

A Portrait of the Author as a Reader

My sketch is of an author who I already am or try to be.¹ It is a portrait that is at once natural and (to quote the beautiful title of the Brazilian poet Cecilia Meirelles), denatural and denatured, whereupon the question arises: how not to talk about oneself or how, moreover, to talk about oneself?

From the outset I define the author as a reading animal, as the title suggests, hence his lack of essence, existing first and foremost as an interbook writer, the perfect example of which today would be the Catalan Enrique Vila-Matas and his portable literature. Other examples are Borges, Joyce, Thomas Mann, Machado, Rosa, Proust, and many other encyclopedic writers, who seem to carry a library on their backs, so numerous are their implicit and explicit references.

I start from the assumption that authorship is a matter of transdisciplinary reception and production. It is an instance of passage, in which several discourses are articulated and transmitted: those of literature, philosophy, arts, media, sociology, anthropology, etc., precisely because authorship is based on reading and is not a biographical essence. The biography that interests me is less factual than bibliographical, a biobibliography, if you will. The author is a device, both personal and impersonal, at the limit of anonymity. He is initially the author in the first person—"I write"—but then he must transform himself into several other persons, both discursive and empirical: he, she, them, you, we, and even the former thou. A fully self-identified author is stillborn, since he is incapable of putting on the different masks without which there is no authorship: narrative voices, characters, poetic subjects, dramatic voices, *dramatis personae*, essayistic, biographical, and social personas—in short, all sorts of masks. To paraphrase Nietzsche, I would say that the author is a composite of all the characters at a great masquerade. Without these frankly mimetic heterographical records (and heteronomic ones, according to Fernando Pessoa), he falls into the expressivism of an "I" who can only say I, never him/her, you, us, them.

This dispersed method of enunciation is what constitutes the wealth of authorship, and as much as its death has been staged, for good reasons, in recent decades, it survives its own ruin. I would say, following Derrida in *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines*, that the ruin, rather than an external evil

that befalls it over time, constitutes the portrait and the self-portrait. The author survives as a ruin, not in spite of it, precisely because he has metamorphosed into the reader, as Barthes announced at the end of his notorious essay "The Death of the Author": "the birth of the reader must be paid for with the death of the Author."²

On the other hand, in his equally famous "What Is an Author?" Michel Foucault states that "the theory of a work does not exist."³ The same can perhaps be said about the "theory of the author," that it does not exist. Not because of an empirical contingency, that is, for lack of a theoretician fit to develop it, but for one essential reason: the question of authorship has gone through so many changes over the centuries that it is impossible to gather them into a single concept. The category of "author" comprises an extremely scattered set of factual and transcendental notions, values, and methods.

In 1978, in his course *La Préparation du Roman* (The Preparation of the Novel) at the Collège de France, Roland Barthes summarized his position regarding the authorship issue.⁴ Exactly ten years after the publication of his little-understood essay, "The Death of the Author," Barthes explained the about-face that he underwent after the publication of *The Pleasure of the Text*. In the watershed year 1968, when he published the essay on authorship, it had been crucial to suppress the omnipresence of the author in literary studies so as to avoid the biographism inherited from the critical positivism of the nineteenth century. In traditional biographical studies, the empirical life of the author, as it were, overpowered the work, but in the 1960s, still at the zenith of the structuralist movement that Barthes had helped to start and that was soon to go into decline, it became necessary to release the literalness of the text. Barthes thereby avoided suffocating the text with any empiricism that might compromise the independence of fictional literature.

The entire power of literature was therefore taken away from the author and attributed to the reader ("the birth of the reader must be paid for with the death of the Author"). So the flesh-and-blood author died, and the author-reader was born, the Borges archivist, whom Barthes called the *scriptor* of a text made up of multiple quotations. In this sense, the only biography that really mattered was the literary one, consisting of pieces of texts that together registered the private intellectual history of each writer. But this biography was inscribed and made available above all in the fabric of the work, interwoven with the multiple threads of culture, requiring a transdisciplinary approach.

I do not think that the Barthes of the 1970s, the one of *The Light Room* and *The Preparation of the Novel*, fully broke with this conception of the author-reader, since quotability continues to be a driving force in his refined writing. We have only to check the index of names in his works during this so-called poststructuralist period to see how much Barthes the reader inseminates the author figure. There was only a displacement of interest and a rescaling of values. As I see it, there is a correspondence between the reading power and an interest in the biography (in the strict sense) of the great authors, so much so that Barthes revealed, in one of his classes, his interest in writing a biography of the composer Schumann but ended up giving up the project because he could not read German.

The facts of the life of a great author gained importance for Barthes, who was preparing to write a novel himself, marking a turning point in his career as a critic and theorist of literature and writing, although this novel, because of Barthes's death, remained forever in limbo.⁵ It is as if Barthes, at the end of his life, sought in the great artists the creative power to help him carry out his own project of inventive writing, a departure from the kind of writing he had done until then. Proust presents the absolute paradigm of that *search* or *research* (*recherche*). It is not at all a question of being limited to the plain facts of a great life, but rather of understanding the relationship of tension between the world and literary creation. For example, we have to live, to waste time, in order to then rediscover time, as in Proust's case. We waste enough time to gain it back before we die via literary fiction. But if the loss of time is excessive, the work can remain forever unfinished, or worse, unwritten, because it is too late. There is thus competition between worldly experience and literary experience. The latter depends on the former for its existence, but if the former takes up too much time and space, it ends up sacrificing the invention, the ultimate justification for the life of a writer. We are therefore faced with an almost insoluble quandary, as if Barthes researched the lives of the writers he loved—Tolstoy, Stendhal, Proust, Kafka, Flaubert—for help, if not in resolving then at least in settling the tension between everyday life and literary invention. Without experience, there can be no literary work (the Work, as he calls it). But an excess of experience also prevents the achievement of the Work. Barthes asks: "How can the writer (the one I'm talking about: the one who wants to write a Work) protect himself against the encroachments [*empiètements*], the aggressions of Administration (in the broad sense of the term, broader than exclusively professional administration), the demands of life?"⁶ This question has no simple answer:

everything in the world and the so-called practical life is done against the Work, but without the world or daily life, there is no Work, either. And each author must reach a balance between worldly experience and literary writing, there being no formula to solve this impasse. The biographical drama of the writer starts there, but it also ends there. One of the keys to fictional imagination, those that allow the opening and the pursuit of literary invention, is to solve this difficult problem.

Literature as Nonreading

One of the most curious books translated in recent years is Pierre Bayard's controversial *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*.⁷ The thesis of the essay is bold, but also somewhat naïve, and can be summed up as follows: the real reader is a nonreader. The only person who really reads is the reader who gives up reading completely, working his way through the volume, so as to find himself at the end of his journey. Reading, and indeed literature, becomes a mere narcissistic projection of what we supposedly read. Developed over the course of more than two hundred pages and endorsed by such authors as Umberto Eco, Montaigne, and Valéry, all great readers, Bayard has recourse to a text by Oscar Wilde to help explain his thesis. Distorting Wilde somewhat to serve his purposes, Bayard argues that reading is really only useful when it enables the reader to discover himself and become creative. All criticism and all creation are actually autobiographical. We read another in order to talk about ourselves. The work, Bayard says,

fades anyway within the discourse, giving way to an ephemeral hallucinatory object, a ghost-work capable of attracting all projections, which never stops transforming as a result of the interventions. It is therefore preferable to bolster it up with a work on ourselves and try to write fragments of our internal book from the few elements available, attentive to what these elements tell us that is intimate and irreplaceable. It is ourselves that we try to listen to, and not to the "real" book—even if it can possibly serve as a reason—and it is to the writing of ourselves that we must devote ourselves, making sure not to allow ourselves to deviate from that task.⁸

This is a fascinating argument, and one with which I would agree were it not for two basic misconceptions. First, Bayard the academic forgets that the critical conception of Wilde is dated and has a history, which is quite complex but easily

summarized. It is impressionist criticism, concerned with the moods (positive and negative) that a work causes in its reader, who is potentially a writer. To reduce any or all reading to this practice, disregarding the value of others, seems to me an unacceptable blindness in a lecturer in literature, however provocative it may be. Second, the reduction of reading to "me" is as harmful as the reduction of writing to "me." Although the "writing of me" or of "oneself" is in fashion, what fascinates me in these various practices of self is the opposite of what Bayard argues, i.e., the encounter with others and not with oneself. My thesis, if I had one, would be almost the antithesis of his: I write not to find myself as a demiurge or creator, much less to aestheticize my life (a narcissistic and tedious task) but to find the other. What fascinates me in literature and philosophy is the discovery not of oneself or myself but of the he or she whom I do not know. It is these precarious and tiny lives (to quote Pierre Michon) that give me new life, invading the realm in which I am no longer myself. So I see myself as another, away from myself, Sá de Miranda's famous "I have fallen out with myself," populated by ghosts and fantasies of the other that I soon also become. I quote this beautiful sixteenth-century poem, a precursor of an entire genre of poetry of the twentieth century and beyond:

I HAVE FALLEN OUT WITH MYSELF

I have fallen out with myself,
 I am set in all danger;
 I cannot live with myself
 Nor can I flee from me.

In pain, I fled from people,
 Before this one became so great:
 Now I would flee
 From myself, if from myself I could.

What means can I expect, or what end
 To the vain work that I carry out,
 Since I bring myself with me
 Such a great enemy of myself?"

Rimbaud's "I is someone else" (*Je est un autre*), little read in its original context of two letters to Georges Izambard and Paul Demeny, also means this:

the authorial device's infinite capacity to dress up as someone else.¹⁰ This is the reason for the theme of literary and artistic transvestism, which appears in artists as varied as Vila-Matas, Duchamp, Warhol, Flávio de Carvalho, Oiticica, Almodóvar, and (more recently) the cartoonist Laertes, among others. I cannot resist quoting a small passage from Rimbaud's famous letter to Izambard about the clairvoyant: "It is false to say: I think [*je pense*]. We should say: I am thought [*on me pense*]."¹¹ More anti-Cartesian than this it is impossible to be. Clarice Lispector elaborates on the idea: "The shortcut with refreshing shade and reflection of light among the trees, the shortcut where I am finally me, I have not found it. But one thing I know: my path is not me, it is another, it is other people. When I can fully feel the other I will be safe and I will think: this is my port of arrival."¹²

The main examples that Bayard puts forward to defend his thesis that we read to discover ourselves and to be able, finally, to create are all men who spent a large part of their lives in libraries. Their relationship with reading and not reading is completely different from that of a young man who is graduating (Bayard's preferred public), still immersed in the natural ignorance of beginners. If Valéry, for reasons opposed to those of Bayard, defended with great irony the right not to read Proust or Anatole France, it was because he spent his life immersed in books. Like Montaigne, he selected what interested him, learning from others the discovery of self through the encounter with otherness. This is the literary journey, via reading, without which no author can be fulfilled. It was only in this sense that Barthes announced that the birth of the reader must be paid for by the death of the author. From then on (but it has always been like this, I think), every great writer has been above all a great reader. Ignorance, or the reading of the flyleaf, which Bayard advocates in favor of narcissistic writing, serves only for books without any use at all—useless books. But the reader decides what is useful, leafing through and reading one chapter or another, effectively acquainting himself with the work.

The only chapter of Bayard that excited me, despite the imposture of the author, was one in which he addresses forgetfulness as a creative factor for Montaigne. Lack of memory as a condition of writing has not yet been dealt with sufficiently. I can testify here that I am an author with a short memory. Mine always fails me when I need it. I never dare to quote a sentence or particularly a verse from memory; it never works—my mind goes blank or things come out all garbled. I can refer to an idea or notion, or summarize a concept, but memorize

each word of a long passage—never. I simply remember very little of the books I have read and the movies I have seen, just as Montaigne complained many times of picking up an unknown book from the shelf and discovering that he had already read it and annotated it, without being able to recall a single line! He thus began to write the date of his reading on the last sheet of each volume, giving a brief impression of the work, so as not to have to pick it up again needlessly, especially when the book was bad. His trouble remembering was so serious that the author of the *Essays* often did not recognize the sentences people quoted from his own works; he even forgot the books he himself had written!¹³

(Something similar happens with the famous report that Clarice Lispector gives us, in *The Discovery of the World*, of an encounter with Guimarães Rosa. Rosa told her, she says—if this is not just one more of Clarice’s fictions—that he read her “not for literature but for life.” He then went on to quote many passages from the book. She claims that she did not recognize any of them.)¹⁴

Nothing distressing about that. For me, real memory is a function of this great ability to forget. We remember so that later we can forget. But the opposite may also be true, as in Drummond’s beautiful title, *Forgetting in Order to Remember*. In any case, remembering and forgetfulness are not mutually exclusive but feed each other. Freud’s “magic notepad” has great retentive capacity because it erases, deleting what was written on the translucent sheet and marking the block of wax.¹⁵ That many authors have forgotten what they’ve read, and even what they’ve written, does not imply that the texts have disappeared forever. They have just been displaced to another dimension, which was once called the unconscious but today might better be called the “virtual” (a question I will defer to future reflection).

I often feel embarrassed because I cannot summarize a novel I read or a film I saw a month ago, or even last week. Never ask me the exact title, the names of characters, much less the actors’ names—I never know for sure. But I would never say, like Bayard, that I read these books or watched these films in search of myself. When I saw them and loved them, that experience was so intense that a real and virtual mark was made somewhere in my body. And the intensity of this mark will certainly emerge, consciously or unconsciously, at a future time of creation, because virtually it remains there, or rather *here*, like an inscription in my body. If I wish to check some information later, I can simply look up the book or see the film again—thanks to the proliferation of interactive media, there is always a record of the work in question, whether in a physical library or

in a file in cyberspace. Google makes things easier, although it is also a very dangerous instrument; no aid to memory is innocent. The Internet has real value only when combined with a good book culture; otherwise we are exposed to a great deal of misinformation.

I would never say that forgetting details of a book or film amounts to ignorance, negligence, or simply nonreading. Rather, this is a case of what Nietzsche calls *active forgetting*, a function as important as, or more important than, memory. Such forgetting is decisive for our mental and physical health:

To temporarily close the doors and windows of consciousness; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of helpful organs cooperating and diverging; a little peace and quiet, a little tabula rasa of consciousness, so that there is room again for the new, especially for the more noble functions and employees, for governing, foreseeing, predetermining (for our organism is arranged hierarchically)—this is the usefulness of active forgetting, as I said, a kind of doorkeeper, a caretaker of psychic order, peace, etiquette: from which we can see that there could be no happiness, joviality, hope, pride, *present*, without forgetfulness.¹⁶

It is therefore crucial to erase memories, freeing the mind for new ones—to remember one minute to forget for all eternity, perhaps, and only to recover what was actually important, bringing it to the fore and to the corps de ballet of the new writing. Active forgetting is what enables true memory, memory that reinvents the world through writing, by preparing the novel. This might be the difference between the writer who is just cultured and a rather erudite critic. Both read a lot, but the former reads intensively (referring to Deleuze, a reader of Nietzsche) to exercise the inalienable right of deletion. The scholar, by contrast, reads to have a vivid memory of books and of authors, places, and characters, which he loves to quote, preferably by heart. Bayard is right about this: too much information functions as a block to invention, but the converse is also true: he who misreads literally as a discovery of himself will spend the rest of time traveling around his navel and reading one and the same text, that of his autobiography. I remember in passing that *Inscription and Erasure* is the title of a beautiful book by Roger Chartier.¹⁷ The title could be paraphrased as *Type and Delete*. As is well known, the word “delete” came into the English language in the sixteenth century, meaning to “remove, suppress, deliberately omit,” derived from the Latin root *deletum*, supine of the verb *delere*, to “destroy, annihilate, efface, blot out.”

What we call conscious memory is a delaying tactic: the facts and the meanings attributed to them are reconstructed retrospectively, only after the original inscription, often already forgotten.¹⁸ To remember is to recover something from oblivion and then forget it again. Between two forgettings there emerges a memory, until it disappears forever in the waters of the river Lethe, a powerful tributary of unmindfulness. Writing, creating, and inventing are also, or especially, an art of “de-leting,” of making inscriptions and experiences go to sleep so that later an active reader can reactivate them, bringing them to the precarious space of our memory. This process is always in vain, but it is worth the effort of the delayed recovery. This is the monumental event that in the West and elsewhere is called writing: this game of life and death between inscribing and deleting, survival and annihilation, recording and consummating, recalling and forgetting, etc. Nonreading, or what Harold Bloom called (but meaning something else) misreading, becomes a powerful category of reading.¹⁹ We unread not out of ignorance but because of an active desire to forget, to continue to read, that is, to write-read as Barthes defines the erotic category of reading in “Writing Reading.”²⁰ The best readings are difficult because they force me to lift my head, in a continuous and polyphonic movement of reverberation with the other’s text. The true and carnivalizing polyphony is that of reading, not that of the text itself. The erection of reading eroticizes the body that delights in the text of the other, reinscribing it in his body as spilling and spilled subject matter in his own bibliographic corpus.

Was this then what Derrida once called dissemination, potent reading, erect, spilling the semen of knowledge, spilled and converted onto previously blank pages—the seminal and disseminating blank of Mallarmé too, where everything begins, the abyss to which everything goes, as in a Throw of Dice: “Can be / only / the Abyss / raging / whitened / stalled / beneath the desperately sloping incline / of its own wing through / an advance falling back from ill to take flight / and veiling the gushers / restraining the surges,” and later, “that rigid whiteness / derisory / in opposition to the heavens”?²¹

This is the immeasurable contemporary event that digital media only spread; if the Web is not the only model of the virtual (other models have existed and will continue to emerge), it is where we have plunged for at least a decade, or, to use another, more appropriate metaphor, it is where we have surfed as active reader-writers.

If digital democracy does not always promise high-quality writing, the

wealth of digital data is undeniable, in principle within the reach of anyone who has mastered the language of the writing assignment. The literary archive is irrevocably connected to this large collection, not only because many works can be read, consulted, or downloaded from the Web but because today's writers are formed more and more by the global network of computers. The virtual or real book is, and will increasingly be, one of the modalities of what Barthes and Derrida called philosophically text and writing, precursors of hypertext. When *Grammatology* announced in 1967 the end of books and the beginning of writing, its purpose was not physically to destroy books but to demonstrate their historical limits, to be not exactly overcome but subsumed within a broader, less codified, and less standardized notion of writing. I quote Derrida in one of the essays from *Paper Machine*:

Now what is happening today, which is announced as the very form of the future of the book, still as a book, is, on the one hand, beyond the closing of the book, the irruption, the displacement, the disjunction, the dissemination without any possible meeting, the irreversible dispersion of this complete codex (not its disappearance, but its marginalization or its being put aside, according to ways that we would need to return to), but simultaneously, on the other hand, the constant reinvestment of the book project of the book of the world or the world book of the absolute book (that is why I also described that end of the book as interminable, endless), the new space of writing and reading of electronic writing, which travels at full speed from one point to another in the world, and which links, beyond the boundaries and rights, not only citizens of the world in the universal network of a potential *universitas*, of a mobile and transparent encyclopaedia, but any reader as a possible or virtual writer, etc. This reawakens a desire, the same desire. This re-induces the temptation to consider that whose figure is the global network of the www as the ubiquitous book finally reconstituted, the book of God, the great book of Nature, or World-Book in its onto-theological dream finally fulfilled, even though it repeats the end as future.²²

Reading Schemes

The literal defense, with or without irony, of nonreading also results in great ingenuity because deep down it ignores what I call *reading schemes*. This general category is actually personal and nontransferable; otherwise it becomes dogma

(or *paideuma*, as it was called previously). Each author-reader invents his system of reading. The typology that I suggest here should never be generalized in itself; each of us can certainly invent his own, according to the taste (and the knowledge) of the pleasure of the text. For me, there are at least five types of text available for reading. I emphasize, however, that this typology is interchangeable; the same work and the same author may appear in more than one classification, moving from one sphere to another and complicating their own taxonomy. Everything depends on the community of readers. The examples are also brief, but they could be multiplied to infinity; many authors and works important to my formation are not included here.

First, there are the authors and works that are read or heard in childhood and adolescence: the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm or Perrault, the Monteiro Lobato stories, children's and teenagers' stories, legends and folk tales. But we must also consider the authors who started me on more adult reading, which in fact took place only from the age of twelve or thirteen. The following list of names is purely arbitrary, according to my memory, which often, as I said, fails: the romantic and Parnassian poets Álvares de Azevedo Fagundes Varela, Casimiro de Abreu, Gonçalves Dias, Castro Alves, and Olavo Bilac; the novelists Érico Veríssimo, Jorge Amado, and Hermann Hesse (the fundamental *Steppenwolf*); and the poet and lyricist Vinicius de Moraes. These are authors whom I loved and emulated in my tender years. They constitute what Barthes beautifully called *Ursuppe*, the original soup, with which I began to nourish myself, especially the rich work of Jorge Amado, which I read passionately while still attending elementary school in the Camacã multifunctional school in Bahia. Certainly, what my schoolteachers, my family, and my friends put into my hands was also significant, in addition to the abundant bibliography of cartoons and comic strips (all my love of pop culture comes from those; I will never be able to ignore it). I feel no need to go back to those authors, unless a biobibliographical incident occurs. So there they are, like a seminal and inseminating milestone of the literary field.

A second type are the authors who sealed my taste and my desire to write—who sharpened in me what I would call the imitative impulse, already aroused by the first group of authors. I remember in particular Dalton Trevisan, whom I first read when I was about fourteen or fifteen and continued to read, then stopped reading for decades, recently went back to, and still love. Another great initiation was the Abril Cultural edition of *Don Quixote*, which also had such a

great impact on Milan Kundera and his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. In the same collection by Abril I read Dostoyevsky and Kafka, as well as Sartre, among many other classics. Then came the discovery of Thomas Mann and his gigantic *Magic Mountain*, *Death in Venice*, and even the magnificent *Doctor Faustus*, at different times of my life. In school I read Machado de Assis and José de Alencar (the former remained lifelong reading), Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and João Cabral de Melo Neto, first in their beautiful poetic anthologies and later in their so-called complete works. A great shock came with *First Stories*, then *Grande sertão veredas* (*The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*), by Guimarães Rosa; by this time I was at university at the age of eighteen, thanks to the influence of Evelina Hoisel, the great professor of literary theory. Rosa's *Grande sertão* is one of those books that I have read and reread throughout my life, one of maybe ten such books (I am keen on lists, like the filmmaker Peter Greenaway). They are essential re-readings, although today at some distance. I reread *Grande sertão* especially for the musicality, at once refined and barbaric, of the speech of the ruffian-poet-philosopher Riobaldo. An even bigger shock was the discovery of *The Hour of the Star*. Clarice Lispector became a river that never failed to pass through my life; in fact, I have just completed a work of critical readings from her texts for the collection I am editing for Record Publishing. I could go on listing titles and authors, but that is not my intention here, and it would just be a synthesis.

The third category of authors includes those for whom I developed a passion at some point but to whom, for reasons of time, I seldom return. I am thinking of Gregório de Matos, whose work I only occasionally reread in bits and pieces; much of what I think and dream of doing in poetry comes from him. Also Jorge de Lima and his oceanic *Invention of Orpheus*, as well as several other poems, which I began to read in a course with Judith Grossmann; at a certain point his texts were for me poetry par excellence. I have always read Cecilia Meirelles and continue to reread her, but sparingly, so as to be moved by life as it is. Marguerite Duras is an author whom I would like to reread in her entirety, and in the original—but will there be time?

The fourth category, the *hors concours*, so to speak, would include authors who are read out of compulsion and the desire to understand their achievement: Proust (I recommend, for those who do not have time, reading the first and the last volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*: the first to learn about his writing, the last because it is perhaps the most revealing book I have ever read—Marcel's *Thousand and One Nights*, as he himself reveals in the end. All the other volumes

are research on how to become a writer, and when he finally learns the secret, it is too late; his work and his life come to an end. Art was too long for such a short existence. Hence the paradoxical impossibility of time rediscovered: the secret of the narrator-character, that is, the true principle of all writing, will die with his silence. Literature is just a great rehearsal for the book that is forever to come, as Maurice Blanchot understood very well). The Greek tragedies, especially those of Sophocles, the tragedies, comedies, and sonnets of Shakespeare, and the tragedies and comedies of Nelson Rodrigues are rivers flowing through a lifetime, without a starting point or an end. Everything flows into these fluent and confluent writings. That would be my way of reinterpreting and shifting the notion of influence, by replacing it with that of confluence. The most important authors and works for a particular writer are confluents of a small, new stream, which may one day take on another dimension; that is certainly the bet. Decisive poets like Pessoa, Whitman, and Kavafis also inhabit this fourth category.

There is, finally, a fifth category of rare books, for me impossible to read, not because of some shortcoming but for structural reasons. How could I have read *Finnegans Wake*, by Joyce, for example? Anyone who tells me that they read it in the traditional sense is lying. It is a true hypertext, written in several languages. It would be necessary to know Greek, Latin, Irish, and many other languages in order to decipher all the codes of this nonbook. The work resists any simple deciphering, and every translation is always approximate because of the plethora of voices. Moreover, as I have already said, the true polyphony is that of the reader: each of us is more or less able to hear the voices of a text, so as to, as it were, repitch them. All of us are potentially writers. We bring the real sound boxes with which we multiply the virtual polyphony of any text, generating gibberish. Another text that is unreadable for me is the Bible. I've read several of its books, at different times in my life and with multiple purposes, not feeling the need to go through it completely but always in bits and pieces according to specific interests, religious ones being the least of them. Also some texts by Guimarães Rosa—I am thinking particularly of *Tutaméia*—would be in this category of books that don't allow themselves to be read (as Poe says in the beautiful "Man of the Crowd," itself a story that does not allow itself to be read completely, as we shall see below). Some tragedies by Shakespeare, such as *Hamlet*, fall into this category.

This would be, briefly, my personal list of books. It is a nondogmatic list by a reader who has long dreamed of being an author through an imitative instinct,

strictly instinctual, almost an animal thing. An instinct that always makes you want to be the other, to expropriate yourself in a continuous movement of alteration, becoming another, and de-identification.

Before finally closing the typology of this personal list, however, I would like to pay tribute in part to Bayard's thesis. There would be, then, factual non-readings. There are a host of these. Like Clarice Lispector, I have not read many masterpieces of Western humanity, much less Eastern, if such boundaries still remain. I have read scarcely anything of the great Russian novelists: one or another Tolstoy, one or another Dostoyevsky, besides the Russian poets in the wonderful translation by the Brothers Campos and by Boris Schneidermann. I note that there is no longer any excuse for not reading them, because there have been many good translations directly from the Russian in recent decades in Brazil. I have not read Balzac as I would like to, but I am proud to have dedicated myself from an early age to Stendhal and then Montaigne. I have never read José Lins do Rego properly, but I plunged deeply into Graciliano Ramos, whom I read to this day with great pleasure. Et cetera. The list is huge, by definition, and I could go on quoting names, read and unread, venerated and forgotten. I must declare, however, that I read with great joy a French translation of the four volumes of the *Thousand and One Nights*, before they had been translated directly from Arabic into Brazilian Portuguese.

There are also books that I have heard of: some I intend to read when I have time, such as the Anglo-German Sebald and the South African Coetzee, both of whom I have actually started to read. Others I definitely have no intention of even browsing through, such as certain writers who are in fashion. I prefer not to name them, leaving it to the imagination of the reader to guess who they are (after all, it is very easy; many of them are always in the public eye). Factual nonreading—Bayard is right—should be an active category, just like forgetfulness, in no way a fault or an original sin. But neither should it become a way to defend ignorance in the name of creativity as self-assertion. The risk is to fall into the void of no invention, neither one's own nor the other's. In this case, the nonreader is always converted to a nonauthor—or, what is worse, a mediocre author.

There were also the many theoretical readings to which I dedicated myself, especially after I went to study in France in the 1990s. Works of literary theory and philosophy have been crucial to enhancing my appreciation of ideas in fiction that writers like Thomas Mann, Lispector, and Machado, among others,

awakened. Right now I find myself involved in contemplating the questions and themes of Descartes, Foucault, and Derrida, as I develop an essay on the history of madness. This all contributes greatly to the way I conceive and elaborate the difficult and pleasurable literary invention.

Baudelaire: The Artist and the Man of the World

In “The Painter of Modern Life,” an essay on Constantin Guys originally published in the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, Charles Baudelaire makes a distinction between the artist and the man of the world. Without scorning the former, the poet prefers the latter because it is broader. Instead of simply “mundane” in the negative sense, the man of the world has, so to speak, the *feeling of the world* (to quote Drummond again). He is therefore *worldly*, rather than a cosmopolitan bourgeois who has the money to travel. He would not even necessarily travel around (at least this is my interpretation), and his knowledge of animals, plants, and humans would be of such a vast scope that the mere category of artist would not be broad enough to encompass it. For the artist, says Baudelaire, is a specialist, and therefore has a rich but limited view of the world. Basically, he does not reject the world; in my view, he only judges it insufficient to be a man of the world. I infer, therefore, that one must be a man of the world as well as an artist. Someone who could fully achieve this near perfection would have the sensitivity of the artist and the magnitude of view of the man of the world. He would be the true painter of modern life, epitomized, for Baudelaire, by Constantin Guys and Eugène Delacroix. This is how the author of *The Flowers of Evil* defines the two kinds of men: the man of the world “is interested in the whole world, wants to know, understand, appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe. The artist lives very little or even not at all, in the moral and political world.”²³ Baudelaire himself combined both types: the great artist who does not give up the rest of the world, thus uniting, in his view (and who would contradict him?), the three most valuable categories of human existence: the ethical, the political, and the aesthetic.

Baudelaire later praised artifice to the detriment of nature.²⁴ Showing himself to be especially anti-Rousseauian (he does not mention Rousseau, but he depicts the eighteenth century as the rival to be crushed), he demonstrates how nature is brutal and barbaric. Art should not embellish nature, making more complex what in its natural state is simple. The artist’s work aims to surpass the natural world, creating the world of true beauty. The author of *The Flowers of Evil*

is not afraid to praise makeup, because adornment expresses the sophistication of a people. The so-called savages are quite civilized, because they cultivate a great love of colors and ornaments of every kind. What distinguishes the human animal is reason, which enables him to invent artifices in every way imaginable. Makeup is not used to hide ugliness or age but to enhance what is already beautiful. Artificiality is second nature, the more useful because it reveals the talent (not natural) of human labor. In short, art, *mimesis*, does not examine the natural world in order to copy it but invents its own world, with unique rules, to achieve the perfection of what is good and beautiful. Therefore, unlike Rousseau, Baudelaire sees man in nature as insufficient, inadequate. Only art, used in the service of reason, can improve the natural man. In this sense, women's makeup, which is totally artificial, is the paradigm of the artistic. Baudelaire thus has a very different view from that of Prince Hamlet, who condemns outright the masks that beautify women as evidence of the malignancy of females—the “chaotic cosmetic” (to quote a dense verse by the composer and singer Caetano Veloso).

The Impossible Reading and the Rereading

In closing I would like to refer to a text that I reread recently for the umpteenth time, though I found it more enchanting this time than ever before. It is the short, magnificent story by Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man of the Crowd,” which I reread in a trilingual edition of 1993 that includes, in this order, Baudelaire's wonderful French translation, the English original, and the good translation by Dorothee de Brouhard into Portuguese, with excerpts by Benjamin. I think that if I have read this short text so many times, it is precisely because it does not allow itself to be read. I am paraphrasing a comment already referred to, by the first-person narrator of the story, who in turn is quoting what the Germans used to say about the booklet *Hortulus animae*, a prayer book that was very popular in the sixteenth century, in Latin and Germanic editions: “Er lasst sich nicht lesen” (literally, it does not let itself be read), the narrator declares at the beginning of the story, and he repeats this statement at the end. Surely this applies to Poe's own remarkable story and perhaps to great literary texts in general. The best literature is that which cannot be read, and when we have finished reading we are assailed by so many doubts left by obscure passages that all we can do is look forward to rereading it. This was well understood by Guimarães Rosa, who proposed two indexes for his *Tutaméia*, one for reading, another for rereading. I quote one of two epigraphs by Schopenhauer in *Tutaméia*, both advocating

the need to reread: “Hence, therefore, as I have already stated, the first reading requires patience, founded on the certainty that, in the second, much or all will be understood in an entirely new light.” Again, Bayard was right, but for very different reasons than he argues in his book: there is always a trail of nonreading in reading; that is why we need to reread, for the discovery of the other to take place more fully, though never completely. And so we close the pages of the best books thinking of reopening them as soon as a new opportunity arises. Like when they invite the reader-author to speak at the opening of an exciting symposium.

NOTES

1. This is the modified text of a lecture given in the graduate program in literature at the Federal University of Espírito Santo on 6 October 2011, the Academy of Literature of Bahia on 18 November 2011, and the graduate program in literature at the State University of Rio de Janeiro on 28 November 2011.

2. “La naissance du lecteur devra se payer de la mort de l’auteur.” Roland Barthes, “La mort de l’auteur,” in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 2:491–95.

3. Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” in *Dits et écrits I: 1954–1969*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 794.

4. Roland Barthes, *La préparation du roman I et II: Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978–1979 et 1979–1980)*, ed. Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003).

5. Entitled *Vita Nova* in homage to Dante, this novel remained unfinished owing to Barthes’s tragic death—he was run over by a van—on 26 March 1980.

6. Barthes, *La préparation du roman I et II*, 289.

7. Pierre Bayard, *Como falar dos livros que não lemos?* [How to Talk About Books You Haven’t Read], trans. Rejane Janowitzer (Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2007).

8. *Ibid.*, 199, emphasis added.

9. In Sá de Miranda, *Poesias Escolhidas* [Selected Poems], ed. José V. de Pina Martins (Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1969).

10. Arthur Rimbaud, *Lettres de la vie littéraire: 1870–1875*, comp. and ed. Jean-Marie Carré (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 37–53.

11. *Ibid.*, 39.

12. Clarice Lispector, “Em busca do outro” [In Search of the Other], in *A descoberta do mundo* [The Discovery of the World], ed. Paulo Gurgel Valente (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1984), 166.

13. Cf. Michel de Montaigne, “Des livres—Chapitre X,” in *Essais*, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 387–400.

14. Lispector, “Conversas” [Conversations], in *Descoberta do mundo*, 193–94.

15. Sigmund Freud, "Uma nota sobre o 'bloco mágico'" [A Note on the "Magic Note-pad"], in *Edição standard das obras psicológicas completas de Freud* [Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud] (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1976), 19:283–90.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogia da moral: Um escrito polêmico* [The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic], trans. Paulo Cesar Souza (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987), 58.

17. Roger Chartier, *Inscriver e apagar: Cultura escrita e literatura (séculos XI–XVIII)* [Inscribe and Erase: Written Culture and Literature (11th–18th Centuries)], trans. Luzmara Curcino Ferreira (São Paulo: Ed. Unesp, 2007).

18. I address the relationship between memory and forgetfulness in *Nascimento, Derrida e a literatura* [Derrida and Literature], 2nd ed. (Niterói: EdUFF, 2001), 165–270.

19. Harold Bloom, *Um mapa da desleitura* [A Map of Misreading], trans. Thelma Médici Nóbrega (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1995).

20. Roland Barthes, "Écrire la lecture," in Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2:961–63.

21. Cf. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Um lance de dados jamais abolirá o acaso" [A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance], trans. Haroldo de Campos, in Mallarmé, 3rd ed., ed. Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2006), 156–57, 165; cf. Mallarmé, "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 1:362–87.

22. Jacques Derrida, *Papel-máquina* [Paper Machine], trans. Evando Nascimento (São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2004), 30–31.

23. Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," in *Critique d'art*, ed. Claude Pichois and Claire Brunet (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 343–84.

24. *Ibid.*, 374–78.

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