritual stagnation is evoked by three terms with similar meanings although their syntax is different: "It's like being intoxicated with inertia [. . .] It's a sickness with no hope of recovery. It's a lively death" (45). A succession of prepositional phrases that modify the same noun creates, in its turn, the effect of moving while remaining motionless: "Erudition of acquired knowledge . . . erudition of understanding . . . erudition of sensibility" (122). Yet another syntactical form is called into service when Soares assembles a sequence of direct objects composed of adjectives that he transforms into substantives: "I pity those who dream the probable, the reasonable and the accessible" (127).

At other times, the circular movement of these triads gives way to a more spiraling effect, which reminds us of Soares's definition of a spiral as "a potential circle that winds round as it rises, without ever completing itself" and, more concretely as "a snake without a snake, vertically wound around nothing" (107). This occurs, for example, when, in describing himself in terms of three roles that he plays, he "rises" from a literal statement, first, to a conventional metaphor and then to an ineffable image: "I will always be, in verse or prose, *an office employee*. I will always be, with or without mysticism, local and submissive, *a servant of my feelings* and the moments when they occur. I will always be, under the large blue canopy of the silent sky, *a pageboy in an unintelligible rite*" (147-8; my emphasis). We experience a similar effect when Soares describes the rising wind in terms of a series of terms whose resemblance we intuitively grasp even though the meaning of each of the terms, taken separately, is ungraspable: "like the voice of a vacuum, a sucking of space into a hole, an absence in the air's silence" (52).

Text 175, in which Soares describes the misfortune of the generation into which he was born, contains an especially numerous and varied series of triads. He characterizes the world that they inherited as offering "no security in the religious sphere, no guidance in the moral sphere, and no tranquility in the political sphere." As a result, he and his contemporaries were "born into the midst of metaphysical anguish, moral anxiety and political disquiet." The biblical criticism of the previous generation had reduced the Bible to "a doubtful heap of myths, legends, and mere literature." Soares adds to this a triad of things that the previous generation bequeathed or did not bequeath, first, "the impossibility of being Christians" but not "an acceptance of the impossibility"; second, "disbelief in established moral codes" but not "an indifference to morality and the rules for peaceful human coexistence"; third, "the thorny problem of politics" but not indifference "about how to solve it" (156–7). As he moves towards the conclusion of this passage, Soares circles three sentences around the variously formulated idea of destruction: "Our fathers blithely wreaked destruction, for they lived in a time that was still informed by the solidity of the past. The very thing that destroyed was what gave strength to society and enabled them to destroy without noticing that the building was cracking. We inherited the destruction and its aftermath" (157). In the final paragraph, Soares rounds out this overview of human history (which is also a virtuoso display of "static movement") by asserting that "today the world belongs only to the stupid, the insensitive and the agitated" and that "today the right to live and triumph is awarded on virtually the same basis as admission into an insane asylum: an inability to think, amorality and nervous excitability" (156–7).

We also notice that—along with shaping both physical and verbal forms of movement into triadic patterns based on the co-presence of movement and stasis—Soares creates parallel reciprocities on the level of the larger structures of *The Book* by replacing the three phases of a plot constructed according to Aristotle's requirement of order and magnitude with the three subjective activities of feeling, dreaming, and thinking

that (to recall the inverted pyramid metaphor) both converge at the "apex" that is Bernardo Soares himself and radiate outwards from him in the direction of an "indeterminate base." Each of these three activities—which replace the three phases of a unified dramatic action as prescribed by Aristotle with three randomly occurring experiential "episodes"—offers Soares distinct yet overlapping ways of abolishing chronological order in his "show without a plot." We notice, too, that each of them—rather than simply being parts of the completed whole that Aristotle stipulated—tends to become, each in its own turn, a "whole" unto itself. At any moment, feeling, dreaming, and thinking may become, in an entirely random and (recalling Aristotle's dismissive term) "episodic" way, not merely a partial feature, but the whole of Soares's inner life.

In an essay entitled "Sensationism," Pessoa, speaking in his own name, affirms the boundlessness of feeling: "Feeling opens the doors of the prison where thought confines the soul" (*Selected Prose* 66) and "the senses are divine because they are our relationship with the universe, and our relationship with the universe is God" (67). The idea that feeling is the path to "greater completeness" rather than merely a partial activity appears as well in his contention that "nothing exists outside our sensations," an claim that he further expounds when he argues that "all that we truly possess are our own sensations; it is in them, rather than in what they sense, that we must base our life's reality" (98).

Throughout *The Book*, this championing of momentary feelings as a portal to the infinite and the eternal leads to numerous indefinitely extended impressions having Soares as their origin. These include his claim that he enjoys "the permanent novelty of free, uninhibited sensation" (70), which is perfectly illustrated by his description of a "Brief dark shadow of a downtown tree, light sound of water falling into the sad pool, green of the trimmed lawn—public garden shortly before twilight" which leads to the indefinite perception (which also reverses the logical relationship between part and whole) that "you are in this moment the whole universe for me, for you are the full content of my sensation" (97). In another passage, the creaking wheels of a carriage resonate within the purely virtual ensemble formed—not by other ambient sounds that are really there—but by "the depths of the cars' noisy silences" (129). In yet another passage, he explicitly applies the word "ensemble" to a relationship between incident and completed action that Aristotle would surely not have found acceptable: "Yes, anything that comes from the whole ensemble is enough to console me: a ray of sunlight that eternally enters the dead office, a vendor's cry that flits up to the window of my room, the existence of people, the fact that there are climates in changes in weather, the world's astonishing objectivity . . . " (364). We wonder, as we read this passage, to what possible form of "completion" these particular details could belong. The "whole ensemble" is clearly indeterminate, like the base of Soares's inverted pyramid.

The indeterminateness as well as the greater completeness of dreaming emerges, in its turn, in Soares's affirmation that "I see dreamed landscapes as plainly as real ones. If I lean out over my dreams, I'm leaning out over something. If I see life go by, my dream is of something" (93). He repeats this idea at greater length in Text 92, which begins "I've never done anything but dream. This, and this alone, has been the meaning of my life. My only real concern has been my inner life. My worst sorrows have evaporated when I've opened the window on to the street of my dreams and forgotten myself in what I saw there" (88). He likewise praises daydreamers who dream the impossible and whose reveries are like the soul's music, lulling them and meaning nothing" (127). Boundlessness joins with the momentary when Soares remarks, after describing "an immense peace [. . .] coldly present in the abstract fall air," observes that "all this is a vision that vanishes as soon as it occurs, a winged interlude between nothing and nothing that takes place on high, in shades of sky and grief, diffuse and indefinite" (196). The boundless striving inherent to his dreaming is also foregrounded by his announced goal, which is to "create in myself a nation with its own politics, parties and revolutions, and to be all of it, everything to be God in the real pantheism of this people-I, to be the substance and movement of their bodies and their souls, of the very ground they tread and the acts they perform! To be everything, to be them and not them!" (140). This complementarity between the boundless imperialism of dreaming and the radical devaluation of action that it requires emerges in Soares's claim that "inaction makes up for everything. Not acting gives us everything. To imagine is everything, as long as it doesn't tend towards action. No one can be king of the world except in dreams. And everyone of us who really knows himself wants to be king of the world" (145). The dominion of dreaming over any activity undertaken in the so-called real world is further suggested by Soares's dismissal of reality as merely an "episode of the imagination"

(195).

Thinking is the third alternative to action that we find in *The Book*; however—as was true with feeling and imagining—its random occurrences, which are both momentary and boundless, eschew any notion of chronological progression. Soares foregrounds the momentariness of thinking when he alludes to "this sudden awareness of my true being" (40), his "sudden awareness of my humiliation among real people" (265), his realization "in an inner flash that I'm no one" (227), and the insight that he achieves when reason "flashes in the blackness of life" (165). The "imperialism" of his thoughts, their tendency to subjugate everything to their sway, emerges in multiple passages in which he suggests that thinking is superior to sensations or dreaming (whose absolute value is, nonetheless, contradictorily affirmed in other passages)—as though thinking has even "greater completion." Thus, he speaks of "flashes of awareness that we live an illusion" and dismisses his dreams as "a stupid shelter, like an umbrella against lightning" (78) and "those abominations from the soul's sewers" (208). Sensations, in their turn, are revealed by thinking to be nothing more than "slumbers that fill up our mind like a fog" (76).

The co-presence of the momentary and the boundless that we observe with respect to the three "episodes" of feeling, observing, and thinking are paralleled throughout *The Book* by the reciprocity between the *inanimate state* in which Soares's "lively death" will eventuate and the *static movement* from which he creates his "show without a plot." What Soares says of art—that it "frees us, illusorily, from the squalor of being" (234) and that "it takes us away from here" (300)—is, of course, equally true of death. His praise of art as "a substitute for acting or living" (199) parallels his appreciation of death as "a liberation from life" (243) and as a state in which "man is no longer a slave" (244).

In the text entitled "Funeral March for Ludwig II, King of Bavaria," Death describes her manifold yet debilitating pleasures: "Come to my affection, which never changes, and to my love, which has no end! [. . .] Against my breast you won't even feel the love that prompted you to come and seek it [. . .] I will be your maternal wife, the twin sister you've at long last recovered" (414). This both resembles and differs from the invocation to the "Madonna of inner silences," whom he associates with aesthetic experience: "The substance of your flesh isn't spiritual, it's spirituality. You are the woman before the Fall, still a sculpture made from that clay that□ paradise [. . .] You alone are pure, Lady of Dreams, whom I can conceive as a lover without conceiving any stain, for you are unreal. I can conceive of you as a mother and adore you, for you were never defiled by the horror of being fertilized or the horror of giving birth" (439). The Madonna then becomes the object of a threefold litany in which she is invoked as "the Eternal day [. . .] the Invisible Twilight [. . .] the Absolute Night" (440).

Death and art conjoin once again when Soares observes that "a statue is a dead body, chiseled to capture death in incorruptible matter" (158) and characterizes statues, paintings, and stained-glass windows as "these special universes marked by death and immobility" (344). One of the most powerful of these passages appears in Text 312, which begins with what appears to be the straightforward expression of a death wish (complete with a likely allusion to Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy), which then modulates into the longing to exist in some higher dimension of life:

To cease, to sleep, to replace this intermittent consciousness with better, melancholy things, whispered in secret to someone who doesn't know me! . . . To cease, to end at last, but surviving as something else: the page of a book, a tuft of disheveled hair, the quiver of the creeping plant next to a half-open window, the irrelevant footsteps in the gravel of the bend, the last smoke to rise from the village going to sleep, the wagoner's whip left on the early morning roadside . . . Absurdity, confusion, oblivion—everything that isn't life. (33–4)

This concluding catalogue of the whirl of disparate things that Soares imagines himself becoming makes us aware that what began as melancholic longing for death has modulated into a vital or multiform expression of static movement.

Soares also makes us aware of the proximity of timeless death to its counterpart in equally timeless art when he remarks that "We all know that we die; we all feel that we won't die. It's not just a desire or hope that brings us this shadowy intuition that death is a misunderstanding; it's a visceral logic that rejects . . . " (388). The knowledge that we will die is continuously present in each phase of Soares's life whether as memories, as the experience of life itself in terms of monotony or tedium, or as premonitions of his own eventual death.

The Book abounds in explicit reminders of death, the least surprising of which is the death of Soares's barber (391).

A less direct reminder, which suggests his heightened susceptibility to thoughts of his own eventual extinction, appears when he reflects that "each new autumn is closer to the last autumn we'll have, and the same is true of spring or summer; but autumn, by its nature, reminds us that things will end" (177). Such thoughts can also be provoked in the absence of any identifiable cause: "Sometimes I feel, I'm not sure why, a touch of foretold death" (41). Perhaps the most poignant of these reminders occurs when Soares transforms various signs of daily *life* into a cluster of *memento mori*:

The day will come when I see no more of this, when I'll be survived by the bananas lining the pavement, by the voices of the shrewd saleswoman, and by the daily papers that the boy has set out on the opposite corner of the street. I'm well aware that the bananas will be others, that the saleswomen will be others, and that the newspapers will show—to those who bend down to look at them—a different date from today's. But they, because they don't live, endure, although as others. I, because I live, pass on, although the same. (151)

When death itself is not paramount in Soares's thoughts, it is often replaced by tedium, which he credits with inducing in him a weariness so pervasive that it can arise even from actions that he does *not* perform: "In my present tedium there is no rest, no nobility, and no well-being against which to feel unwell: there's a vast effacement of every act I do, rather than a potential weariness from acts I'll never do" (365). Having described tedium as "possession by a negative demon" (229), he later elaborates on the idea of its being a kind of jail keeper that confines him to a prison whose walls are boundless: "tedium is the physical sensation of chaos, a chaos that is everything. The bored, the uncomfortable and the weary feel like prisoners in a narrow cell. Those who abhor the narrowness of life itself feel shackled inside a large cell. But those who suffer tedium feel imprisoned in the worthless freedom of an infinite cell." He concludes that, although the walls of the narrow cell in which the merely bored, uncomfortable, and weary are confined may eventually collapse, "the walls of the infinite cell cannot crumble and bury us, because they don't exist; nor can we be revived by the pain of shackles that no one has put on us" (316).

The countervailing "visceral logic" that rejects the knowledge that we will eventually die emerges throughout *The Book* precisely at those moments where we experience the presence of what Soares calls "*truly* static things [. . .] woven by eternity" (304; my emphasis). The appeal of aesthetic stasis—in contrast to the physical inanition that it so closely resembles—is also beautifully expressed by Soares's imagining "if our life were an eternal standing by the window, if we could remain there for ever, like hovering smoke, with the same moment of twilight forever paining the curve of the hills . . . If we could remain that way for beyond for ever! If at least on this side of the impossible we could thus continue, without committing an action, without our pallid lips sinning another word!" (97). In a similar vein, his description of the beauty of stained-glass windows reminds us that they open upon a timeless scene: "eternal stained-glass windows, hours of naïve design and coloration executed by some artist who for ages has slept in a Gothic tomb on which two angels, their hands pressed together, freeze the idea of death in marble" (289). The parallel between death and art is likewise evoked in Soares's description of an early-morning scene, in which he appeals to a distinction between "stillness" and "torpor": "The shops are still closed except for the cafés and dairy bars, but the stillness isn't one of torpor, like on Sundays—it's just stillness" (376). This same logic allows Soares to transform monotony, a form of stasis that he had likened to demonic possession, into a desirable goal when he declares that "wise is the man who monotonizes his existence" (153) when he utters a surprising request: "Give me monotony—the dull repetition of the same old days, today an exact copy of yesterday—while my observant soul enjoys the fly that flits past my eyes and distracts me, the laughter that drifts up from I'm not sure which street, the liberation I feel when it's time to close the office, and the infinite repose of a day off" (154).

While none of the published versions of *The Book* are truly and definitively final since they are chosen by Pessoa's editors—and a literary work that is "all middle" rather than being organized according to an Aristotelian beginning-middle-end paradigm can never really conclude—it is interesting to notice that all of the concluding passages chosen by his various editors point our attention, whether by design or not, to the aesthetic transformation of death produced by "visceral logic." Teresa Sobral Cunha concludes her edition, in fact, with the passage (Text 473 in Richard Zenith's edition) in which this crucial phrase appears: "We all know

that we die; we all feel that we won't die. It's not just a desire or hope that brings us this shadowy intuition that death is a misunderstanding; it's a visceral logic that rejects . . . " (593).

Both Alfred MacAdam's and the 1988 French edition translated by Françoise Laye end with Text 27 in Richard Zenith's. In this passage, transformation is alluded to by the initial assertion that literature is "art wed to thought without the stain of reality," which then leads Soares to remark, by way of illustration, that "flowers, if they are described with phrases that could define them in the air of imagination, will have colors of a permanence that cellular life does not permit." The contrast between mortality and the visceral logic that resists it is conveyed even more concisely when Soares declares that "to move is to live, to speak is to survive" (MacAdam 277).

Text 463 in Zenith's edition, with which Françoise Laye's 1999 French edition concludes, attributes to "peace" the power of transforming a lower form of existence into a higher that had previously been ascribed to literature: "Peace at last. All that was dross and residue vanishes from my soul as if it had never been" (Zenith 381). This leads to a representation of death from which, as it were, the "stain" of real mortality has been entirely removed: "Go swiftly by, life that's not felt, a stream flowing silently under forgotten trees! [. . .] go to the shadow or to the light, brother of the world, go to the glory or to the abyss, son of Chaos and of the Night" (381–2).

The final text of Margaret Jull Costa's translation (Text 441 in Richard Zenith's edition) begins with Soares making an observation that calls attention to the contrast between darkness and light: "High up in the lonely night an unknown lamp blooms behind a window" (Costa 261). The reciprocity between the blackness of the night and the brightness of the lamp (already conveyed by the idea that one has made the other "bloom") is then developed in the reverse direction by his remark that "it seems as if it is only because that lamp is lit that the night is so dark" (262). The similar relationship between the experience of nothingness that the dark night arouses and its transformation into literature ("art wed to thought") is conveyed by the lyrical description with which this text concludes: "I feel this because I feel nothing. I think this because this is all nothing. Nothing, nothing, just part of the night and the silence and of whatever emptiness, negativity and inconstancy I share with them, the space that exists between me and me, a thing mislaid by some God . . . " (262).

The fullest exploration of the relationship between the ultimacy of death and its aesthetic transformation by "visceral logic" is the one chosen by Richard Zenith for his Penguin edition of *The Book*. This text begins with Soares entering the local barbershop, whereupon he learns of the death of one of the barbers. His initial reaction is a kind of internalization of death: "The whole of my irrational good mood abruptly died, like the *eternally* missing barber from the adjacent chair. A chill swept over all my thoughts. I said nothing" (391; my emphasis). He then transforms this "disquieting" reaction into a threefold series of rhythmical repetitions that organize it into a motionless pattern. In the first of these, the death of the barber reminds him of the death of other acquaintances: "The nondescript old man with dirty gaiters who often crossed my path at nine-thirty in the morning . . . The crippled seller of lottery tickets who would pester me in vain . . . The round and ruddy old man smoking a cigar at the door of the tobacco shop . . . The pale tobacco shop owner . . . What has happened to them all, who because I regularly saw them were part of my life?" (392).

In the second of these repetitions, his attention shifts to the eventuality of his own death: "*Tomorrow I too* will vanish from the Rua da Prata, the Rua dos Douradores, the Rua dos Fanqueiros. *Tomorrow I too*—I this soul that feels and thinks, this universe I am for myself—yes, *tomorrow I too* will be the one who no longer walks these streets, whom others will vaguely evoke with a 'What's become of him?'" (392). He then concludes with rhythmical enumeration of the three aspects of his life that will disappear with him: "And everything I've done, everything I've felt and everything I've lived will amount to merely one less passer-by on the everyday streets of some city or other" (392).

Taking Soares's entry into the barbershop as a prologue, we notice that the body of this final text is divided into two parallel parts, each of which begins with a specific event: the actual death of the barber, followed by Soares's imagined death. Each of these events becomes, in turn, boundless and indeterminate: Soares wonders, at first, "what has happened to them all" and then contemplates the eventual disappearance of "everything." We further notice that both of these transformations point toward two different forms of eternity: one in which, not only the barber, but all of us will eventually be "missing" and the other created by

the emergence of timeless patterns. The *stasis* of death is, in effect, metamorphosed into the "static movement" of the passage itself.

We began this chapter by arguing that Soares's "factless autobiography," despite the tragic overtones with which the author would imbue his destiny, cannot be considered a tragedy in the sense given to this genre by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, in which plot is judged to be the essential feature. In support of this contention, we adduced Pessoa's own declaration of his anti-Aristotelian aesthetic as well as Soares's utter disinterest in writing a work that fulfilled Aristotle's requirements of magnitude and completeness. However, as we reflect further on the way in which "visceral logic" operates throughout *The Book*—transforming Soares's "disquiet" into an aesthetic pleasure bordering on "bliss" —we may suspect an underlying connection—perhaps, even, a profound similarity—between it and what Aristotle called "catharsis." The relevant passage in the *Poetics* occurs in Chapter VI in which Aristotle says that tragedy "achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents" (11).

As O. B. Hardison explains in his commentary to the *Poetics*, what Aristotle apparently had in mind was the idea that tragedy produces a satisfying "clarification" (his choice for the most accurate translation of "catharsis") of pitiable and fearful events by representing them as parts of an overarching plot whereby the events leading up to the hero's tragic suffering are shown to be intelligibly related:

The tragic poet begins by selecting a series of incidents that are intrinsically pitiable or fearful [. . .] He then presents them in such a way as to bring out the probable or necessary principles that unite them in a single action and determine their relation to this action as its proceeds form its beginning to its end. When the spectator has witnessed a tragedy of this type, he will have learned something—the incidents will be *clarified* in the sense that their relation in terms of universals will have become manifest—and the act of learning, says Aristotle, will be enjoyable. (117; my emphasis)

Having established that catharsis is essentially achieved by the plot, Hardison then continues: "The modern aesthetician might say that a work of art is successful insofar as it achieves 'coherence' and that the discovery of this 'coherence' is the essential aesthetic pleasure" (117). As Hardison's commentary helps us to see, Soares has, in effect, recast "catharsis" as "visceral logic" but with the striking difference that the coherence that he offers throughout *The Book* is to be found in a "show" that is based, not on the subordination of its individual episodes into an organizing plot, but on the sublimation of Soares's "disquiet" into an elusive yet nonetheless palpable and gratifying form of immobility.

The "show without a plot" that Pessoa weaves from feeling, dreaming, and thinking—and which rehabilitates the "spectacle" that Aristotle had dismissed—may remind us of Françoise Laye's remark that *The Book* is "one of the most explicit as well as the most poetic of the Portuguese 'saudade,' reformulated by Pessoa in a highly personal way" (34). Both the saudade (which expresses nostalgic longing) and *The Book*—like the choral singing that we find in Greek tragedy—have in common the ambition of transforming "disquiet" into a compensatory lyrical expression that sublimates it while implicitly recognizing that no overt action that one could possibly conceive is capable of banishing it. The play that Aristotle singled out for special praise—Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*—had, as responses to human suffering, both choral lamentations and a ritualized plot that led to Oedipus's banishment. Pessoa, foregoing the illusion of a definitive cure to suffering and to the eventuality of death through a salvific sacrificial act, contents himself with its aesthetic transformation.

Chapter Three: Shadows of Gestures

" . . . we're shadows of gestures performed by someone else, embodied effects, consequences that feel."

PESSOA'S EVENTUAL DECISION to entrust the authorship of *The Book* to his "mutilated self" in the person of Bernardo Soares parallels the constriction of its setting, which is limited to a narrow strip of Lisbon as well as its marginalizing of plot, which is replaced by a "show." Soares is a quintessential anti-hero—the counterpart in human form of the anti-setting and the anti-action that we have observed in the two previous chapters. He tells us in Text 167, that "we're ruled by implacable laws" (158), whose nature he clearly spells out in Text 149, where we learn that "None of us, from the cat on up to me, is really in charge of the life imposed on us or the destiny we've been given; we are all equally derived from no one knows what; we're shadows of gestures performed by someone else, embodied effects, consequences that feel" (133). He elaborates on this idea when he reflects that "I will always be, under the large blue canopy of the silent sky, a pageboy in an unintelligible rite, dressed in life for the occasion, executing steps, gestures, stances and expressions without knowing why" (148). Soares's references to novels likewise convey his strikingly diminished sense of selfhood. At one point, he observes "I'm like a story that someone told, and so well was it told that I took on just a hint of flesh at the beginning of one of the chapters of this novel that's the world" (160-1); at another, while thinking about the wearying obligation of having a relationship with another person, he comments that "It all seems like something I read somewhere, like an incident that happened to someone else, a novel I read halfway through and whose second-half was missing" (203). As we look more closely at Soares's "shadowy gestures," however, we discover that, he actually plays three quite clearly defined roles in his "unwritten novel": first, as a *modest* employee of Vasques & Co.; second, as a self-declared *superior man*, whose claim to this distinction proves doubtful; and third, as an apprentice to his chosen literary masters.

The commercial enterprise in which Soares works as an assistant bookkeeper is hierarchically organized, with his boss Vasques at the top and Soares himself nearly at the bottom. Soares never, of course, imagines himself replacing Vasques; the positions occupied by the owner of the business and his employee are precisely defined and not subject to reciprocal exchange. At most, Soares can hope to be promoted to the position of head bookkeeper, a prospect that he anticipates with a mixture of delight and misgiving: "I know that the day I become head bookkeeper of Vasques & Co. will be one of the great days of my life. I know it with foretasted bitterness and irony, but also with the intellectual advantage of certainty" (24). The poor figure that he cuts in the group photograph described in Text 56—"I look like a nondescript Jesuit, My gaunt and inexpressive face has no intelligence or intensity" (56)—contrasts with the masterful presence of Vasques, who instills in Soares and his fellow workers a belief in the transcendant purpose that they serve under his leadership: "In the middle [of the photograph] was Vasques himself; flanking him in a definite, then indefinite, ranking by category, were the other human souls that daily came together here as one body to accomplish small tasks whose ultimate objective is the secret of the gods" (56). The complete antithesis of his subordinate, Vasques is "affectionate, frank, and savvy, brusque and affable" (19). In addition, he possesses a "broad and human smile," which Soares compares to "an applauding crowd" (19).

In yet a further amplication of this tribute, Soares cites as influences on his own intellectual development not only Cesário Verde (the father of modern Portuguese poetry) but also " Senhor Vasques my boss" (118). The secular and the divine join hands when Soares imagines Vasques as "pronouncing the words like a business benediction" (371) when, in fact, he is merely telling his employees that they may leave for the day. He imagines himself as engaged in a lofty, hierarchically organized enterprise once again—this time with a specifically literary inflection—when he describes his modest activity as an assistant bookkeeper as though he were a scribe writing for the ages: "the ruled pages on which I carefully write the commercial epic of Vasques and Co" (256).

Beyond the reassuringly stable and hierarchical borders of Vasques's company, however, Soares enters into two much less clearly defined realms in which relationships are based on reciprocities. The first of these traps him within what, for the sake of convenience, we could call "bad reciprocity" in which Soares's desire to possess an object or to pursue a goal automatically produces the presence of a rival who competes with him for the same object or goal. This form of relationship comes to the fore when Soares intriguingly suggests, in response to a friend who tells him that he is being exploited by Vasques, that it is "not any worse to be exploited by Vasques and his fabrics than by vanity, by glory, by resentment, by envy, or by the impossible"

(18). Soares's own experience, in fact, amply demonstrates that the emotional cost of these forms of exploitation is far greater than the price exacted by his boss.

Soares does, in fact, frequently fall victim to his own vanity, which he defines as "the emotional certainty that others see [our] greatness or attribute it to us" (340) and which arouses in him dubious fantasies regarding his own superiority. His actual *uncertainty* regarding the high opinion that others have of him is, on the contrary, proved by the many times that his self-elevating fantasies about himself are accompanied by an equally self-devaluating doubts. Renunciation, which Soares credits with making it possible "to conquer without competing" (18), would seem to offer him a way of avoiding the risks of this "bad reciprocity." He speaks yearningly of "the slumber that [. . .] bears the soothing gifts of renunciation on the platter with which it approaches our soul" (383) and further describes renunciation as being—along with flight and suicide—one of the "grandiose acts of our aristocratic self-awareness" (38). In one of the more remarkable of his hyperboles, he claims that "I received in exchange for life's pleasures, and with the ring of renunciation on my evangelical finger, the stagnant jewel of my ecstatic disdain" (15). His fashioning of a self-aggrandizing image of renunciation, is undermined, however, by other passages suggesting that he may well be renouncing something that he doesn't actually possess. One of the most poignant statements of this ironic predicament—to be set alongside his remark about life denying him the little that he asked for—occurs when he regrets that the gods have taken his toys away from him and left him alone:

God created me to be a child and willed that I remain a child. But why did he let Life beat me up, take away my toys and leave me alone during playtime, my weak hands clutching at my blue, tear-stained smock? If I couldn't live without loving care, why was this thrown out with the rubbish? Ah, every time I see a child crying in the street, left there on his own, the jolting horror of my exhausted heart grieves me even more than the child's sadness. I grieve with every pore of my emotional life, and it is my hands that wring the corner of the child's smock, my mouth that is contorted by real tears, my weakness, my loneliness . . . And all the laughs from the adult life passing by are like the flames of matches struck against the sensitive fabric of my heart. (336–7)

In passages such as this one, we recognize that Soares is expressing obliquely through metaphors—whereby life takes his toys away from him and matches are cruelly struck against his heart—a pattern of "bad reciprocities" in which he is at a competitive disadvantage with a superior rival.

An especially frank admission of the role of this rival in shaping Soares's attachment to renunciation occurs when he remarks that "we abdicate from every effort like the weak-bodied from athletic endeavors, and we hunch over the book of sensations like scrupulous scholars of feeling" (12). An even more concrete example occurs when, after having given a characteristically hyperbolic description of his predicament, Soares appears to admit that what he calls renunciation may be little more than obligatory recognition that he has failed in a competition: "My destiny, which has pursued me like a malevolent creature, is to be able to desire only what I know I'll never get. If I see the nubile figure of a girl in the street and imagine for the slightest moment, however nonchalantly, which it would be like if she were mine, it's a dead certainty that ten steps past my dream she'll meet the man who's obviously her husband or lover" (169). From this banal episode he extrapolates to the reflection that "everything belongs to others except my grief for not having any of it" (458).

With respect to envy—which follows closely in the footsteps of vanity and resentment, Soares begins by evoking it in relatively restrained forms, as when he tells us that he envies people who possess an ability that he lacks, including those "who write prolifically or who at least produce lengthy and finished works" (82) and "those for whom a biography could be written" (20) as well as "those who produce novels" (250). Not content with such a "normal" form of envy, however, Soares manages to envy the presumably much larger group that includes everyone who is *not* more gifted than himself, whom he describes as "those poor slobs who have no books to show, who have no literature besides their own soul, and who are suffocating to death due to the fact they exist without having taken that mysterious transcendental exam that makes one eligible to live" (60).

The boundlessness of Soares's capacity for envy becomes especially obvious at moments when he turns his attention away from the desirable object itself and towards the impossibility of his trading places with his rivals. As he admits himself, "I envy all people, because I'm not them. Since this always seemed to me the

most impossible of possibilities, it's what I yearned for everyday, and despaired of in every sad moment" (39). Closely related to this are passages in which he gives vent to his hatred of others, as when he reveals that "I hate without hatred all the poets who write verses, all the idealists who saw their ideals take shape, all those who obtained what they wanted" (122). The bitterness that fuels this self-protective reaction becomes especially evident when he expresses his disdain of people who enjoy life, an achievement that has become utterly beyond his reach: "Let us not forget to hate those who enjoy" (63), among whom, he chooses for particular mention "hunters [who] hunt wolves, deer, and wild ducks" whom he advises us to hate "not because they kill but because they enjoy themselves (and we don't)" (244).

The impossibility of usurping the identities of his successful competitors (whose real superiority he implicitly, albeit grudgingly, recognizes) produces a second impasse in which what he wants is no longer the desirable object, but the stumbling block that places it beyond his reach. Not fulfillment, but the *impossibility* of fulfillment then becomes the object of his quest, a predicament to which numerous passages testify. He observes, for example, that "the dream that promises us the impossible denies us access to it from the start" (127) and that even if he succeeded in achieving certain forms of the impossible, he would nevertheless be doomed to imagine "other impossibilities"(154). Perhaps his clearest statement to the effect that the impossible—which, at the outset, was experienced as an obstacle—has now become the *object* of his desire appears when he acknowledges that he suffers from "the longing for impossible things precisely because they are impossible" (171).

We notice, too, that Soares's "disquiet" itself plays the role of a ubiquitous obstacle throughout *The Book*. It becomes part of a sequence of obstacles when he declares "such *disquiet* when I feel, such *discomfort* when I think, such *futility* when I desire!" (180; my emphasis). He later pairs it with weariness when he reflects that "what I most of all feel is weariness, and the disquiet that is its twin when the weariness has no reason to exist but to exist" (283). It inheres not only in natural phenomena that can plausibly be associated with it—as when Soares confides that "there's something of my disquiet in the endless drizzle, then shower, then drizzle, then shower, through which the day's sorrow uselessly pours itself out over the earth" (126)—but also in the *absence* of any such catalyst: "Nothing oppressed. The late afternoon disquiet was my own" (77). It can also be projected onto objects that are not inherently disquieting: "Ah, the high and larger moon of these placid nights, torpid with anguish and disquiet" (64) an operation which reappears in a simile—"my disquiet like a river contained between its banks"—that, bordering as it does on non-sequitor—conveys the likelihood of encountering disquiet in even the most unlikely places. His unrelieved readiness to invent obstacles emerges with particular force when he complains that: "To want to die in Peking and not to be able to is one of the things that weigh on me like a feeling of impending doom" (252).

The ubiquitousness of the obstacle—and of the superior rival who lurks behind it—is conveyed as well by the manifold personifications into which his disquiet is transformed. At one point, he calls it "fate" and taxes it for "always try[ing] to make me love or want things just so that it could show me, on the very next day, that I didn't have and could never have them" (169). He pictures it at another moment as "the intellectual monster that is everything" (112) and, at yet another, as "the monster immanent in things" which "is served by the shifting of a rock on a hilltop or by the stirring of envy or greed in a heart" (120). It reappears as "the great Spider" whose spittle "binds us to whatever is close, tucking us into a soft bed of slow death which is rocked by the wind" (149). In Text 243, his overheated imagination produces a plethora of monsters: "They hover like bats over the soul's passivity, or like vampires that suck the blood of submission. They're larvae from the debris on the hillside, shadows that fill the valley, remnants left by destiny. Sometimes they're worms, loathsome to the very soul that cradles and breeds them; sometimes they're ghosts that sinisterly skulk around nothing at all; sometimes they pop out as snakes from the absurd hollows of spent emotions" (209).

In Text 20, the superior rival takes the form of what Soares calls "the inscrutable web of creation," which arouses in him a memorable complaint:

Whenever I've tried to free my life from a set of circumstances that continuously oppress it, I've been instantly surrounded by other circumstances of the same order, as if the inscrutable web of creation were irrevocably at odds with me. I yank from my neck a hand that was choking me, and I see that my own hand is tied to a noose that fell around my neck when I freed it from the stranger's hand. When I gingerly remove the noose, it's with my own hands that I nearly strangle myself. (26)

Soares clearly recognizes here that, in attempting to fashion himself as a "superior man," he has unwittingly become his own hangman.

To this point, it seems that Soares must choose between either the benign form of "exploitation" that he experiences as Vasques's employee or the truly virulent and self-destructive form offered to him by vanity and its fellow vices. The "bad reciprocity" that we see at work in this second phase of Soares's relationship with others coexists, however, with the "good reciprocity" made possible by the presence—as an alternative to his rivals, both named and unnamed—of the various literary masters to whom he will apprentice himself. As a preliminary step in his apprenticeship to these masters, he must extricate himself from the trap into which he has been drawn by the various forms of boundless exploitation—vanity, glory, envy, and resentment—to which he has succumbed. Thus, he enters into a phase of genuine renunciation in which he frees himself from his former allegiance to "the pariahs of Greatness," whom he learns to regard as nothing more than "poor devils with their insatiable hunger (239), and recognizes that he's "lived in state of mental slumber, leading the life of someone else" (281), and advises his readers "to see all things that happen to us as accidents or incidents from a novel . . . only with this attitude can we overcome the mischief of each day and the fickleness of events" (211). He returns to this advice towards the end of *The Book*, where he concludes that "once we're able to see this world as an illusion and a phantasm, then we can see everything that happens to us as a dream, as something that pretended to exist while we were sleeping" (386).

As part of this process of withdrawal, Soares renounces his specious claim to superiority, which he traces to the influence of Romanticism:

In my dreams I've sometimes tried to be the unique and imposing individual that the Romantics envisaged in themselves, and I always end up laughing out loud at the very idea. The ultimate man exists in the dreams of all ordinary men, and Romanticism is merely the turning inside out of the empire we normally carry around inside us. Nearly all men dream, deep down, of their own mighty imperialism: the subjection of all men, the surrender of all women, the adoration of all peoples and—for the noblest dreamers—of all eras. Few men devoted, like me, to dreaming are lucid enough to laugh at the aesthetic possibility of dreaming of themselves in this way. (53)

Allusions to such dreams of empire occur repeatedly—and often with mordant and liberating irony—throughout *The Book*. At one point, Soares, reflecting on the fate of the "poor salesmanly demigods who conquer empires with lofty words and intentions but need to scrounge up money for food and the rent," compares them to "the troops of a disbanded army whose commanders had a glorious dream, which in them—now trudging through the scum of marshes—has been reduced to a vague notion of grandeur, the consciousness of having belonged to an army, and the vacuity of not even knowing what the commander they never saw had ever done" (60).

Soares invokes—as an alternative to this invisible commander—certain spiritual masters from whom one may acquire—rather than envying—the virtues of lucidity and detachment: "I know nothing greater, nor more worthy of the truly great man, than the patient and expressive analysis of the ways in which we don't know ourselves . . . Flashes of awareness that we live an illusion—that, and no more, is what distinguishes the greatest of men" (133–4). In Text 149, he cites Socrates and Francisco Sanches as masters of irony and in Text 123 similarly praises the Buddha and Christ as exemplary models for the renunciation of so-called reality. Soares likewise pays tribute to "the jaded indifference of the emperor Severus," who once said "*omnia fui, nihil expedit*—I've been everything, nothing's worth the trouble" (120). Text 219 adds to the list of these masters of lucidity the names of Plato, Scotus Erigina, Kant, and Hegel.

Underlying Soares's readiness to submit to the example of these great spiritual masters is the longing for what he calls "paternal hand," which he attributes, not only to himself, but to humanity in general:

There's a childish instinct in humanity that makes the proudest among us, if he's a man and not crazy, long—Blessed Father!—for the paternal hand that would guide us, through the world's mystery and confusion. Each of us is a speck of dust that the wind of life lifts us and then drops. We have to depend on a stronger force, to place our small hand in another hand, for today is always uncertain, the sky always far, and the life always alien. (159)

He gives this idea a more specifically literary inflection when he affirms that "to read is to dream, guided by someone else's hand. To read carelessly and distractedly is to let go of that hand" (199). Text 55 offers a

lengthy tribute to "the joyful sense of expansive life" that he experiences while reading the classical authors (55). He then expands on this idea:

I read and am liberated. I acquire objectivity. I cease being myself and so scattered. And what I read, instead of being like a nearly invisible sit that sometimes oppresses me, is the external world's tremendous and remarkable clarity, the sun that sees everyone, the moon that splotches the still earth with shadows, the wide expanses that end in the sea, the blackly solid trees whose tops greenly wave, the steady peace of ponds on farms, the terraced slopes with their paths overgrown by grapevines. (55)

To this tribute, we may add the very obvious pleasure that he takes in the resources of language itself: "My bedside book is Father Figueiredo's *Rhetoric*, where every night I read yet again for the thousandth time, in correct and clerical Portuguese, the descriptions of various figures of speech, whose names I still haven't learned" (345-6).

Soares alludes to the reciprocity between the words of the dead writers and his own inner voice when he remarks that "I frankly and unblushingly admit it: there's not a *passage* of Chateaubriand or a canto of Lamartine—passages that often seem to be the *voice* of my own thoughts, cantos that often seem to have been written for me to know myself—that transports and uplifts me like a passage of Vieira's prose, or like certain odes by one of our few classical writers who truly followed Horace" (55; my emphasis). He will later return to this experience of reciprocity—which allows him to share writerly pleasure rather than envying it—in a passage in which he replaces Lamartine with José Vanentin Fialho de Almeida while adding Antonio Vieira: "Certain pages of Fialho and Chateaubriand make my whole being tingle in all of its pores, make me rave in a still shiver with impossible pleasure. Even certain pages of Vieira, in the cold perfection of their syntactical engineering, make me quiver like a branch in the wind, with the passive delirium of something shaken" (224). This passage continues with a beautiful fragment on writing in which Soares emphasizes "the thrill of surrender, aroused by words that "cuddle me like a baby," that "flow softly like water I can feel" and that cause ideas and images to appear with "throbbing expressiveness" and make imagination itself "shimmer like moonlight" (224).

These highly pleasurable encounters between Soares and his masters reminds us that writing—along with allowing Soares to express his inner voice while by-passing the obstacles and frustrations inherent to speaking—also gave him access to the "voices of his dead ancestors," to recall the phrase that T. S. Eliot uses in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Pessoa himself expressed this idea—perhaps with Dante's *Divine Comedy* in mind—when he wrote "I believe in the existence of worlds superior to our own and in the inhabitants of these worlds [. . .] Given this hierarchy of beings, I don't believe in direct communication with God but, depending on our spiritual aptitude, we can communicate with beings that are placed ever higher" (qtd. in Lopez 244).

The "paternal hand" of the great writers is the benign corrective to actual fathers who, according to Soares's historical overview, "blithely wreaked destruction" (157). The feckless behavior of these recent ancestors left Soares in a predicament in which

"I don't know who I am or what I am. Like someone buried under a collapsed wall, I lie under the toppled vacuity of the entire universe" (163). Unlike the comparably paternal hand of Vasques that consigned him to the subordinate position of assistant bookkeeper, the submission that characterizes his relationship to the great writers allows him to display his own mastery of writing. In this respect, we notice his playful competition with these literary masters, in which he pictures himself playfully "besting" them at their own game: "The *Iliad* composed by me had a structural logic in its organic linking of epodes such as Homer could never have achieved. The meticulous perfection of my unwritten verses makes Virgil's precision look sloppy and Milton's power slack. My allegorical satires surpassed all of Swift's in the symbolic exactitude of their rigorously interconnected particulars. How many Horaces I've been" (249).

The idea that the master prepares the path to achievement rather than blocking access to it clearly emerges when he reflects that "to begin with somebody else's creation, working only on improving it . . . Perhaps that is how the *Iliad* was written" (250) and announces his own ambition to express "the sensibility of Mallarmé in the style of Vieira; to dream like Verlaine in the body of Horace; to be Homer in the moonlight" (119). As Robert Bréchon tells us, "Pessoa's own personal dream was to become a new Virgil or a new Dante, the demiurge of an architectural poetic monument" (*Etrange Etranger* 408). As Bréchon further observes, the

work that Pessoa actually left behind at the moment of his untimely death are, from the perspective of this architectural ambition, merely *disjecta membra*. The great irony, of course, is that the scattered fragments that Pessoa left behind at the moment of his death are becoming increasingly, and justifiably, recognized as one of the greatest masterpieces of modernist writing.

Soares's own tributes in *The Book* to his dead ancestors include, along with those that we have already seen, the passage in which he singles out for special mention "the reckless playwright William Shakespeare, John Milton the schoolteacher, Dante Alighieri the tramp" (28) as well as Fragment #278, to which he adds Giacomo Leopardi, Antero de Quental, and Alfred de Vigny. Pessoa freely acknowledged in his own name the ancestors who served as his models. He spent the greater part of his life, for example, working on a play entitled *Faust* whose indebtedness to Goethe is obvious, described Ricardo Reis as a disciple of Horace, and praised in Walt Whitman the "rebirth of the Greek spirit." The idea of Whitman as a model reappears in his championing of what he calls his "non-Aristotelian art," whose chief manifestation can be witnessed in "the astonishing poems of Walt Whitman." A closer look at Pessoa's (and, by implication) Soares's relationship with two of their mentors will help us better to appreciate the nature of the "good" reciprocity that binds them together. The first of these is Antonio Vieira, who "gave" Pessoa the Portuguese language in which he would write all of his major literary creations; the second is William Shakespeare, in whom he found the model of a literary career that he would emulate in a strikingly original form. Soares's "factless autobiography" is the shadow of gestures inherited from Vieira and Shakespeare, among other predecessors; at the same time, however, it is an original gesture in its own right in which we detect shadows of their inspiration.

António Vieira (1608–1697), whom Pessoa praises in Mensagem as the "Emperor of the Portuguese language," was a Jesuit priest whose hundreds of sermons and letters established him as one of the greatest prose stylists of the Portuguese language. Vincent Barletta, in his introduction to António Viera's *The Sermon of Saint Anthony*, argues for the existence of a fundamental link between Vieira's "sermonic narratives of personal experience" (13) and Bernardo Soares "confessions." Adapting Martin Heidegger's maxim about language as the house of being, he intriguingly interprets Soares's declaration that "my nation is the Portuguese language" as meaning that "the Portuguese language is the house of *my* being, and to that house António Vieira holds the key" (15). At the same time, Pessoa's identification with Vieira is accompanied by a certain distance, which assures that his own work will not merely be a shadowy gesture that will be eclipsed by its precursor. As Barletta argues, Pessoa is a modern, secularized Vieira who turns away from the dependency on biblical revelation and Ignatian spirituality that characterizes the work of his master. This idea that Pessoa was a heterodox student of his Jesuit master is also suggested by Richard Zenith, who, in his essay entitled "António Vieira, Emperor of Pessoa's Portugal," points out that his "praise of Vieira pertains not to his literary imagination but to his verbal precision, his syntactic construction, the perfect weight and placement of his words" (4).

Soares clearly shares Pessoa's filiation with Vieira, whom he calls "my master" (32). In Text 259, he expatiates on the overwhelming emotional impact made on him by Vieira's prose:

I weep over nothing that life brings or takes away, but there are pages of prose that have made me cry. I remember, as clearly as what's before my eyes, the night when as a child I read for the first time, in an anthology, Vieira's famous passage of King Solomon: 'Solomon built a palace . . . ' And I read it all the way to the end, trembling and confused. Then I broke into joyful tears—tears such as no real joy could make me cry, nor any of life's sorrows ever make me shed. The hieratic movement of our clear majestic language, that expression of ideas in inevitable words, like water that flows because there's a slope, that vocalic marvel in which the sounds are ideal colours—all of this instinctively seized me like an overwhelming political emotion. (224)

In the midst of such praise, Soares never suggests for a moment that Viera's mastery of the Portuguese language is a stumbling block placed along the path that will lead to his own literary achievement. Quite the contrary, Vieira has bequeathed to him a language over which he will exercise mastery in his own uniquely individual way, as Pessoa himself suggests in one of his letters to Ophelia Quieroz, the only woman with whom he ever had a romantic relationship: "I have arrived at an age [41] in which one achieves perfect mastery of one's qualities and in which the intelligence has the greatest possible strength and dexterity. Thus,

it is time for me to fulfill my literary project my completing certain things, by rearranging others, and by writing those that remain to be written" (*Lettres à la fiancée*, 118-9).

Several passages in *The Book* suggest, not only Soares's *mastery* of the language in which he would write his masterpiece, but (recalling his remark about the experience of being alone in a normally crowded city) his "absolute ownership" of it. Thus, he claims at one point, in an act of absolute identification with Portuguese, "I don't write in Portuguese. I write my own self" (364); at another, he declares that "My nation is the Portuguese language" (225). Unlike the nubile girl seen on the streets of Lisbon, the language spoken by the Portuguese people does not seem to have produced even one suitor capable of competing with Soares for its affection. The displacement of his erotic attachment from competition with potentially superior rivals to masterful play with the Portuguese language is beautifully conveyed by the opening sentences of Text 259: "I enjoy speaking. Or rather, I enjoy wording. Words for me are tangible bodies, visible sirens, incarnate sensualities. Perhaps because real sensuality doesn't interest me in the least, not even intellectually or in my dreams, desire in me metamorphosed into my aptitude for creating verbal rhythms and for noting them in the speech of others. I tremble when someone speaks well" (224).

The reciprocity—as distinguished from exploitation—that Soares experiences with respect to Vieira and the language that he bequeathed to him applies as well to William Shakespeare. As Mariana Gray de Castro has observed, "Pessoa cites Shakespeare surprisingly few times in his poetry and creative prose, but alludes to him continually in his correspondence, as well as in theoretical writings on such topics as celebrity, authorship, genius, madness, and sexuality. Shakespeare also assumes pride of place in Pessoa's reflections on *his own work*" (13; my emphasis). She also notes that "Erostratus' (late 1920s) and "Impermanence" (early 1930s), Pessoa's two most developed essays on the subject of artistic greatness and of what will survive into succeeding ages, evoke Shakespeare throughout.

Pessoa praises Shakespeare—in a remark that is equally applicable to himself as well as to Soares—as "the great expresser" and a writer of great "subtlety" (*Always Astonished* 4). In his essay entitled "*A nova poesia portuguesa no sue aspeito psicológico*," he had described Shakespeare as the "culminating figure of the Renaissance, the only historical period, that, until now, has surpassed the Greek" (cited in Almeida, 58). His ranking of the great poets is also revelatory: third prize goes to Victor Hugo, whose conception is merely "perfect" and second to the Portuguese poet Anthero de Quental, who is both "profound and perfect," while Homer and Shakespeare—whose conception is "vast, profound, and perfect"—share the first rank (cited in Almeida, 58).

In "Shakespeare, the Missing All," George Monteiro argues persuasively for the far greater role played by English writers, and Shakespeare preeminently, in Pessoa's literary education as well as in the formulation of his heroic literary ambition. As Monteiro says, "that Pessoa saw himself as Portugal's Shakespeare, the 'Super-Camoes of the Quinto Império,' seems to me beyond questioning" (38). He then quotes a passage in a letter written by Pessoa to the literary critic Gaspar Simoes, who had recently published a psychoanalytical study of his work. After telling Simoes that a critic should, above all, attempt to discern what he calls "the *central explanation* of the artist (lyric type, dramatic type, elegiac lyric type, dramatic poetic type, etc.)," he provides the "central explanation" of himself in a way that foregrounds his reciprocity with Shakespeare: "The central point of my personality as an artist is that I am a dramatic poet: I have continually in mind, in everything I wrote both the exaltation of the poet and the depersonalization of the dramatist" (39).

As Monteiro suggests, "Pessoa probably had this reciprocity in mind when he diagnosed Shakespeare as a 'hysteric' in his youth and early manhood, a 'hystero-neurasthenic' in full manhood, and to a lesser degree, at the end of his life" (39). Several additional details adduced by Monteiro are equally pertinent. Reflecting on his failure to have published even one book as late as 1931 (he was, after all, forty-three years old), Pessoa took comfort in the parallel thus created (presumably, if not quite plausibly) between himself and Shakespeare: "But my confrère William Shakespeare, a person of some worth in the eyes of the world, suffered from the same sickness of the soul" (*Always Astonished* 40). Soares's allusion to Shakespeare as his "confrère"—a term that he would never apply to his boss Vasques or to his legion of adversaries—as well as the suggestion that reciprocity has led to the achievement of mastery is echoed by Pessoa's own claim that "I am now in full possession of the fundamental laws of literary art. Shakespeare can no longer teach me to be subtle, nor Milton to be complete. My intellect has attained a pliancy and a reach that enable me to assume

any emotion I desire and to enter at will into any state of mind" (*Lettres à la fiancée* 4).
Reciprocity between the master and his apprentice emerges once again, but with a somewhat different inflection, when Pessoa comments on the deficiencies of Shakespeare's plays in a way that, unwittingly perhaps, suggests a striking parallel with *The Book*: "Shakespeare is the example of great genius and great wit linked to insufficiency of talent. He is as supreme in the intuition that constitutes genius and in the quickness of strangeness that constitutes wit as he is deficient in the constructiveness and the coordination which constitute talent" (*Always Astonished* 46).
Soares echoes this point of view when he confides to us that "if I had written *King Lear*, I would be plagued by remorse for the rest of my life. For the sheer greatness of this work grossly magnifies its defects, its monstrous defects, the tiniest things that stand between certain scenes and their possible perfection" (247). As he continues this diagnosis, we may find ourselves thinking that we are reading, not a criticism of the play that Shakespeare actually wrote, but of the monumental literary work—*The Book* itself—that Pessoa himself was never able to write: "It's not the sun marred by spots; it's a broken Greek statue. All that has ever been done is ridden with errors, faulty perspectives, ignorance, signs of bad taste, shortcomings and oversights" (247).
In persuasively arguing her case that Pessoa's recognition of Shakespeare's superiority does not lead to futile competition and resentment (which is crucial to my own view of the master/apprentice relationship as a "good" form of reciprocity), Mariana Gray de Castro quotes a letter that Pessoa wrote to Boavida Portugal which clearly implies that "even the '*poeta máximo*' that is to be Pessoa, although inevitably greater than the great Camões, will still not be on a plane with Dante or Shakespeare" (180). With Harold Bloom's idea of "the anxiety of influence" in mind, she also maintains that, although he was clearly in competition with Camoes, "Shakespeare is an influence towards whom Pessoa displays no discernible anxiety" (180). She then cites approvingly Jonathan Bate's remark, in *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, "The hope that one might be a descendant of a great poet may be a source of confidence instead of anxiety" which she then applies to Pessoa: "Shakespeare is the underlying presence to Pessoa's heteronymic project whom Pessoa openly acknowledges as such; far from inhibiting Pessoa's creativity, he fires it" (181). She then concludes her argument that Pessoa did not think of himself as Shakespeare's rival with a lapidary observation: "Instead, he was under the illusion that Shakespeare, whose achievement he would never match, had profoundly Pessoan characteristics: that the Bard was a glorified version of himself" (182).
Pessoa offers an invaluable key to our understanding of the "underlying presence" of *Hamlet* in *The Book* when, after arguing on behalf of dramatic poetry as the highest form of literary expression, Pessoa then muses about the possibility of a form of writing that takes us to an even higher stage: "Let us suppose that a supreme depersonalizer like Shakespeare, instead of creating the character Hamlet as part of a play, created it as a simple person with no play. He would have written a drama, so to speak, of a single person, an extended, analytical monologue" (*Always Astonished*, 69). With Pessoa's surmise doubtlessly in mind, Monteiro argues—in a remark that points implicitly to the relationship between *Hamlet* and *The Book*—that Pessoa took Jacques's celebrated remark that "All the world's a stage" literally, with the result that he "eliminated any sort of Globe Theatre from his world, thereby freeing his actors (especially his heteronyms), their actions, and their words, from the constraints of theatrical time and space" (49). Monteiro illustrates this point by taking the example of Alberto Caeiro, but his observation is equally applicable to the creative imitation of his master that Soares achieves in the medium of prose fiction: "In the poetry of Alberto Caeiro, for instance, we have poetry presented without dramatic context; it grows out of him and contributes to no play or stage other than that of the life that Pessoa has detailed for him" (49).
Of even greater relevance to *The Book* is Monteiro's insightful claim that "Pessoa suffered from a Hamlet complex" (47). He cites as evidence the concluding lines of the alternative version of one of Pessoa's *35 Sonnets*, in which the poet asks:

Can I complain that men should be
Such as do Hamlet love and despise me?
In the same poem, Pessoa—with Hamlet clearly in mind and Shakespeare perhaps as well—says of himself, "I, whose sick will is maimed and blind and shod." Pessoa's aggrieved sense that other people admire in Hamlet

precisely the lamentable failings that they criticize in him may be imagined as setting the stage for the creation of Bernardo Soares, who combines Hamlet's chief failing—obsessive and crippling introspection and self-dramati-zation—with a gift for memorable poetic statement that—even in English translation—has been rarely equaled by any other writer.

G. Wilson Knight suggests, albeit unintentionally, the appeal of our reading *The Book* as a work in which Hamlet is reborn "as a simple person with no play" when he observes of the actual Hamlet and the play that Shakespeare did write for him:

Hamlet is a dualized personality, wavering, oscillating between grace and the hell of cynicism. The plot reflects this see-saw motion; it lacks direction, pivoting on Hamlet's incertitude, and analysis holds the fascination of giddiness. Nor can Hamlet feel anything passionately for long, since passion implies purpose, and he has no purpose for any length of time. One element in *Hamlet*, and that a very important one, is the negation of any passion whatsoever. His disease—or vision—is primarily one of negation, of death. Hamlet is a living death in the midst of life; that is why the play sounds the note of death so strong and somber at the start . . . The usual process is reversed and the climax is at the start. Hamlet, already in despair, converses early with death: through the remaining acts he lives within that death. (*The Wheel of Fire*, 43)

Along with describing Hamlet himself in terms that will likely remind us of Soares, Knight also points to a structural similarity between *Hamlet* and *The Book* when he refers to the "see-saw motion" of the plot. The plotlessness of *Hamlet*—which will lead Horatio to attribute the main action of the play to "accidental judgments, casual slaughters"—returns in even more extreme form in *The Book*, from which it has been almost entirely excluded, surviving marginally in Vasques's commercial "plotting" but otherwise replaced by the erratic *movements* of Soares's "factless autobiography." Knight's observation that in *Hamlet* "the usual process is reversed and the climax is at the start" likewise finds its equivalent in *The Book*. Soares has lost not only his father, but his mother as well. To these real-life losses, he adds imaginary ones that, despite their unreality, doubtlessly give very real expression to the intensity of his dereliction:

I lost my ancient castle before I was born. The tapestries of my ancestral palace were sold before I existed. My manor house from before I had a life fell into ruins, and only in certain moments, when the moon shines in me over the river's reeds, do I shiver with nostalgia for the place where the toothless remains of the walls blackly stand out against the dark-blue sky made less dark by a milky yellow tinge. (286)

The see-saw movement of plot in both *Hamlet* and *The Book*, as well as the reversal of the "usual process" that we observe both in the play and its modernist transformation into an "unwritten novel" implies, to be sure, that plot itself cannot provide the "catharis" of which Aristotle speaks in his *Poetics*.

In both *Hamlet* and *The Book*, the task of transforming pain into pleasure is borne, consequently, not by a main action, but by *language*. What rescues *Hamlet* from the "universe of death" that Knight finds in it is neither the bloodbath in which the duel between Hamlet and Laertes eventuates nor the arrival of Fortinbras, but, above all, the magnificence of Hamlet's soliloquies, which Pessoa has rewritten—in the Portuguese language that he inherited from Antonio Vieira—as Soares's "verses in prose." We may think of his achievement as fulfilling the unrealized dream of Gustave Flaubert, of whom Marthe Robert tells us that "he never wrote the novel without a plot, based entirely on the perfection of stylistic constructions which he undoubtedly visualized as the model of liberated prose" (225). It also fulfills Robert's own vision of the modernist novel—of which Pessoa/Soares's "unwritten novel" is a particularly illustrious specimen—as a genre that "is free to be a sequence of sentences without history or story, free to express nothing but the narcissistic giddiness of its own writing, and even free to claim that this is the only respectable aspect of its vocation" (230).

Chapter Four: The Written Voice

"To say! To know how to say! To know how to exist via the written voice and the intellectual image. This is all that matters in life."

IF WE NOW turn our attention to the narrative technique of *The Book*, we will not be surprised to discover that Soares brings to it the same quest for "greater completeness" that had led him—with respect to setting, plot, and character—to replace inherited literary conventions with strategies that shape the "narcissistic giddiness" that Marthe Robert attributes to the modernist novel into a new kind of literary monument, one that flaunts its "ruins" rather than hiding them. The ordinary completeness that is achieved by combining dialogue with narration virtually disappears from Soares's unwritten novel, thus allowing the "written voice" to emerge in its place. This hybrid technique, which produces what we may call a "silent monologue" by blurring the distinction between writing and speaking, allows Soares to write in a way that approximates his speaking voice while achieving kinds of completeness that are not available to ordinary speech.

Text 56, which reads like an especially brief short story, is one of the very few in *The Book* in which Soares makes conventional use of narration and dialogue. In it, he recounts an episode involving a photograph taken of his boss Vasques, himself, and his fellow employees. This text begins in a conventionally narrative way: "The firm's monied partner, chronically affected by a grave illness, decided on a whim during one of his healthy respites to have a group portrait made of the office personnel" (56). After providing a few appropriately realistic details surrounding the circumstances of the taking of the photograph, he then shifts to an encounter with two other employees that occurred a couple of days later in which he is confronted with nonnegotiable visual proof of his unimposing physical aspect: "I look like a nondescript Jesuit. My gaunt and inexpressive face has no intelligence or intensity or anything else to raise it out of that lifeless tide of faces" (56). This leads then to a snippet of spoken language, conventionally placed in quotation marks: "'You came out really well,' Moreira said suddenly. And then, returning to the sales representative: 'It's his spitting image—don't you think?'" The text then concludes with a brief and laconic bit of narrative commentary: "And the sales representative agreed with a happy affability that tossed me into the rubbish bin" (57).

Similarly, Text 62 opens by establishing the setting of the "story" that will follow: "One of my favorite strolls, on mornings when I dread the banality of the approaching day as if I were dreading jail, is to walk slowly past the still unopened shops and stores, listening to the scraps of conversation that groups of young women or young men, or women with men, let fall—like ironic alms—in the invisible school of my open-air meditation" (62). Soares then offers a paragraph consisting mainly of "scraps of conversation" in which anonymous passersby utter "the same succession of the same old phrases" interspersed with his own brief and unappreciative comments. He then shifts our attention to conversations which he is not actually able to hear but which are, nonetheless, "transparent to my penetrating intuition," a feat that he illustrates with just one example of quoted speech: "'The guy was so soused he couldn't even see the stairs'" (63). The passage then concludes with a narrated account of the effect produced upon him by this "episode" drawn from the daily life of his fellow inhabitants of Lisbon: "Intrigue, gossip, the load boasting over what one didn't have the guts to do . . . All of this leaves me with the impression of a monstrous and vile animal created in the chaos of dreams, out of desires' soggy crusts, out of sensations' chewed-up leftovers" (63).

In Text 74, entitled "Thunderstorm," an impending storm that has "smudged [the sky] with transparent white" leads the office boy to make a remark that does not, however, elicit a rejoinder from Soares: "'I can only remember one other like this,' he statistically remarked." In place of a response that may have led to yet another "scrap of conversation," Soares launches into an impressionistic rendering of the scene: "A cold silence. The sounds from the street seemed to be cut by a knife. Then there was a long, cosmically held breath, a kind of generalized dread" (73). In one final example, from among the *few* available ones, Soares devotes nearly the entirety of Text 370 to a series of "Little nonsense phrases inserted into a conversation we pretend to be having." What follows is a series of disconnected phrases that he describes as "meaningless affirmations made from the ashes of other, equally meaningless affirmations" (305). The text itself concludes with Soares telling us that he created this purely imaginary conversation for "The two figures sitting at the table set for tea" and then inventing for them omniscient authorial summary of their future lives in which "they go their separate ways, each marrying someone else" (307).

As these examples are likely to suggest, Soares himself has little gift for conversation. Experience has taught

him that “The words of others are mistakes of our hearing, shipwrecks of our understanding” (277) and he admits that “I feel physically nauseated by the voice and gestures of my so-called fellow man” (264). Equally revelatory passages occur when he alludes to some obstacle preventing the proper exercise of his own “spoken voice.” He wonders, for example, how his voice will sound to others (283) and hesitates one day at the market to ask the price of bananas because the vendor “might find my voice strange” (152). He likewise thinks of his voice as being “echoed in the echoing cloister of my inglorious isolation” (31), describes it as getting “caught, as if there were a strange audacity in saying these words out loud” (121), and admits that “I dread the gestures I have to make and am intellectually shy about the words I have to speak” (283).

The marginalizing of actual speech caused by Soares’s inhibition prepares for its “return” in sublimated forms that are more “complete” in that they unite the act of speaking with something that it normally excludes. This happens, for example, when Soares notices the *musicality* of certain voices as when he hears “the voice of an evening crier, crying I don’t know what but with a sound that stands out—an Arabian chant like the sudden patter of a fountain—against the monotony of twilight” (14). Text 408 is similarly devoted to his recollection of a street singer who “sang in a kind of stupor, a kind of ecstasy right there in the street, his gaze oblivious to his listeners” (337). At one point, he even offers his own contribution to the music of voices: “I’m sitting at the door, feasting my eyes and ears on the colours and sounds of the landscape, and I softly sing—for myself alone—wispy songs I compose while waiting” (13).

At other times, real voices will be transformed into metaphorical ones, as when he imagines that “the voice of space becomes a shout” (242) or tells us that “the washed plates raise their voice of water and porcelain” (326). A similar effect is achieved when he observes that “the noises from the street talk in a loud and detached voice” (194) or when he hears a voice in “the sounds made by what the wind lifts up or sweeps forward” (178). Likewise, the sounds of Lisbon in the early morning speak to him in a convivial way that relieves him of his grief: “There’s just the sound of the first tram, like a match to light up the soul’s darkness, and the loud steps of my first pedestrian, which are concrete reality telling me in a friendly voice not to be this way” (95). Imagined voices sing to him when he observes, following the end of a rainstorm, that “the vehicles sang a different song, louder and happier, and windows could be heard opening up to the no longer forgetful sun” (31). Yet another virtual voice emerges when, striving to express the impossible things evoked by music or the night, he finds that “As if a long, horizontal peace had raised its voice, the risen voice crashes and then calms, and a dribbling can be heard up and down the invisible beach” (93).

In a particularly insightful moment– a kind of “Eureka” in which he discovers the cure for his allergy to speaking, not in the *repression* of speech but in its *transformation* into writing—Soares says: “To say! To know how to say! To know how to exist via the *written voice* and the intellectual image. This is all that matters in life; the rest is men and women, imagined love and factitious vanities, the wiles of our digestion and forgetfulness, people squirming—like worms when a rock is lifted—under the huge abstract boulder of the meaningless blue sky” (108; my emphasis). This written voice doubtlessly satisfies the desire for “absolute ownership” that, as we saw in the chapter on setting, Soares attributes to “finding ourselves alone in a place that is normally full of people” (338). It allows him, in effect, to create a sublimated form of speaking that does not implicate him in what he calls “the metaphysically morbid impulse” (184) of coexisting with others, which necessarily places him at a disadvantage.

The written voice is not, to be sure, entirely unproblematic. Soares admits, for example, that “writing is like the drug that I abhor and keep taking, the addiction I despise and depend on” (137). He confirms this view of writing as a therapy that uncannily resembles the ailment that it was intended to cure in Text 231, which offers a compelling series of reflections that cast it in a highly unfavorable light, including the admission that he writes because he has not perfected the art of renunciation as well as the recognition that “the greatest punishment is to know that whatever I write will be futile, flawed and uncertain” (200). At moments in which he is assailed by an especially heightened sense of futility, words themselves seem reduced to unintelligible markings: “I’m looking at the grimy white blotting paper, tacked down at the corners and spread out over the advanced age of the slanted desk top. I examine the crossed out scribbles of concentration and distraction” (96). He will even go so far as to question his literary talent itself: “And it suddenly occurs to me how much more eloquently a great prose stylist would say this [. . .] But I don’t have an eloquent style” (279–80), a failing that he relates to a profound existential crisis: “I’m unable to write because I’m unable to be” (314).

Even those moments when he feels assured of his talent fail to bring him the expected satisfaction: "Even writing has lost its appeal. To express emotions in words and to produce well-wrought sentences has become so banal . . . something I do [. . .] without real enthusiasm or brilliance" (386).

However, unlike speaking, to which Soares is unremittingly allergic, his written voice manages to survive the conviction of futility that it inspires. Among the more charming passages in *The Book* are those in which Soares bravely manages actually to create a kind of reciprocity between failure and achievement. He tells us somewhat defiantly that "I carry my awareness of defeat like a banner of victory" (54), an assertion that reappears in his claim that "I prefer a defeat that knows the beauty of flowers to a victory in the desert" (175).

Writing, in effect, allows Soares to give voice to his frustration in a productive way. In many places, we notice, in fact, that the words that he uses to express his eventual disillusionment are so much less effective and memorable than the somewhat routine expressions that he uses to express his initial pleasure in writing: "I imagined myself the poet of my prose, in the winged moments that welled up in me . . . And today, rereading, I see my dolls bursting, the straw coming out of their torn seams, eviscerated without ever having been . . . " (150). Soares also sees that imperfection—rather than being simply a flaw in writing, may actually contribute to its success: "I weep over my imperfect pages, but if future generations read them, they will be more touched by my weeping than by any perfection I might have achieved, since perfection may have kept me from weeping and, therefore, from writing" (65). To this, he adds the observation that "We're well aware that every creative work is imperfect and that our most dubious aesthetic contemplation will be the one whose object is what we write. But everything is imperfect" (12). The idea that, despite its imperfections, the written voice—even more than dreaming—gives us access to the otherwise "silent speech" of human desire comes to the fore when Soares asserts that "Literature—which is art married to thought, and realization untainted by reality—seems to me the end towards which all human effort would have to strive, if it were truly human and not just a welling up of our animal self" (30).

The written voice also provides access to a mutual relationship with a *virtual* community of future readers that far exceeds the actual community of Lisboetas with whom he had had such difficulty in speaking: "It sometimes occurs to me, with sad delight, that if one day (in a future to which I won't belong) the sentences I write are read and admired, then at last I'll have my own kin, people who 'understand' me, my true family in which to be born and loved" (167). He likewise declares, in the opening words of Text 260, that "Art consists in making others feel what we feel, in freeing them from themselves by offering them our own personality" (225). Soares similarly wonders—presciently, in the event—"if my apparently negligible voice might not embody the essence of thousands of voices, the longing for self-expression of thousands of lives, the patience of millions of souls resigned like my own to their daily lot, their useless dreams, and their hopeless hopes" (16). He reiterates this idea when he speculates that "What I write, bad as it is, may provide some hurt or sad soul a few moments of distraction from something worse. That's enough for me, or it isn't enough, but it serves some purpose, and so it is with all of life" (22).

A comparable form of reciprocity with *childhood*—from which he had otherwise been separated by the intervening years—is yet another collateral benefit of the written voice, as we discover when Soares observes of his particular way of writing that "I unwind myself like a multicoloured skein, or I make string figures of myself, like those woven on spread fingers and passed from child to child" (21), he tells us at one point; at another, with an implicit "defense and illustration" of *The Book* surely in mind, he reflects that "The art of children is in non-realization" (406). Pessoa himself said as much about his own work in general:

My writings were none of them finished; new thoughts intruded ever, extraordinary, in excludable associations of ideas bearing infinity for term. I cannot prevent my thoughts hatred of finish; about a single thing ten thousand thoughts, and ten thousand inter-associations of these ten thousand thoughts arise, and I have no will to eliminate or arrest these, nor to gather them into one central thought, where their unimportant but associated details may be lost. (*Always Astonished* 3)

Thanks, once again, to his written voice, Soares—like children and also like the legendary Sigismund, King of Rome, who claimed to be "above all grammar"—is able to violate the principles of correct syntax at will. He discovers, upon reflection, that his approach to writing is guided by two principles: first, "to express what one feels exactly as it is felt—clearly if it is clear; obscurely if obscure; confusedly, if confused" and, second, "to

understand that grammar is an instrument and not a law" (81).

In Text 370, Soares's claim to be "above all grammar" leads him to declare—via an imaginary conversation between two speakers in which his presence as their ventriloquist is nonetheless apparent—that "I've always despised knowing the correct way to say something . . . All I ever liked in grammar books were the exceptions and pleonasms . . . To dodge the rules and say useless things sums up the essentially modern attitude. Did I say that correctly? . . . " (307). This "conversation" by proxy then continues with an admiring remark about a friend who "was going to dedicate his life to destroying verbs . . . " and who "wanted to discover and develop a way for surreptitiously not completing sentences" (307). Appropriately, Soares's cavalier attitude towards syntax coexists in a perfectly reciprocal way with his extreme respect for it, which we notice, for example, in his claim that "There is no enduring emotion without syntax. Immortality depends on the grammarians" (199), to which he adds an especially furious note when he claims, in a charming variation on the adage about hating the sin but not the sinner, that "I hate with genuine hatred, with the only hatred I feel, not those who write bad Portuguese, not those whose syntax is faulty, not those who used phonetic rather than etymological spelling, but the badly written page itself, as if it were a person, incorrect syntax, as someone who ought to be flogged" (225).

Text 332 is just one of so many passages in which Soares's dutiful respect for correctness is on display:

No problem has a solution. None of us can untie the Gordian knot; either we give up or we cut it. We brusquely resolve intellectual problems with our feelings, either because we're tired of thinking, or because we're afraid to draw conclusions, or because of an inexplicable need to latch on to something, or because of a gregarious impulse to return to other people and to life. Since we can never know all the factors that a problem entails, we can never solve it. To arrive at the truth we would need more data, along with the intellectual resources for exhaustively interpreting the data. (280)

The text entitled "Kaleidoscope," on the other hand, provides a perfect example of a passage that flouts conventional syntax, albeit in a poetically effective way that presumably does not invite being "flogged":

Don't speak . . . You happen too much . . . If only I didn't see you . . . When will you be just a fond memory of mine? How many women you'll be until that happens! And my having to suppose I can see you is an old badge no one uses . . . Yes, this is life. The others have dropped their oars . . . The cohorts have lost their discipline . . . The knights left at daybreak with the sound of their lances . . . Your castles passively waited to be deserted . . . No wind abandoned the rows of trees on the summit . . . Useless porticos, hidden silverware, prophetic signs—all of this belongs to vanquished twilights in ancient temples and not to our meeting in this present moment, for there is no reason for lindens to give shade apart from your fingers and their belated gesture . . . All the more reason for remote territories . . . Treaties signed by stained-glass kings . . . Lilies from religious pictures . . . Whom is the retinue waiting for? . . . Where did the lost eagle go? (333–4)

We notice in this passage that, despite the interruptions created by the first three ellipses (and which are, in fact, optional in the sense that could have been replaced by periods) the sentence begins correctly enough: both individual words and their arrangement conform to the conventions of standard prose.

A shift in the direction of the poetic—which is a hallmark of Soares's written voice—begins, however, with the emergence within the context of the phrase "old badge," which Soares uses as a metaphor for his sense of obligation. This is then followed by an ellipsis, that, unlike its three predecessors, is "poetic" in the sense that it requires a certain cognitive leap in order that we establish an intelligible connection between the elements that it joins. This shift then gains in amplitude and intensity as the passage continues. We observe, in particular, that the incorrect syntax that spreads like a contagion through this passage is produced by the reciprocal activity of ellipses and metaphors—both the *presence* of prosaic words made poetic and their *suppression* via ellipses—as though both techniques were interchangeable or, as it were, in "perfect equilibrium" with each other.

The possibility of achieving poetic effects by violating normal syntax is beautifully expressed in Text 19, in which Soares speaks of "The magic power of words in *isolation* or *joined together* on the basis of sound, with inner reverberations and *divergent* meanings even as they *converge*, the splendour of phrases inserted between the meanings of other phrases, the virulence of vestiges, the hope of the woods, and the absolute peacefulness of the ponds on the farms of my childhood ruses" (25; my emphasis). This evocation of words that are isolated from each other—or connected to each other in ways that dispense with conventional

syntax—may remind us of an intriguing remark that Roland Barthes makes about haiku in *The Preparation of a Novel*. The fragments of a haiku, Barthes says, are "*present* to one another yet they're not *connected*; a mode of co-presence that's very difficult to conceptualize: to conceive of a co-presence without it being metonymical, antithetical, causal, etc.; *a consecution without logic* yet without signifying the destruction of logic: *a neutral connection*—such would be the surface of a collection of haiku (33; my emphasis).

The "neutral connections" that can be equally achieved either by isolating words or by joining them together—thus producing what Soares called, in another context, "Siamese twins that aren't attached" (20)—may be noticed in the ambiguous effect that he achieves through his use of ellipses. At times, he will use them (especially in the medial position) in a perfectly prosaic way in order to mark a pause for which a simple period may have sufficed: "I did my best to lose all attachment to life . . . In time I even shed my desire for glory" (217); "To begin with somebody else's creation, working only on improving it . . . Perhaps that is how the *Iliad* was written." (250); "No, others don't exist . . . It's for me that this heavy-winged sunset lingers, its colour hard and hazy" (268); "The voice of brooks that you interpret, pure explicator . . . The voice of trees whose rustling means what we say it means . . . Ah, my unknown love, this is all just us and our fantasies, all ash, trickling down the bars of our cell!" (277).

An equally prosaic effect is created in the several places where Soares has left a blank space in places where he couldn't decide on the appropriate word. At such moments, our recognizing the author's hesitation does not provoke even the slightest emergence of the poetic: "His religion was□ far from the common people and the□ " (53); "My hazy but constant sensibility and my long but conscious dream□ which together form my privilege of a life in the shadows" (165); "Ah, what transcendental□ sensuousness when at night" (197); "who's to say that sickness wasn't preferable or more logical or more□ than health" (216); "this is the□ substance from which I carve the imaginary statue of my existence" (216); "The creators of metaphysical systems and□ of psychological explanations are still in the primary stages of suffering. What is systematizing and explaining but□ and construction?" (341).

Poetic effects do emerge within this prosaic surface, however, when Soares uses initial and terminal ellipses to enclose a fragment, in such away as to create a reciprocity between completion and incompletion. This strategy produces a "greater completeness" in which the ellipses, while signifying that a piece is missing, also create an aesthetically satisfying experience of closure. Examples include:

" . . . the sacred instinct of having no theories . . . " (218)

" . . . where, curled up on a bench in a railway station, my contempt dozes in the cloak of my discouragement . . . " (22)

" . . . the world of dreamed images which are the sum of my knowledge as well as of my life . . . " (22)

" . . . and a deep and weary disdain for all those who work for mankind, for all those who fight for their country and give their lives so that civilization may continue . . . " (37) " . . . in the sad disarray of my confused emotions . . . " (47)

" . . . Absurdity, confusion, oblivion – everything that isn't life . . . " (34)

" . . . with a drawling, moribund murmur, with no light in the increasing light, the rumble of the storm subsided in the distant expanses – it circled over Almada . . . " (194)

A variant of this technique involves replacing the initial ellipsis with the conjunction "and" which, for a brief moment, is not merely a serviceably prosaic device for transitioning from one element of a sentence to another, but, paradoxically, a sign of disconnection:

"And then it seemed . . . " (52)

"And they were from the same human race . . . " (191)

"And thus I'm able . . . " (212)

"And every sensation is an illusion . . . " (301)

"And they are shadows, shadows . . . " (80)

Another technique that produces reciprocities between closure and openness involves Soares's writing sentences that appear to be syntactically complete, but in which a terminal ellipsis creates the effect of incompletion:

"The distant idylls alongside streams grieve me in this inwardly analogous moment . . . " (102)

"The rain groans as it listlessly batters the panes . . . " (126)

“I can’t be certain of the right course of action, nor verify whether the goals have been achieved . . . ” (131)
“My mother died too soon for me to ever know her . . . ” (228)
“Hear me out and then tell me if dreaming isn’t better than life . . . ” (248)
“You are nothing but wings . . . ” (263)

The co-presence of poetic and prosaic effects that we notice in Soares’s use of ellipses may be also observed in the way that Soares shifts between literal and figurative uses of the actual words of *The Book*. We notice, for instance, that he uses the word “height” in a simple and unproblematically literal way when, speaking of himself, he refers to his “five feet six inches of height” (71) and rewards himself at another with the compensatory observation that when we stand atop a mountain” with our own added height, even higher than the summits” (72). Figurative language, albeit of a comparatively low order of intensity, emerges when he alludes to “the height of wisdom” (158) achieved by a civilization that recognizes the futility of effort, a “dead” metaphor to which he returns when he affirms, in practically the same breath, that the ability to recognize the insignificance of our suffering is both “the beginning of wisdom” and “the height of wisdom” (350).

Figurative resonances intensify, however, when Soares creates an unexpected reciprocity while imagining “the vast wavering mountains known as oceans, which hold the majesty of *height* in the secret of their *depths*” (112; my emphasis). A similarly poetic transformation of an erstwhile prosaic word occurs when he observes of the passing clouds that they are “meaningless in the heights of the exhausted sky” (180), or, most powerfully and uncannily of all, when he describes his emotional state as “merely this useless sky’s reflection in a lake in me – a lake secluded among steep rugged rocks, perfectly still, a kind of dead man’s gaze in which the heights distractedly observe themselves” (196).

The word “river,” in its turn, makes many literal appearances, as when Soares, thinking specifically of the Tagus, alludes to “the forever changing views of the wide river and its Atlantic estuary” (23) or when, with a different river in mind, he remembers that “Sometimes I spend hours at the Rerreiro do Paço, next to the river, meditating in vain” (101-2) and that “Often enough, I’ve wanted to cross the river – those ten minutes from the Terreiro do Paço to Cacilhas” (111). A shift to the figurative occurs, however, when “a landscape made for wild ducks unrolls in my imagination,” to evoke a “great and abandoned river [whose] true shore can be glimpsed lying in the depthless distance” (51). Comparable shifts include his desire to “flow like an enchanted river across gentle slopes of my own self, ever further into unconsciousness and the Far-away, to no end but God” (90), his announcement that “the great rivers of non-worlds have flown sovereignly under my watching eyes” (123), and his evocation of “the long leaves of obscene trees whose branches sway on the echoing banks of the soul’s infernal rivers” (137).

Likewise clouds are merely literal when Soares observes “A ray of sunlight, a cloud whose shadow tells us it is passing” (149), but then become figurative when he compares his ideas to “windblown clouds” (44), notices that “clouds smother the light with blankets of moisture” (154), or describes them, in an extended personification, as “like me, a ravaged passage between sky and earth, at the mercy of an invisible impulse, thundering or not thundering, whitely giving joy or blackly spreading gloom, stray fictions in the gap, far from the earth’s noise but without the sky’s peace” (180). Journeys, which include such prosaic examples as a ride on a tram (253-4) and train trip to Cascais (254), shift to a poetic register when Soares evokes “the Ulyssean journey through all experiential sensations” (113), compares his dreams to “journeys to unknown, imagined, or simply impossible countries” (348), and claims that “the ritual purpose of the journey was to go in search of nonexistent ports” (461).

When we look more closely at the emergence of poetic figures within the prosaic texture of *The Book*, we notice that it occurs in the three quite distinct forms of amplification, contradiction, and comparison. Like ellipses, all of these figures create reciprocities where we would expect to find mutual exclusions, although they do this in quite different ways. At first glance, ellipses imply *incompletion*; as we have already noticed, however, Soares’s ellipses often create co-presences between fragmentation and wholeness. Poetic figures, for their part, implicitly assert the presence of an underlying *connection* between the words that they comprise. Soares’s figures, however, are often so resistant to logical analysis that they will remind us of Roland Barthes’s remark that the fragments of a haiku are “present to one another yet they’re . . . not connected.”

Amplification frequently appears in the form of *hyperbole*, a figure that, by definition, illustrates Barthes's remark about "a mode of co-presence that is very difficult to conceptualize." We notice this effect, for example, in Soares's description of the nightly routine of going to bed: "Behind me, on the other side of where I'm lying down, the silence of the house touches infinity" (34). At one point, the futile act of waiting for he knows not what leads him to reflect that "in the end there would be nothing but a slow falling of night, with the whole of space gradually turning the colour of the darkest clouds, which little by little would vanish into the abolished mass of the sky" (51). This example actually contains a sequence of figures that are disproportionate to their occasion, beginning with the relatively banal "slow falling of night," mounting to a higher level of exaggeration involving "the whole of space," and culminating in the superlative hyperbole in which it "vanish[es] into the abolished mass of the sky."

Barthes's "neutral connections" reappear when Soares admits that he dreads "the banality of the approaching day as if I were dreading jail" (62) and when he confides to his readers that daily contact with his fellow inhabitants "leaves me with the impression of a monstrous and vile animal created in the chaos of dreams, out of desires' soggy crusts, out of sensations' chewed-up leftovers" (63). Parallelism joins with hyperbole in Text 162 to create an echoing hyperbole when Soares laments that "my pride was stoned by blind men, my disillusion trampled on by beggars." In Text 69, the preparatory use of the positive and comparative forms of the same adjective leads to a hyperbolic leap into an unexpected superlative: "It's raining hard, harder, still harder . . . It's as if something were going to collapse in the blackness outside" (68). In this example, the use of a standard grammatical device to suggest intensification is replicated, but also greatly intensified, by the extrapolation involved in the sudden (and discontinuous) leap into the figure with which the sentence concludes.

Amplification also emerges in Soares's use of *climax*, a rhetorical poetic figure in which words, phrases, or clauses are arranged in the order of their ascending intensity, which, once again, creates a movement towards "neutral connection." We notice its relatively simple appearance in Soares's threefold enumeration of the delights that he experiences in his dream about the "marvelous islands" in the South Seas: "It would all be repose, artistic achievement, the intellectual fulfillment of my being" (17). At times, Soares will introduce a variant of the figure of climax by concluding a sequence with a terminal ellipse, thus creating an effect of boundless amplification: "I realize that there are islands to the South and great cosmopolitan attractions and . . . " (24); "we all desire more perfect life, complete happiness, the fulfillment of our dreams and . . . " (52); "the capes I rounded with my imagination and the beaches where I landed with my . . . " (114); "To deny, like the Buddha, its absolute reality; to deny, like Christ, its relative reality; to deny . . . " (120). An amusing inversion of this movement towards alogical connections occurs in examples of "anti-climax," as when Soares reflects that "There is, at this hour, a disquieting harmony, extending from the visible invisibility of everything to the slightly rough wood of the white sill, where my left hand rests sideways on the old, cracked paint" (49).

One of the most obvious figures to fall under the category of contradiction is *paradox*. Pessoa himself said that "all truth has a paradoxical form" (*Always Astonished* 30), and Soares, as though in compliance with this principle, fills *The Book* with paradoxes, which, appropriately, range from the intelligible to the fathomless. At the lower end of the ladder, we notice such commonplace paradoxes as "to find personality by losing it" (37), "renunciation is liberation" (111), and "not wanting is power" (111). Moving upwards, we find temporal contradictions such as "like remembrances of what was to come" (between 22 and 31) and "an absurd remembrance of my future death (68) as well as logical contradictions that include his advice that we "let the secrets you tell be secrets you've never had" (292) and his description of "a deserted street with people in it" (282). Soares's fondness for this particular figure seemingly leads him to find it even when the opportunity does not present itself in any obvious way. Thus, he reflects that "whether or not they exist, we're slaves to the gods" (26), says of an old man seen from his window that "he's attentive to what doesn't exist" (59) and of himself that "I'll be walking down a street as if I were sitting down, and my attention, although alert to everything, will have the inertia of a body completely at rest" (45).

Syllepsis, a rhetorical figure in which a word is made to refer to two or more words in a sentence even though it applies only to one of them literally, produces some especially memorable "neutral connections" in *The Book*. Among them we find: "I've arrived at Lisbon but not at a conclusion" (23); "To choose the wheat or to choose the many was the same" (25); "Forgotten my umbrella and the dignity of my soul" (38); "Pain as of a

choked sob or a discovered truth" (47); "A landscape for hunters and anxieties" (51); "As slumber of mysteries and battlements" (128); "I'm suffering from a headache and the universe" (279).

Non-sequitors, which are produced by an inference or a conclusion that does not follow logically from a premise, provide yet another facet of Soares's repertoire of incongruities. They include such "presences without connection" as: "Women who crochet because life exists" (21); "Everything was sleeping as if the universe were a mistake" (35); "A vast calm made me wish I'd been sleeping" (35); "the sordid monotony of their lives . . . makes me apocryphal and beggarly" (37-8); "a certainty that makes me want to die singing" (47); "Not another sound can be heard except the sounds of the whole city" (98).

The same fluctuation that we observe, with respect to figures involving amplification and contradiction, between examples in which the connections among terms are relatively intelligible and those in which they tend towards the unfathomable may be noticed in the countless metaphors and similes that create comparisons throughout *The Book*. Intelligibility comes to the fore in such examples as Soares likening his "worthless self" to "an indissoluble residue at the bottom of a glass" (21), the ebb and flow of "[his] confused consciousness" to "two tides in the black night" (36), and his despair to "the sudden feeling of being imprisoned in an infinite cell" (45). Likewise, when he compares life to "a roadside inn" (12) or concludes that "the entire life of a human soul is mere motions in the shadows" (63) we sense that we are on reasonably familiar ground.

The connections involved in many of Soares's similes and metaphors, however, are so tenuous as to remind us of Samuel Johnson's celebrated remark about poetic figures in which "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." Examples include his comparing the "sound of the first tram" in the morning to "a match to light up soul's darkness" (95), his leap from "incongruities" to "hedges separating deserted paths, suppositions like old pools" (47), his claim that "certain intuitions are like seagulls" (51). This pursuit of "neutral connections" likewise leads Soares to say of "the treading of the last lost men" that it "sounded ever so lightly, their dragging steps opening nothings in the restless greenery" (25), to observe of himself that "with my hands in the pockets of my posthumous coat, I strolled down the avenue of my small room" (31) and that "I promenade my conscious unconsciousness along my tree branch of the usual" (43-4).

Soares prepares us to appreciate yet another hallmark of the "written voice" when he elaborates at some length on the distinction between the "Babelish" language of particularity and the "Adamic" language of universality:

There are basically only two things in our earthly experience: the universal and the particular. To describe the universal is to describe what is common to all human souls and to all human experience—the broad sky, the day and night occurring in and by it; the flowing of rivers, all with the same fresh and nunnish water; the vast waving mountains known as oceans, which hold the majesty of height in the secret of their depths; the fields, the seasons, houses, faces, gestures; clothes and smiles; love and wars; gods both finite and infinite; the formless Night, mother of the world's origin; Fate, the intellectual monster that is everything . . . Describing these or any other universals, my soul speaks the primitive and divine language, the Adamic tongue that everyone understands. But what splintered, Babelish language would I use to describe the Santa Justa Lift, the Reims Cathedral, the breeches worn by the Zouaves, or the way Portuguese is pronounced in the province of Tràs-os-Montes? These are surface differences, the ground's unevenness, which we can feel by walking but not by our abstract feeling. (112)

Having distinguished between the languages proper to the universal and the particular, however, he then continues by suggesting—in a remark that will remind us of his quest for "greater completeness"—that the two, however distinct from each other they may be, are, at the same time, reciprocal:

What's universal in the Santa Justa Lift is the mechanical technology that makes life easier. What's true in the Reims Cathedral is neither Reims nor the Cathedral but the religious splendor of buildings dedicated to understanding the human's soul's depths. What's eternal in the Zouaves breeches is the colourful fiction of clothes, a human language whose social simplicity is, in a certain way, *a new nakedness*. What's universal in local accents is the homely tone of voice in those who live spontaneously, the diversity within groups, the multicoloured parade of customs, the differences between peoples, and the immense variety of nations. (112; my emphasis)

The idea that the universal and the particular may, indeed, be two interchangeable ways of perceiving the

same thing reappears in Soares's remark that "The world is a set of distinct things with varied edges, but if we're nearsighted, it's a continual and indecipherable fog." (148) as well as in his observation that "Over the diversely high rooftops the light lets its hands slip away until, in the unity of those same rooftops, the inner shadow of everything emerges" (190). At another point, he notices the way that the diverse group of pedestrians that passes by on the street coalesces into a unifying image: "Whirls, whirlpools, in life's fluid fluidity! In this large downtown square, the soberly multicoloured flow of people passes by, changes course, forms pools, divides into streams, converges into brooks" (79). In a similar way, he speculates that "perhaps it's this skepticism vis-à-vis our understanding that makes me look at a tree and a face, a poster and a smile, in exactly the same way. (Everything is natural, everything is artificial, everything equal)" (299).

One of the most extended illustrations of the reciprocity between the particular and the universal occurs in Text 70, which presents a street scene that begins with a brief sequence of particularities but ends with an Adamic vision that transforms even the most fundamental of distinctions into reciprocities. The text begins with Soares, who is walking along a street in Lisbon, suddenly noticing a fellow pedestrian: "He carried an old briefcase under his left arm and his right hand held the curved handle of a rolled-up umbrella, which he tapped on he ground to the rhythm of his walking" (68-69). The "tenderness" that Soares feels for this particular man then leads to a universalizing perception of their common humanity: "I feel an enormous tenderness that encompasses the whole of childish humanity, the whole of sleeping society, everyone, everything" (69). The concluding phase of this lengthy text elaborates in a prolonged and rhapsodic way on the co-presence of unity and diversity:

The whole lot is just like him: the girls chatting on their way to the workshop, the young men laughing on their way to the office, the big-bosomed maids returning with their heavy purchases, the delivery boys running their first errands—all of this is one and the same unconsciousness, diversified among different faces and bodies, like marionettes moved by strings leading to the same fingers of an invisible hand. They go on their way with all the manners and gestures that define consciousness, and they're conscious of nothing, for they're not conscious of being conscious. Whether clever or stupid, they're all equally stupid. Whether old or young, they're all the same age. Whether men or women, all are of the same sex that doesn't exist. (70)

The quasi-mystical vision of the unity of all things with which this passage concludes may remind us that Soares's own personal experience is of the irremediable conflict between dream and reality that resulted from the *loss* of unity. No sooner does Soares desire something than satisfaction is denied to him, as though the stumbling block that he encounters on the path to fulfillment were intrinsic to the path itself. If he wants to speak, an inhibition intervenes to assure that he won't; the nubile girl that he sees on the street has (or so he surmises) a boyfriend; he can't play with his toys because the gods have taken them from him; if he wants to know who he is, the answer is withheld from him; his dubious self-promotion as a superior man inevitably produces reminders of his actual mediocrity.

Soares adopts the "written voice" as the narrative medium in which he will compose his "factless autobiography" precisely because it provides him with a way of redeeming on the level of literary creation the otherwise unresolvable opposition between what he wants from life and what it gives him. It allows him to transform contradiction into complementarity and (recalling his own words) to see a hindrance as a marvel and a problem as a path. Soares offers us—in the form of yet another double-stranded Ariadne's thread—an even more clarifying guide through the meandering paths of *The Book* when, in Text 204, he describes his fall in terms of a *gap*—"I'm the gap between what I am and am not, between what I dream and what life made of me" (180) and then likens his writing to a *ray of light*: "The only tolerable form of communication is the written word, since it isn't a stone in a bridge between souls but a ray of light between stars" (185). It is thanks to writing that Soares is able to bypass the "stone in a bridge" of speaking and to leap, without the slightest fear of falling, from the narcissistically disquieting observation that "the universe isn't mine" to the narcissistically *giddy* conviction that "it's me" (112).

"Minos determined to remove the cause of this opprobrium from his abode, enclosing it within a labyrinth devised and built by Daedalus, the most distinguished of all living architects, who framed confusion and seduced the eye into a maze of wandering passages."

-*Ovid*, Metamorphoses

IN "TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT," T.S. Eliot famously declares that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material" (31). Eliot then offers a parallel separation between the sources in which a work originates and the aesthetic form into which they are transformed when he distinguishes between the "emotions" that are represented in a particular work and the artistic "feelings" that the writer shapes into the work itself. Thus, he tells us, with respect to Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*, that "The episode of Paolo and Francesca employs a definite emotion, but the intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of" (31). A similar insistence on the strict separation between the completed artistic work and the raw experiential materials from which it has been drawn is subsequently reinforced by Eliot's assertion that "the difference between *art* and *event* is always absolute" (3; my emphasis).

E. M. Cioran adds a crucial element to the relationship that Eliot establishes between suffering and creativity when, in his essay on Leo Tolstoy, he maintains that rather than simply "transmuting" the pain of the man who suffers, the artist may actually have taken pleasure in inflicting it: "Cruelty, in literature at least, is a sign of election. The more gifted the writer, the more he devotes himself to confining his characters in hopeless situations; he pursues them, tyrannizes them, forces them to confront every detail of the impasse or the agony into which he has thrust them." Fernando Pessoa adds yet a further perspective on Eliot's contention when he suggests that, "the man who suffers" may actually serve as a scapegoat upon whom the author has projected his own suffering: "Another method [for avoiding suffering], this one more subtle and more difficult, is to habituate oneself to embody the pain in a predetermined ideal figure. To create another 'I' to be the one responsible for suffering in us, for suffering that we suffer. To create, then, some internal sadism, entirely masochistic, that enjoys the suffering as if it were someone else's" (*Always Astonished* 116).

Sigmund Freud called the universal human desire to kill one's father and to sleep with one's mother the "Oedipus Complex" because he found the most striking literary representation of it in Sophocles's Greek tragedy, *Oedipus the King*. The universal *artistic* desire that interests us—which impels the artist, first, to displace his suffering upon a surrogate and then to construct a work that transmutes the surrogate's suffering into his own aesthetic achievement—finds its classic representation in the story of Daedalus as recounted by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. Ovid makes clear that the cause of the "scandal" that has fallen upon the house of Minos is his wife Parsiphaë's "foul adultery" with Poseidon's bull, to which we may add Minos's own transgression in keeping the bull for himself rather than sacrificing it as well as Daedalus's in fabricating the cow that Parsiphaë used to lure the bull into having intercourse with her. The burden of guilt, however, is displaced upon a surrogate in the form of the Minotaur, whom Minos then designates as the "opprobrium" that must be removed. Unlike the Minotaur, who troubles the eye with his "strange form [. . .] half man, half bull," Daedalus is "the most/distinguished of all living architects,/who framed confusion and seduced the eye/into a maze of wandering passages." Rather than being punished for the deceitfulness that created the scandal in the first place, he transmutes it into an impressive architectural achievement:

Not otherwise than when Maeander plays
his liquid games in the Phrygian fields
and flowing back and forth uncertainly,
observes its own waves bearing down on it,
and send its doubtful waters on their ways
back to their source or down to the open sea:
so Daedalus provided numberless
confusing corridors and was himself
just barely able to find his way out,

so utterly deceitful was that place. (269)

The fate of entrapment that nearly befalls Daedalus (and which may remind us that he is, in fact, imprisoned on the island of Crete by King Minos) is conveniently transferred to the Minotaur, and the prison in which he will eventually be killed by Theseus will be remembered—thanks to its intricate and deceitful design—as a tribute to Daedalus's artistry.

A similar relationship between an artist who fails to respect ordinary human limits and a surrogate who suffers in his place reappears in Ovid's account of the flight from Crete undertaken by Daedalus and Icarus. Recognizing that Minos controls escape routes both by land and sea, Daedalus invents a means of flying, that clearly involves his hubristic theft of a divine privilege. Ovid does, indeed, allude to Daedalus's hubris in several places, telling us, for example, that he "changed the face of nature," that he then instructed Icarus in "their transgressive art," and that the art itself led an astonished plowman to "think them gods." The punishment due to Daedalus's hubris is, however, displaced on Icarus, who goes one fatal step further than his father in imagining himself to be a god:

Now on their left, they had already passed
The Isle of Samos, Juno's favorite,
Delos and Paros too; and on their right,
Lebinthos and Calymne, honey-rich,
when the boy audaciously began to play
and driven by desire for the sky,
deserts his leader and seeks altitude. (272)

Ovid had already prepared us to see Icarus's tragedy as the consequence of a punishable defect when he described him as a feckless boy who "unaware of any danger in the things he handled . . . got in his father's way" while Daedalus was crafting the wings that would lead to his demise. Like the Minotaur—whose "strange form" prepares him to be designated as "the cause of this opprobrium"—Icarus bears an incriminating feature that facilitates the sleight-of-hand that will shift the burden of suffering from father to son. Similarly, his fate—drowning in the sea followed by burial in the earth—will both echo the incarceration of the Minotaur in the labyrinth and contrast with Daedalus's successfully completed return to Athens, an achievement that nicely complements his reputation as "the most distinguished of all living architects."

The twofold operation that we observe in the Daedalus story—in which suffering is first displaced upon a surrogate and then transformed into a completed work that redounds at the surrogate's expense to the artist's glory—reappears in Canto XXVI of Dante's *Inferno*, in which the role of surrogate—played successively by the Minotaur and Icarus is assigned to Ulysses and in which the opposing implications of the labyrinth and the wings (depending on whether they are viewed from the perspective of the surrogate or the artist) reappear in the form of eloquence, which is the source both of Ulysses's damnation and Dante's creative achievement. That Dante identifies with Ulysses is clearly suggested by those passages in which he intimates the nearly irresistible attraction that he feels for the Greek hero, and for the rhetorical gifts for whose misuse he is being punished. We notice, for example, that he prefaces his description of his meeting with Ulysses by reminding himself that he must exercise restraint; should he, otherwise, follow his "natural bent," he will, like Ulysses, go "Where virtue doesn't" (ll. 23–4). So drawn is he to the particular transgression for which Ulysses is being punished that he risks falling into the fire that torments him: "and if I didn't grip/A rock I would have fallen from where I stood/Without a push" (ll. 46–8). A moment later, he pleads with Virgil to allow him to listen to Ulysses:

"Master," I said, "I earnestly implore,
If they can speak within those sparks of flame—
And pray my prayer be worth a thousand pleas—
Do not forbid my waiting here for them
Until their horned flame makes its way to us;

You see how yearningly it makes me lean." (ll. 66–71)

Both Ulysses and Dante undertake transgressive journeys: Ulysses to "a world that has no people in it" and Dante into the realm of the dead. From the very beginning of the *Inferno*, however, Dante establishes a clear distinction between Ulysses's journey and his own by suggesting that the latter is undertaken as an act of submission rather than, as in the case of Ulysses, the violation of divinely ordained constraints: his journey has been commanded, not by his own imprudent desire to exceed human limits, but by the will of Beatrice; he will, furthermore, be guided by Virgil, to whose authority he dutifully submits.

Along with clearly distinguishing himself from Ulysses, Dante "transmutes" several of the details related to the catastrophe that befalls Ulysses's into displays of his artistic mastery. For example, he attributes to Ulysses a rhetorically effective speech designed to persuade his men to accompany him on his doomed journey:

'O brothers who have reached the west,' I began,
Through a hundred thousand perils, surviving all:
So little in the vigil we see remain
Still for our senses, that you should not choose
To deny it the experience—behind the sun
Leading us onward—of the world which has
No people in it. Consider well your seed:
You were not born to live as a mere brute does,
But for the pursuit of knowledge and the good.' (ll. 107–15)

The speech itself, which for Ulysses amounts to the signing of his death warrant, is, at the same time, Dante's artful rewriting of the speech that Virgil had given to Aeneas in which the Trojan hero expresses his fidelity to a project that has been willed by the gods:

"Through diversities
Of luck, and through so many challenges,
We hold our course for Latium, where the Fates
Hold out a settlement and rest for us.
Troy's kingdom there shall rise again." (Bk I, ll. 278–82)

Having thus projected the *misuse* of eloquence (comparable to Icarus's misuse of his wings) upon Ulysses, Dante then takes the further step of "transmuting" the central event of Ulysses's narrative—the westward journey that he undertakes to the Gates of Hercules—into an artful rewriting of Icarus's flight: he has Ulysses say that "We made wings of our oars, in an insane/Flight" (ll. 120–1); like Icarus, whose joy quickly turns to grief, Ulysses describes the emotion provoked by the apparently successful completion of their journey: "We celebrated—but soon began to weep" (l. 129); finally, the actual outcome of their "insane flight"—in which a storm tosses their ship "Until the sea had closed over us" (l. 136) recalls the drowning of Icarus: "Father! He cried, and Father!/Until the blue sea hushed him, the dark water/Men call the Icarian now" (188–9). It may also remind us that—like Daedalus, who almost became trapped in the labyrinth—Dante had compared himself to a swimmer who *nearly* drowns in "dangerous seas" (l. 18) at the beginning of Canto I, a detail that highlights the role played by Ulysses, who, as Dante's designated scapegoat, will *actually* drown.

Looking more closely at the flames that enfold Ulysses (and into which Dante risked falling) we notice that—like the labyrinth, which is a prison for the Minotaur and a demonstration of artistic mastery for Daedalus—they are both a site of punishment for Ulysses and an opportunity for Dante to display his craftsmanship by rewriting two events reported in the bible. First, we have Elijah's ascent into heaven, to which Dante himself had alluded earlier in Canto XXVI and which is recorded in the Book of Kings: "Now as they [Elijah and Elisha] walked on, talking as they went, a chariot of fire appeared and horses of fire, coming between the two of them; and Elijah went up to heaven in the whirlwind" (2Kings 2:11). The tongues of fire

also refer to the descent of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles: "When Pentecost day came around, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech" (Acts 2:1–4). The whirlwind that is associated in the bible with manifestations of divine favor, is "transmuted," to be sure, into the storm that Ulysses describes as "whirl[ing] the vessel round, and round again" (132).

If we now turn to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the most prominent form of suffering that we notice is the "unmanly grief" of which Claudius accuses Hamlet and which leads him to contemplate suicide in his first soliloquy. That Shakespeare may have transferred his own personal grief over the loss of his son Hamnet to Hamlet, who mourns the death of his father, is a commonplace of criticism of his most famous play. More recently, Stephen Greenblatt has speculated that Shakespeare may also have been haunted by conversations with his father, who, although still living, feared that he would die without benefit of a proper Catholic funeral, a ceremony that had recently been banned in England. In his introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of the play, G. R. Hibbard adds further evidence in support of this view when he points to the similarities between Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy and Sonnet 66, which begins "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry", a resemblance "which may well lead one to think at this point in the action Hamlet's sentiments are very close to Shakespeare's own" (1). In a remark that will recall Eliot's distinction between suffering and creativity, however, Hibbard later calls attention to an important difference between Shakespeare and his most famous dramatic character: "Hamlet may question whether life is worth living, and reject love because it leads only to the breeding of sinners, but the play in which he does this bears eloquent witness to its author's fertility of invention and to his exuberant delight in the sheer variety of human nature" (30).

Hibbard further implies an intriguing application of Eliot's distinction between "the man who suffers" and "the mind which creates" as well as between "event" and "art" when he speculates that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* under the thrall of what he calls a "daemon": "the very length of the tragedy, even in the Folio version, almost invites one to speculate that Shakespeare composed it, at the compulsive urging of his daemon, for his own satisfaction . . . It is almost as though the creative impulse refuses, for once, to heed the practical limitations and demands of the theatre. In the very process of bringing his play to an end Shakespeare expands its reach and significance. He cannot let go of it; and it will not let go of him" (1–2). Unlike the atmosphere of the play—in which corruption, decay, and death hold unremitting sway—there is in the play itself, as Hibbard observes, "a sense of adventure about it all. It conveys the same feeling of excitement at moving into the unknown and the unexplored that Keats experienced "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (30).

Hibbard's evocation of Shakespeare's own personal "daemon" and the indifference to practical considerations that he induces in him should remind us of Horatio's warning to Hamlet as he goes to his meeting with a very different kind of demon in the form of his father's ghost:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive you of your sovereign reason
And draw you into madness? (I.iv.69–74)

Horatio's warning to Hamlet regarding the perils of demonic possession and Hibbard's suggestion that Shakespeare may have been in the grip of a creative daemon of his own reminds us—as with technical skill in the Daedalus story and eloquence in *Inferno XXVI*—of the two diametrically opposing outcomes to which the same predicament can lead, depending on whether it befalls "the man who suffers" or "the mind which creates."

The distinction between these two outcomes may be observed in Hamlet's first soliloquy (I, ii, 129-59), in

which Shakespeare calls upon his considerable poetic skill to "transmute" Hamlet's *paralyzing* experience of grief into a verbal pattern that produces an effect of aesthetic *stasis*. Hamlet's own personal demon has already confined him, even before the meeting with his father, within a tormenting psychological labyrinth from which he can find no escape. Every line in his soliloquy points to a conflict that leads to an impasse: his desire to kill himself is prohibited by the "canon 'gainst self-slaughter"; he cannot enjoy the pleasures of life because it has, from his despairing perspective, become "an unweeded garden"; hyperbole is once again at work when he contrasts "Hyperion to a satyr," by which he means, somewhat dubiously, to distinguish between his father and Claudius; his mother's absolute fidelity to her first husband ("she would hang on him/As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on") has now swung in the direction of absolute betrayal ("But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two") and the infidelity itself is equated with the violation of a taboo ("O, most wicked speed, to post/With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!").

Shakespeare's daemon, in contrast to Hamlet's, has inspired him to find in the successive impasses to which Hamlet has been led by his despair his own creative occasion, one in which the same words that portend irresolvable conflict for Hamlet are arranged in such a way as to create a chiasm that effectively transmutes conflict into complementarity. The "pivot" of Hamlet's thirty-one line soliloquy occurs in the already quoted lines 15-17, which refer to the perfect conjugal love shared by Gertrude and King Hamlet: the two fourteen-line passages that appear on either side of it describe in the most dire terms the psychological impact of loss of this ideal on Hamlet, "the man who suffers." We notice, however, that Shakespeare, "the mind which creates," reaps an aesthetic benefit from this loss by having the key terms that appear on one side reappear—albeit in an altered form so as to avoid mere repetition—on the other. Thus, the desire that "this too too solid flesh would melt" in the first line returns as "But break, my heart" in the thirty-first. Subsequent reappearances involve: "dew" as "righteous tears"; "self-slaughter" as "incestuous sheets"; "things rank and gross in nature" as "a beast, that wants discourse of reason"; "But two months dead" as "A little month, or ere those shoes were old"; and, finally, "Hyperion to a satyr" as "Than I to Hercules."

A similar transmutation of paralysis into aesthetic stasis may be observed in the so-called chapel scene, in which Shakespeare creates a "diptych" out of Claudius's and Hamlet's parallel inability to perform an act that each ardently desires. Claudius wants to repent having killed his brother but is not ready to relinquish the rewards:

My fault is past, but, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. (III, iii, 51–5)

Hamlet, for his part, wants to revenge his father's murder but also to assure that Claudius will be damned:

and am I then revenge'd,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.
Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent. (III, iii, 84–8)

The aesthetic stasis that Shakespeare creates here by "transmuting" the paralysis of his characters into a diptych is further reinforced by the mirroring relationship between the beginnings and ends of the two soliloquies that he writes for them: Claudius's begins "O, my offense is rank, it smells to *heaven*;" and ends "Words without thoughts never to *heaven* go." Hamlet's begins "Now might I do it pat, now is a-praying/And now I'll do't. And so a goes to *heaven*"; heaven then returns towards the end of his soliloquy in the line "that his heels may kick at *heaven*."

The transformation of paralysis into stasis that we observed in Hamlet's soliloquy as well as in the chapel scene also applies to the play as a whole, in which the proliferation of obstacles creates a series of actions

that, failing to achieve their desired end, produce an effect of incoherence and disarray, as is memorably summarized by Horatio, who tells Fortinbras that the carnage that he observes is the result

Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause;
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fallen on the inventors' heads. (V.ii.396–400)

The absence of a coherent and unifying main plot produces a series of events that are not clearly organized by causal connections. However, these episodic, rather than plot-driven, events of the play are nonetheless shaped, once again, into a static aesthetic design. We notice, in a general way, that Shakespeare creates this effect by using the "Mousetrap," which he places at the precise midpoint of *Hamlet*, as a kind of "hinge" that holds together two diptychs: the first consisting of the events leading up to this midpoint, in which our attention is focused on Hamlet's failure to revenge his father's death, and those following it, in which attention shifts to Claudius's failure to deal effectively with the obvious threat that Hamlet presents to him. This overall mirroring between stalled revenge in the first-half of the play and stalled self-defense in the second may also be observed in the chiastic arrangement of scenes throughout the play. Limiting ourselves to the relationship between the first and fifth acts of the play, we notice that the sequence of principal events in the first act is not produced by cause and effect:

A. Platform: Fortinbras menaces the kingdom
B. Court of Denmark: Hamlet and Laertes
C. Conversation between Hamlet and Horatio
B. Polonius's House
A. Platform: ghost of Hamlet's father

It does, however, form a chiasm, with the conversation between Hamlet and Horatio serving as a hinge: the scene in Polonius's house echoes the scene set in the Court of Denmark (Polonius presiding over one, Claudius over the other) and the second scene on the platform echoes the first (Fortinbras's military threat the focus of attention in one, Claudius's treachery in the other).
We likewise observe the co-presence of a discontinuous series of events and an underlying chiastic structure in Act V:

A. Corpses in Cemetery
B. Laertes vs. Hamlet with Ophelia as object
C. Conversation between Hamlet and Horatio
B. Duel between Hamlet and Laertes
A. Corpses in room of state

Once again, a conversation between Hamlet and Horatio serves as the pivot, the duel between Hamlet and Laertes echoes their combat in Ophelia's grave, and the corpse-strewn stage at the end of the play returns us to the gravediggers scene with which Act V began. We may also observe that the relationship between the first and final acts of the play is based more on symmetry than on cause and effect. The play begins with news of Fortinbras's approach with his army and ends with his inheriting the Kingdom of Denmark; the main action of the second scene, which takes place in the court of Denmark, involves the petitions of Laertes and Hamlet which is echoed toward the end of Act V by their duel; following the central conversation between Hamlet and Horatio that occurs in both Act I and preceding it chiastically in Act V, we have two scenes in which the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia is the center of attention; finally the encounter between Hamlet and the ghost of his father at the end of Act I "returns" as his encounter with the skull of Yorick at the beginning of Act V. Recalling Eliot's distinction between "event" and "art," we may conclude that the inability

to act decisively and effectively that paralyzes all of the principal characters in *Hamlet* and leads to their collective tragedy on the level of "event," provides Shakespeare with the opportunity to "transmute" the loss of plot into a theatrical triumph.

T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," written at about the same time as Pessoa was beginning work on *The Book*, similarly expresses the very different outcomes to which "daemonic possession" may lead. There are no actual demons in "Prufrock," yet we constantly sense the oppressive influence throughout the poem of what Eliot called "the Eliot way." He used this term to explain his mother's inability to decide to visit him in England, describing it as an affliction that makes it "impossible for any of our family to make up their minds." James Longenbach tells us that "in an uncollected essay about Henry Adams, to whom Eliot was distantly related (Adams having been the great-grandson of the second president), he referred to the Eliot Way more generally as the Boston Doubt, 'a scepticism which is difficult to explain to those who are not born to it.' 'This scepticism,' Eliot went on, 'is a product, or a cause, or a concomitant, of Unitarianism.' Wherever someone infected with the Eliot Way stepped, 'the ground did not simply give way, it flew into particles.' Such people 'want to do something great,' said Eliot, but 'they are predestined failures'" (qtd. in Longenbach 28).

In a remark that will remind us of Eliot's distinction between "the man who suffers" and "the mind which creates," Longenbach then goes on to argue that "Eliot's first great artistic success grew from the effort to *distance* himself from the threat of such failure by *dramatizing* it. Not only the voice but the very linguistic texture of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' embodies the typically Eliotic stalemate between fortitude and inertia" (28; my emphasis). Among the many details that point to Eliot's displacement of the "Eliot Way" onto Prufrock we notice, even before Prufrock's soliloquy begins, that Eliot has prefaced it with a passage from *Inferno XXVI*, in which Guido da Montefeltro faces a potentially paralyzing conflict: on the one hand, he wants to tell the story of his misdeeds to Dante but, on the other, he wants to avoid harming his reputation among the living. No sooner does he raise the spectre of the impasse to which this conflict could potentially lead, however, than he resolves it by reminding himself that no one (including, he wrongly assumes, Dante himself) has "ever returned from this abyss alive" (l. 63).

Prufrock's situation is—unfortunately for him—a mirror inversion of Guido's: he begins with a forceful decision ("Let us go then, you and I") but then runs afoul of the "Eliot Way," which makes him almost immediately reluctant to pursue the "overwhelming question," which, given Prufrock's state of mind, may be "overwhelming" simply because, it is a question. As a result, the "Let us go" with which this paragraph begins returns at the end in the form of a deferral: "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'/Let us go and make our visit." A similar pattern may be observed in the paragraph beginning with optimistic announcement that "And indeed there will be time," but ends with yet another reversal: "And time yet for a hundred indecisions,/And for a hundred visions and revisions,/Before the taking of a toast and tea."

The "Eliot Way" subsequently emerges to obstruct Prufrock's journey when he doubts that he has sufficient courage to face other people whom, he is convinced, will surely notice his thinning hair. For Prufrock, this relatively trivial uncertainty leads him to formulate a characteristically rhetorical question that guarantees his inaction: "Do I dare/Disturb the universe?" Later in the poem, Prufrock, having by this point clearly decided not to undertake the journey that he had initially proposed, asks himself by way of self-justification, "Would it have been worth it after all," a phrase that he intones five times and to which he responds implicitly in the negative by invoking a purely hypothetical obstruction in the form of a woman who, "settling a pillow by her head,/Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all.'"

As Longenbach observes, however, "the Eliot Way is countermanded by a willed decisiveness, a determination to act that is nurtured so privately that to anyone else it appears irrational" (28). There is, as it were, a *second* "Eliot Way" that allows Eliot to displace the paralyzing capacity of the first onto Prufrock and then to "transmute" the *event* of Prufrock's suffering into a work of *art*. Among the signs of this second "Eliot Way," we notice that Eliot writes, in the form of a dramatic monologue, a poem that artfully draws upon, in both obvious and not-so-obvious ways, two of the greatest masterpieces of western literature: Dante's *Inferno* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. From Hamlet, he has borrowed both the content of his poem (Prufrock's indecision revisits Hamlet's) and its form (Prufrock's monologue echoes Hamlet's soliloquies). We also observe that one of the poem's most famous lines—"No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to

be"—points, not only to Shakespeare's play but also to the line in *Inferno II*—"I am no Aeneas or Paul"—in which Dante expresses his reluctance to undertake the journey through the afterlife that Virgil has proposed to him:

Eliot's adaptations of the *Inferno* begin, of course, with his using a passage from Canto XXVII as the epigraph to "Prufrock" and concludes with a three-line stanza (an allusion to Dante's terza rima?) that arguably revisits Ulysses's drowning at the end of *Inferno XXVI*:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Additional literary allusions remind us of the distinction between Prufrock, who is describing a lived experience that exemplifies the "Eliot Way," and T. S. Eliot, who is writing a poem under the very different influence of his *literary* precursors (rather than his progenitors) that allows him to distance himself from his designated surrogate. When Prufrock assures himself, in a palpably delaying maneuver, that "There will be time," Eliot is artfully echoing a line from Andrew Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress." His certainty that there will be time for "all the works and days" echoes the title of a poem by Hesiod. His evocation of "a bracelet of bright hair" is a direct borrowing from John Donne's "The Relic." His fantasy of his head's being "brought in upon a platter" revisits the fate of John the Baptist. His wondering "And would it have been worth it, after all . . . to have squeezed the universe into a ball" is yet another rewriting of a famous image from "To His Coy Mistress."

The two meanings of the term "Eliot Way"—as both obstacle and as path—apply as well to the combination of randomness and orderly design that characterizes the poem as a whole. In a way that may remind us of *Hamlet*, whose series of individual scenes may seem random, transitions between the disparate verse paragraphs of "Prufrock" often seem abrupt or, at the very least, not governed by a discernible principle. We begin with a journey through "half-deserted streets," then shift to a couplet describing women who talk about Michelangelo, then to one organized around an extended metaphor comparing the "yellow fog" to a cat that "rubs its back upon the window-panes," and the "yellow smoke" to a cat that "rubs its muzzle on the window-panes/Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening." Such unpredictable shifts as these continue to reappear throughout the poem.

At the same time, we notice that Eliot "transmutes" the randomness of Prufrock's wandering journey into strictly controlled formal pattern. The center of his 131-line poem (the number itself suggests the presence of a submerged, but nonetheless conscious design) is the couplet "Is it perfume from a dress/That makes me so digress?", which itself contains (whether by design or not) 13 syllables; both lines are in trimester verse, the first an irregular combination of two dactyls followed by an anapest, the second a regular sequence of iambs. The tightly controlled formal aspects of these of these two lines as well as their placement at the very center of "Prufrock" contrasts suggestively with the implications of the word "digress." This same co-presence of aimless wandering and strict formal control applies to the poem as a whole, which, as R. G. Peterson has demonstrated in precise detail, "seems to move outward [from this center], the last half repeating the first in reverse order, in what may be visualized as a series of concentric circles based on clusters of related images and leading backward to the etherization (ll. 1–3) and forward to the awakening and drowning (ll. 124–131)" (25). From beginning to end, Peterson argues, the poem "focuses inward on its numerical center, and that focus is consistent and highly symmetrical, based on the repetition in reverse order of nine thematic groupings of obviously related images." He then diagrams "Prufrock" as follows:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 X 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 x = ll. 65–66

and then summarizes the content of each of the groups in this way:

1. Change of consciousness
ll. 1–3: Etherization, evening
ll. 124–131: Waking, drowning
2. The self

ll. 4–12: Prufrock and the other (“you”)
ll. 111–123: Prufrock alone
3. The city
ll. 15–25: Evening, cat
ll. 99–110: Sunsets, dooryards, streets
4. The social self—indecision and misunderstanding
ll. 30–34: Toast, tea
ll. 87–98: Cups, marmalade, tea
5. Refinement
ll. 37–44: Bald spot, morning coat, collar
ll. 81–86: Bald head, no prophet
6. The social self—crisis
ll. 49–53: Coffee, music, conversation
ll. 65–80: Tea, cakes, ices
7. Pure sensation
ll. 55–56: Eyes
ll. 73–74: Ragged claws
8. Ineffectuality
ll. 57–60: Pinned insect, butt-ends
70–72: Pipe smoke, lonely men
9. Erotic sensation
ll. 62–64: Arms
l. 67: Arms
x. = The Center
ll. 65–66: Perfume from a dress

The concentric design of the poem—like the labyrinth in the Daedalus story, the nine circles of Dante’s *Inferno* and the chiastic structure of *Hamlet*—point ambiguously both to victimage and to mastery. Peterson emphasizes the former when he interprets it as signifying : “the extreme self-centeredness of the ineffectual lover” (25). Yet, to be sure, Eliot’s “deceitful” shaping of Prufrock’s hapless dithering into a modernist labyrinth is equally a tribute to his skill as a literary architect in whose work we discover, in Eliot’s own words, that “the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (“Tradition” 28).

Turning our attention now to *The Book of Disquiet*, we notice scattered allusions to the two artifacts—the labyrinth and the wings—upon which Daedalus’s reputation as the archetypal artist rests. Soares describes himself, for example, as “lost in tangles, natural labyrinths of darkness” (33) and as “a will lost somewhere in the labyrinth of who I really am” (115) and when he complains that “everything becomes a confusing labyrinth where I stray, in myself, away from myself” (187). He also refers to the “meandering pages” of his writing (106) and describes his putting his impressions “in vagabond words that desert me as soon as they’re written, wandering on their own over slopes and meadows of images, along avenues of concepts, down footpaths of confusions” (286). Images of flight include his telling us that “I spread my wings without moving, like an imaginary condor” (373), his looking at “the immense sky and the countless stars, and I’m free with a winged splendor whose fluttering sends a shiver throughout my body” (47) and then “at the lofty, clear sky where I see [. . .] an impalpable soft down of a winged and far-away life” (316).

The Daedalus whose display of artistic skill contrasts with the suffering that is displaced upon his surrogate, however, disappears, his once-godlike powers now demoted to the level of a day-dreaming child: “In my arranging and rearranging of images I’m like a child using newspaper to dress up an a king, and in the way I create rhythm with a series of words I’m like a lunatic adorning my hair with dried flowers that are still alive in my dreams” (169) or as an interior decorator: “If life has given us no more than a prison cell, let’s at least decorate it as best we can – with the shadows of our dreams, their colourful patterns engraving our oblivions on the static surfaces of the walls” (261).

The disappearance in *The Book* of an artist whose mastery of his medium sets him apart from the protagonist whom he otherwise resembles, has as its principal consequence that Pessoa and Soares are, to

adopt one of Soares's more startling images, "Siamese twins that aren't attached" (20). François Laye refers to the author of *The Book* as Pessoa-Soares and has this to say about their relationship: "Soares, like Pessoa himself, wants to remain undefined, wavering, in flight from the gaze of others, and refusing to sacrifice any of his virtualities, any of this possibilities for self-renewal . . . But there is even more to say about this: Bernardo Soares—that is, Fernando Pessoa himself—thinks of himself as a "stranger": a stranger like any other poet, but to such an unusually extreme degree that includes all of humanity, whose mediocrity he deplores" (45).

There is, to be sure, a close personal resemblance. As Robert Bréchon reminds us, after his mother's death, Pessoa began leading as life that closely resembled Soares's: "He went more and more often to the cafés of the *Chiado*, the *Baixa* [. . .] like Soares, he was increasingly given over to wandering about Lisbon, to 'flâneries,' to dreaming, to alcohol, to little joys and great sorrows" (*Etrange Etranger* 402). Zbigniew Kotowicz adds this the observation that: "Many of Soares's traits resemble Pessoa himself. Loneliness, immobility, a meaningless office job were all a part of Pessoa's existence [. . .] Stripping Soares of external accidents, through an aesthetics of poverty, abnegation, decadence and insignificance, Pessoa bares himself open. Soares's voice is sometimes what one imagines Pessoa would sound like in a confessional mood. This is the nearest we get to Pessoa's pain, to Pessoa at his most intimate" (73–4).

Pessoa himself adds support to this view when he remarks, in his unfinished preface to "Fictions of the Interlude," that "My semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares, who in many ways resembles Álvaro de Campos, always appears when I'm sleepy or drowsy, so that my qualities of inhibition and rational thought are suspended; his prose is an endless reverie. He's a semi-heteronym because his personality, although not my own, doesn't differ from my own but is a mere mutilation of it. He's me without my rationalism and emotions. His prose is the same as mine, except for certain formal restraint that reason imposes on my own writing, and his Portuguese is exactly the same" (*The Book*, 474).

We observe Pessoa sounding very much indeed like Soares in a letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro: "On days of the soul like today I feel, in my awareness of every bodily pore, like the sad child who was beaten up by life. I was put in a corner, from where I can hear everyone else playing. In my hands I can feel the shoddy, broken toy I was given out of some shoddy irony. Today, the fourteenth of March, at ten after nine in the evening, this seems to be all my life is worth." So close, in fact, is the implied resemblance between author and protagonist, that Pessoa concludes by telling Monteiro that "I'll take the time to make a typed copy [of this letter] so as to include some of its sentences and grimaces in *The Book of Disquiet*" (*The Book* 469).

In exploring this relationship further, we notice that *both* Pessoa and Soares experience writerly frustration, a circumstance that prevents Pessoa from availing himself of the technical skill that allowed his masterful precursors to distance themselves from their surrogates. Soares clearly presents himself as a "man who suffers" and reveals as well that to all the usual forms of human suffering he has added writing itself (which is no cure): "Writing is like the drug that I abhor and keep taking, the addiction I despise and depend" (137). Later, he declares: "Page by page I slowly and lucidly reread everything I've written, and I find that it's all worthless and should have been left unwritten [. . .] the time that I spent doing it earned me nothing but the illusion, now shattered, that it was worth doing" (150). The relief from suffering that writing could potentially bring never materializes: "To write is to lose myself, yes, but everyone loses himself, because everything gets lost. I, however, lose myself without any joy—not like the river flowing into the sea for which it was secretly born, but like the puddle left on the beach by the high tide, its stranded water never returning to the ocean but merely sinking into the sand" (137). He dreams of an accomplishment that is well beyond his means: "Ah, to be able to construct a complete Whole, to compose something that would be like a human body, with perfect harmony among all its parts, and with a life, a life of unity and congruency, uniting the scattered traits of its various parts!" (248).

That Pessoa's and Soares's sufferings are nearly identical is further made clear by Pessoa's remark to Armando Cortes-Rodrigues that "My state of mind compels me to work hard, against my will, on *The Book of Disquiet*. But it's all fragments, fragments, fragments" (473). Robert Bréchon confirms this proximity between the "real" and the "fictional" authors of *The Book* when he observes that: "As beautiful as they may be, the books that he has bequeathed to us are only *disjecta membra*; they give us only a faint idea of his potential greatness." Bréchon continues by arguing that Pessoa was never able to construct the sort of literary

monuments achieved by Virgil and Dante because "he was not a builder; rather, like Shakespeare, he was, above all else, a 'great soul' a consciousness without limits" (408).

Having abolished the boundary between "the man who suffers" and "the mind which creates" Pessoa/Soares similarly blurs the distinction between the *event* and the *art* into which it is transmuted, producing a work in which, as Richard Zenith observes in his "Preface," "*forme* and *fond* perfectly reflect each other" (xv). One obvious consequence is that *The Book*'s lack of a coherent shape mirrors Soares's own lack of a fixed identity. At one point, he says, "I cease being myself and so scattered" (55); at another, he admits that "I don't have any idea of myself, not even the kind that consists in the lack of an idea of myself. I'm a nomad in my self-awareness. The herds of my inner riches scattered during the first watch" (101). Likewise, he admits that "at a certain point in my written cogitation, I no longer know where the centre of my attention lies—whether in the scattered sensations I attempt to describe like enigmatic tapestries, or in the words which absorb me as I try to describe the act of describing and which, absorbing me, distract me and cause me to see other things" (321). In yet another passage, the non-identity of the protagonist and the work in which he appears uncannily converge: "I'm the suburbs of a non-existent town, the long-winded commentary on a book never written. I'm no one, no one at all. I don't know how to feel, how to think, how to want, I'm the *character of an unwritten novel*, wafting in the air, dispersed without ever having been, among the dreams of someone else who didn't know how to complete me" (227; my emphasis).

Zbigniew Kotowicz emphasizes *The Book*'s indeterminate identity when he notes, regarding the fate of the fragments that Pessoa left behind at the time of his death, that:

Shortly before his death, Pessoa marked an envelope L. do D. (*Livro do Desassossego*, *The Book of Disquiet*) and shoved into it various fragments of prose which he had been composing all his literary life. Those were the preparatory stages to hone the work into a publishable form and that was all Pessoa had time to do; he never got around to appointing a literary executor, nor did he leave any precise indications as to how he would arrange the material. Some of the fragments were finished and polished; many others were still in manuscript, sometimes barely legible, sometimes no more than loose notes. To aggravate the situation further, Pessoa's own selection turned out to be unreliable. Some fragments found in the envelope did not seem to belong in *The Book of Disquiet* and among the rest of his papers others were found that obviously did. (71-2)

To this, Richard Zenith adds that "what we have here isn't a book but its subversion and negation: the ingredients for a book whose recipe is to keep sifting, the mutant germ of a book and its weirdly lush ramifications, the rooms and windows to build a book but no floor plan and no floor, a compendium of many potential books and many others already in ruins" (ix).

A further consequence of the blurred distinction between event and art is that the two forms of punishment that appear in the Daedalus story—incarceration and drowning—are, ambiguously, sources of *both* pain and pleasure in *The Book*. We notice, on the one hand, that Soares does, at times, associate the labyrinth with disorientation and anxiety:

As my body penetrates the lanes and side streets, my soul loses itself in intricate labyrinths of sensation. All that can disturbingly convey the notion of unreality and feigned existence, all that can demonstrate—not to abstract reason but□ and concretely—how the place occupied by the universe is hollower than hollow; all this objectively unfolds before my detached spirit. I don't know why, but I'm troubled by this objective network of wide and narrow streets, this succession of street lamps, trees, lighted and dark windows, opened and closed gates—heterogeneously nocturnal shapes which my near-sightedness makes even hazier, until they become subjectively monstrous, unintelligible and unreal. (191)

At the same time, however, the complexity and indeterminacy of the labyrinth can also be sources of pleasure: "The geography of our consciousness of reality is an endless complexity of irregular coasts, low and high mountains, and myriad lakes [. . .] Everything is complex for those who think, and no doubt thought itself takes delight in making things yet more complex" (284).

The same principle applies to enclosed spaces in general. At times they are uncannily conjoined with infinity in a way that produces oppression: "Infinite prison—since you're infinite there's no escaping you" (197); "those who suffer tedium feel imprisoned in the worthless freedom of an infinite cell [. . .] the walls of the infinite cell cannot crumble and bury us, because they don't exist; nor can they be revived by the pain of

shackles no one has put on us" (316). Conversely, both enclosed spaces and infinity can have positive implications for Soares: "There's infinity in a cell or a desert. One can sleep cosmically against a rock" (86); "the silence of the house touches infinity" (34); "fourth-floor room overlooking infinity" (348); "parks of infinity" (431); "avenue of my small room" (31); "But even from this fourth-floor room that looks out over the city, it's possible to contemplate infinity. An infinity with warehouses down below, it's true, but with stars up above . . . " (382).

Like incarceration, drowning is also treated ambiguously in *The Book*. On the one hand, Soares describes himself as "wanting to scream because of a feeling that I'm sinking in an ocean of□ whose immensity has nothing to do with infinity of space or the eternity of time, nor with anything that can be measured or named" (192). He compares his soul to "a black whirlpool, a vast vertigo circling a void, the racing of an infinite ocean around a whole in nothing. And in these waters which are more a churning than actual waters float the images of all I've seen and heard in the world—houses, faces, books, boxes, snatches of music and syllables of voices all moving in a sinister and bottomless swirl" (228).

The sea can also emerge as a source of pleasure, however, as when Soares expresses a desire "To cease, to be the ebb and flow of a vast sea, fluidly skirting real shores, on a night in which one really sleeps!" (33). During a walk along the seashore, he likewise describes an experience of the sea that is far removed from the image of it as "a black whirlpool": "The entire ocean, noisy and cool, rolling in from the depths of the vast night to ripple over the beach, during my nocturnal walk to the seashore." The "entire ocean" then returns in an even more appealing variant in the concluding line of this text: "How much I feel if I meander this way, bodiless and human, with my heart as still as a beach, and the entire sea of all things beating loud and derisive, then becoming calm, on the night we live, on my eternal nocturnal walk to the seashore" (93). At one point, "the black whirlpool" mutates into a "white whorl" with similarly seductive implications: "There on the beach, with no sound but that of the ocean waves and of the wind passing high overhead, like a large invisible aeroplane, I experienced dreams of a new sort—soft and shapeless things, marvels that made a deep impression, without images or emotions, clear like the sky and the water, and reverberating like the white whorls of ocean rising up from the depths of a vast truth" (174).

Closely related to the ocean—and sharing its ambiguous associations with both *event* and *art*—are abysses and chasms. On the one hand, we find such unnerving descriptions of bottomless space as "On the path to the abstract chasm that lies in the depths of things there are horrors that the world's men don't imagine and fears to endure that human experience doesn't know" (114). In a similar vein, Soares describes life as "a roadside inn where I have to stay until the coach from the abyss pulls up" (12). On the other hand, we find such pleasurable images as Soares's allusion to "the boundless possibility contained in the abyss of everything" (54) and to the happiness that he finds in observing "the landscape of simple rain falling on the street resurrected from the chasm!" (73).

In his analysis of narrative, the American literary critic Kenneth Burke finds its underlying motive in "its subjection to impulses toward perfection, including the perfection of the victim" (qtd. in C. Carter Allen 29). This "universal narrative desire" discovered by Burke clearly corresponds to that we have called the "Daedalus Complex," whose twofold operation—involving displacement of suffering upon a surrogate followed by its transmutation into a completed work—we have observed in the work of two of Pessoa's acknowledged masters as well as in a modernist poem that, like Pessoa's own work, draws its inspiration from them and, in the person of Prufrock, offers a protagonist who resembles Soares in certain respects. Having Burke's terms in mind helps us to see more clearly, however, that Pessoa has essentially forged a work that dismantles the "Daedalus Complex" by *imperfecting* the victim—in the person of a narrator/protagonist who is barely distinguishable, if at all, from his creator and by *imperfecting* the work in the form of a literary monument that he was never able to build. The artist who had heretofore imitated the craft of Daedalus is now eclipsed by one who identifies with the imprisoned Minotaur and the drowning Icarus; likewise, the labyrinth as well as the sea that he inherited from the Daedalus story become his "sheltering ruins."

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Acknowledgments

I DISCOVERED *THE BOOK OF DISQUIET* several years ago thanks to a review of it by the British novelist Paul Bailey in which he said "This book has moved me more than anything I have read in years. I have rarely encountered such exhilarating lugubriousness." My own reading of *The Book* quickly convinced me that, along with the exhilaration that it so abundantly offers, it was also one of the towering masterpieces of 20th century fiction even if, much like Bernardo Soares himself, it could be so aptly described as "the ruins of buildings that were never more than ruins." I am deeply grateful to the Dalkey Archive Press, and to Jeremy Davies as the editor of its "Scholarly Series," both for sharing my high estimate of this "unwritten novel" and for responding so enthusiastically to my proposing a critical study devoted entirely to it.

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THOMAS J. COUSINEAU teaches English at Washington College. He is the author of *After the Final No: Samuel Beckett's Trilogy*, Waiting for Godot*: Form in Movement, Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction*, and *Three-Part Inventions: The Novels of Thomas Bernhard*.

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