

A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR AS A READER¹

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Portrait of the author-reader

My sketch is of this author who I already am or try to be. A portrait that is at the same time natural (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. But this can be thought of with respect to Borges, Joyce, Thomas Mann, Machado, Rosa, Proust and many other encyclopaedia-writers, who seem to carry a library on their backs, so many are their implicit and explicit references.

I start from the assumption that authorship is the very place of transdisciplinary reception and production. It is an instance of passage, in which several discourses are articulated and transmitted: literature, philosophy, arts, media, sociology, anthropology etc., precisely because, as I would like to demonstrate, authorship is based on reading and not a biographical essence. The biography that interests me is less factual than bibliographical, a biobibliography therefore. 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 different masks without which there is no authorship: narrative voices, characters, poetic subjects, dramatic voices,

¹ Nascimento, Evando. Portrait of the Author as a Reader. Translation by Anthony Lennard. In: Rocha, João Cezar de Castro. *Lusofonia and its futures*. Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013, p. 207-224.

This is the text of the lecture given at the Graduate Program in Literature at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES) on October 6th, 2011, the Academy of Literature of Bahia (ALB) on November 18th, 2011, and the Graduate Program in Literature at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) on November 28th, 2011.

dramatis personae, essayistic, biographical, and social personas, in short, all sorts of masks. To paraphrase Nietzsche, I would say that the author is a composition of a great masquerade. Without these heterographical records (and heteronomic ones, according to Fernando Pessoa), frankly mimetic, he falls into the expressivism of an 'I' who can only say I, never him / her, you, us, them.

This disperse place of enunciation is what constitutes all the wealth of authorship, and as much as its death has been staged, with good reasons, in recent decades, it survives its own ruin. I would say, following Derrida in *Mémoires d'aveugle: Autoportrait et autres ruines*², that the ruin is constitutive of the portrait and the self-portrait, and not an evil that befalls it from outside over time. The author survives as a ruin, not in spite of it, precisely because he 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."³

On the other hand, in his equally famous "What is an author," Michel Foucault states that "The theory of a work does not exist."⁴ 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 the lack of a theoretician fit to develop it. But for one essential reason: the figures and changes that the authorship issue has gone through over the centuries are so many that it is impossible to gather them into a single concept. The catagoreme "author" attempts to account for an extremely scattered set of factual and transcendental notions, values and devices.

So I will take this opportunity to develop a little further one of these fundamental references to the theme of my spoken writing (which is what a real speech sounds like). In 1978, in one of the classes on his course *La Préparation du Roman* [Preparation of the novel], in the Collège de France, Roland Barthes reviews his position regarding the authorship issue⁵. Exactly ten years after the

² Derrida, Jacques. *Mémoires d'aveugle: l'autoportrait et autres ruines*. Paris: Louvre/Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990.

³ "[...] la naissance du lecteur devra se payer de la mort de l'Auteur". Barthes, Roland. La mort de l'Auteur. In: _____. *Oeuvres complètes II*. Paris: Seuil, 1994, p. 491-495.

⁴ Foucault, Michel. Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur ? In: _____. *Dits et écrits I: 1954-1969*. Directed by Daniel Defert e François Ewald. Paris : Gallimard, 1994, p. 794.

⁵ Barthes, Roland. *La préparation du roman I et II: cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978-1979 et 1979-1980)*. Text established, annotated and presented by Nathalie Léger. Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003.

publication of his little-understood and earlier quoted "The Death of the Author", Barthes expresses the about-turn that he underwent, especially since the publication of *The Pleasure of the text*. If, in the symptomatic year of 1968, when he published the essay on authorship, it had been crucial to point out the need to suppress the omnipresence of the author for literary studies, this had happened to avoid the biographism inherited from the critical positivism of the nineteenth century. If, in traditional biographical studies, the life of the empirical author, as it were, overpowered the work, at that time, in the 1960s, still at the zenith of the structuralist movement which Barthes had helped to found and which was soon to go into decline – it was necessary to release the literalness of the text. Barthes thereby avoided suffocating text by any empiricism that might compromise the independence of fictional literature.

The entire power of literature was therefore removed from the author and attributed to the reader, in the above-quoted concluding sentence of the essay. So the flesh-and-blood author died, and the author-reader was born, the Borges archivist, called by Barthes the *scriptor* of a text made up of multiple quotes. 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 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 breaks with this conception of the author-reader, since quotability continues to be a driving force for his refined writing. We only have to check the index of names in his works during this so-called "post-structuralist" period, to see how much the reader Barthes inseminates the author figure. There will only be a displacement of interest and a re-scaling 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 he reveals, in one of his classes, his interest in writing a biography of the composer Schumann, but ends up giving up the project because he could not read German.

However, the facts of life of a great author gain importance for this critic-writer, who was preparing to, he himself, write a novel, whose advent would mean a

turning point in his career as a critic and theorist of literature and writing (for this reason, above all, I mention him here)⁶. A novel that, due to the actual death of its author, remained forever in limbo. It is as if that Barthes, at the end of his life, sought in the great artists a creative power to help him carry out his own project of inventive writing, and no longer just critical, as had been the case until then. Proust gives the absolute paradigm of that *search* or that *research (recherche)*. It is not at all a question of being limited to the plain facts of a great life, but rather of understanding how the world and literary creation establish relations of tension between themselves. For example, we have to live, to waste time, to then rediscover it, as in Proust's case. We waste enough time to gain it back before we die, via literary fiction. However, 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 gains too much space, it ends up sacrificing the invention, the ultimate justification of the life of a writer. We are therefore faced with an almost insoluble quandary, and it is as if Barthes researched in the lives of the writers he loves – Tolstoy, Stendhal, Proust, Kafka, Flaubert ... – for subsidies that help, if not to resolve, at least to help settle the dilemma between everyday life and literary invention. No experience, no literary work (the Work, as he calls it). But the 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?"⁷ A question without a 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 reaches a possible agreement between worldly experience and literary writing, there being no formula to solve this impasse. *The biographical drama of the writer starts but it also ends there; I would definitely say that one of the keys*

⁶ Entitled *Vita Nova*, in homage to Dante, the project of this novel remained unfinished due to Barthes's tragic death, run over by a van, on 26th March 1980.

⁷ *Id.*, p. 289.

to fictional imagination, those that allow the opening and the pursuit of literary invention, is to solve this difficult equation of countless unknowns.

Literature as non-reading

One of the most curious books we have seen translated in recent years is the controversial *How to talk about the books that we do not read?*, by Pierre Bayard⁸. The thesis of the essay is bold, but also somewhat naive, summed up as follows: the real reader is a non-reader. The only person who really reads is the reader who gives up reading completely, working his way through the volume, so as to, at the end of his journey, find himself. Reading, and indeed literature, becomes a mere narcissistic projection in what we supposedly read. Developed over more than two hundred pages, endorsed by authors such as Umberto Eco, Montaigne and Valéry, all acknowledgedly great readers, this thesis is widely explained with recourse to a text by Oscar Wilde at the end. Somewhat distorting Wilde's text to serve his purposes, Bayard argues that reading really is only useful for the reader to discover himself and become creative. All criticism and all creation is actually autobiographical. We read another to talk about ourselves. I quote Bayard:

[The work] 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*⁹.

A fascinating thesis, and one that I would be willing to underwrite were it not for two basic misconceptions. First, the lecturer in literature Pierre Bayard forgets that the critical conception of Wilde is dated and has a history, which is quite complex but well summarised. It is impressionist criticism, concerned with the moods (positive and negative) that a work causes in its reader, who is

⁸ Bayard, Pierre. *Como falar dos livros que não lemos? [How to talk about the books we do not read?]* Translation Rejane Janowitz. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2007.

⁹ *Id.*, p. 199, my italics.

potentially a writer. To reduce any or all reading to this practice, disregarding the value of others, seems to me unacceptable blindness in a lecturer in literature, however provocative it may be. Secondly, the reduction of reading to "me" is as harmful as the reduction of writing to "me". Although it is known that the "writing of me" or "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 aestheticise my life (a narcissistic and tedious task), but to find the other. What fascinates me in literature and philosophy is not the discovery of oneself or myself, but of the he or she that 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, the famous "I have fallen out with myself," by Sá de Miranda, populated by ghosts and fantasies of the other which I soon also become. I quote this beautiful poem from the sixteenth century, a precursor of an entire art of poetry of the twentieth century and current times

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?¹⁰

¹⁰ Miranda, Sá de. *Poesias Escolhidas*. [Selected Poems] Introduction, selection and critique by José V. de Pina Martins. Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1969.

I is someone else (Je est un autre) by Rimbaud, little read in its original context of two letters to Georges Izambard and Paul Demeny¹¹, also means this: the infinite capacity that the authorial device has to dress up as another man and another woman. This is the reason for the theme of literary and artistic transvestism, which appears in artists as multifarious as the aforementioned 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 the famous "letter about the clairvoyant, from Rimbaud to Izambard: "It is false to say: I think [*je pense*]. We should say: I am thought [*on me pense*]."¹² More anti-Cartesian than this, impossible. And Clarice Lispector concludes that 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."¹³

The main examples that Bayard puts forward to defend his thesis of the need to not read, to discover oneself and finally be able to create, are all acknowledgedly men who spent a large part of their lives in libraries. Their relationship with reading and not reading is completely different from a young man who is graduating (the preferred public of Bayard), still immersed in the natural ignorance of beginners. If Valéry, for reasons opposite to those of Bayard, with great irony defended in writing 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 is fulfilled. It was only in this sense that Barthes announced the birth of the reader being paid for by the Death of the Author. From then on (but it has always been like that, I think), every great writer has been above all a great reader. Ignorance, or the reading of the flyleaf, the presentation and the front cover, as Bayard argues in favour of narcissistic writing, serves only for books without any use at all – useless ones. But who

¹¹ Rimbaud, Arthur. *Lettres de la vie littéraire: 1870-1875*. Compilation and notes Jean-Marie Carré. Paris: Gallimard, 1990, p. 37-53.

¹² *Id.*, p. 39.

¹³ Lispector, Clarice. Em busca do outro [In search of the other]. In: _____. *Descoberta do mundo*. [Discovery of the world] Organization by Paulo Gurgel Valente. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1984, p. 166.

decides this useful is at least the reader, 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 just come out all garbled. I can refer to an idea or notion, or summarize a concept, but memorise each word of a long quote, never. Because 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 finding out that he had already read it and annotated it, without being able to recall a single line! Therefore, he proceeded 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. Things were so serious that the author of the *Essays* often did not recognize himself in the sentences they quoted from his own works, also because he simply forgot about the books he had written ...¹⁴

(I open a parenthesis here: Something similar happens with the famous report that Clarice Lispector gives us, in *The Discovery of the world*, of an encounter with Guimarães Rosa¹⁵. He told her, she said, if this is not just one more of Clarice's fictions – he said that he read her "not for literature but for life." He then went on to quote many sentences by CL. She concludes by saying that she did not recognize any of these quotes ... Close parentheses.) 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 rather they feed each other. Freud's *Magic Notepad* has great retentive capacity because it erases, deleting what was written on the translucent sheet and

¹⁴ Cf. Montaigne, Michel de. Des livres – Chapitre X. In: _____. *Essais*. Texts established by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat. Paris: Gallimard, 2002, p. 387-400. (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.)

¹⁵ Lispector, Clarice. Conversas [Conversations]. In: _____. *A descoberta do mundo [The Discovery of the World]*. *Op. cit.*, p. 193-194.

marking the block of wax¹⁶. The fact that many authors have forgotten their readings, and even their own writings, does not imply that such readings have disappeared forever. They have just been displaced to another instance, which was once called the *unconscious* and which today might be better named the "*virtual*" (a vast question that I leave on ice here for 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 – I never know for sure. But I would never say, like Bayard, that I went through these books, films or plays 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 the time of invention. Because virtually it remains there, or rather, *here*, like an inscription in my body. If I wish to check some information at the time of invention, I just look up the book or see the film again – nowadays support media have multiplied and somewhere there is always a record of the work in question in a real library or in a file in cyberspace. Google is there to make things easier, although it is also a very dangerous instrument – like any memory aid, none of them is innocent. The Internet only has its real value when combined with a good book culture, otherwise we are exposed to great misinformation.

I would never say that in this case there was ignorance, negligence or simply non-reading. Rather, there was 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

¹⁶ Freud, Sigmund. Uma nota sobre o 'bloco mágico' [A note on the 'magic notepad']. In: _____. *Edição Standard das obras psicológicas completas de Freud*. [Standard Edition of the complete psychological works of Freud] v. XIX. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1976, p 283-290.

of psychic order, peace, etiquette: from which we can see that there could be no happiness, joviality, hope, pride, *present*, without forgetfulness.¹⁷

It is therefore crucial to erase, freeing the system for new entries – 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. Forgetting actively is what enables true memory, the one 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. But the scholar reads to have a vivid memory of books and of works, 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 travelling around his navel and reading one and the same text, that of his autobiography. I remember in passing that *Inscription & Erasure* is the title of a beautiful book by Roger Chartier¹⁸. The title could be paraphrased as *Type & Delete*. As is well-known, ‘delete’ came into the English language in the 16th Century, *(to) delete* ‘remove, suppress, deliberately omit,’ derived from the Latin root *deletum*, supine of the verb *delere* ‘destroy, annihilate, efface, blot out.’

What we call conscious memory is a delay procedure: the facts and the meanings attributed to them are reconstructed retrospectively, only after the original inscription, often already forgotten¹⁹. To remember is to recover it 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, 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. Always in vain, but it is worth the effort of the delayed recovery.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Genealogia da moral: um escrito polêmico*. [*Genealogy of morals: a polemic writing*] Translation Paulo Cesar Souza. São Paulo: Brasilense, 1987 p. 58.

¹⁸ Chartier, Roger. *Inscrever & apagar: cultura escrita e literatura (séculos XI-XVIII)* [*Inscribe & Erase: written culture and literature (11th – 18th Centuries)*]. Translation Luzmara Curcino Ferreira. São Paulo: Ed. Unesp, 2007.

¹⁹ I thoroughly covered this relationship between memory and forgetfulness in Nascimento, Evando. *Derrida e a literatura*. [Derrida and literature] 2nd. ed. Niterói: EdUFF, 2001, p. 165-270.

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. Non-reading or what Harold Bloom called, with another meaning, misreading, becomes a powerful category of reading²⁰. We unread not out of ignorance but because of an active desire to forget, to continue to read, that is to say, to write-read as Barthes defines the erotic category of reading in "Writing Reading"²¹. The best readings are difficult because they force me to lift my head, in a continuous and polyphonic movement of reverberation of 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, re-inscribing 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"²²

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 there that for at least a decade we have plunged or, to use another more appropriate order of metaphor, we have surfed as active reader-writers.

If this digital democracy does not always mean quality writing, the wealth of digital data is undeniable, in principle within the reach of anyone who has

²⁰ Bloom, Harold. *Um mapa da desleitura. [A map of misreading]* Translation Thelma Médici Nóbrega. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1995.

²¹ Barthes, Roland. Écrire la lecture. In: _____. *Oeuvres complètes – II. Op. cit.*, p. 961-963.

²² Cf. Mallarmé, Stéphane. Um lance de dados jamais abolirá o acaso.[A throw of the dice will never abolish chance] Translation Haroldo de Campos. In: Campos, Augusto de; Pignatari, Décio; Campos, Haroldo de (Org.). *Mallarmé*. 3rd. ed., 2nd. repr. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2006, p. 156-157 and p. 165. [Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. *Oeuvres complètes*. I. Edition presented, established and commented on by Bertrand Marchal. Paris: Gallimard, 2004, p. 362-387.

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 in this 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, it was not to physically destroy books, but to demonstrate their historical limits, to be not exactly overcome, but subsumed by a broader, less codified and 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 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.²³

Reading schemes

The literal defence, with or without irony, of non-reading also results in great ingenuity because deep down it ignores what I call *reading schemes*. This general category is actually personal and non-transferable, 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

²³ Derrida, Jacques. *Papel-máquina*. [Paper machine] Translation Evando Nascimento. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2004, p. 30-31.

generalized in itself, each of us can certainly invent his own, according to the taste (and the knowledge) of the pleasure of the text. Strictly 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 could be multiplied to infinity; many important authors and works in my formation will not be quoted. Talking of which, forgive me in advance for presenting my own account.

First, there were 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 teenager's stories, legends and popular or folk tales. But we also have to consider the authors that started me on a 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. Our Romantic and Parnassian poets (Álvares de Azevedo Fagundes Varella, Casimiro de Abreu, Gonçalves Dias, Castro Alves, Olavo Bilac), the novelists Érico Verissimo, Jorge Amado, Hermann Hesse (the fundamental *Steppenwolf*), and the poet and lyricist Vinicius de Moraes are those that occur to me in a brief recollection. They are authors who I loved and emulated in the dawn of my tender years. They constitute what Barthes beautifully called *Ursuppe*, the original soup, with which I began to nourish myself to spread my wings, in particular, the rich work of Jorge Amado, which I read passionately while still attending elementary school in the Camacã Multifunctional School in Bahia. Certainly it was also significant what my school, my family and my friends put into my hands, beside the abundant bibliography of comics and cartoon strips (all my love of pop culture comes from that, I will never be able to ignore it). I feel no need to go back to those authors, unless a biobibliographic incident occurs. So, there they are as a seminal and inseminating milestone of the literary field.

A second type are the authors that sealed all my taste and the desire to write – what I would call the *imitative impulse*, in fact already aroused by the first authors mentioned above. I remember in particular Dalton Trevisan, who I read when I was about fourteen or fifteen and continued to read, then stopped for

decades, recently went back to, and still love. Another great initiation was reading *Don Quixote*, in the Abril Cultural edition, that was the great "Book of Laughter and Forgetting" (to remember a title by Milan Kundera). In the same collection by Abril, appeared Dostoevsky 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. Influenced by my school, there were readings of Machado de Assis and José de Alencar (the former remained as lifelong reading), Carlos Drummond de Andrade and João Cabral de Melo Neto, first in their beautiful poetic anthologies, 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 then at University at the age of eighteen (due to the influence of the great professor of Literary Theory Evelina Hoisel). This latter is one of those books that I have read and continue to read all my life, there may be some ten of these books, no more (I am keen on lists, like the filmmaker Peter Greenaway). They are essential rereadings, although today at some great distance. I reread *Grande sertão* especially for the musicality, at once refined and barbaric, of the speech of the ruffian-poet-philosopher Riobaldo. Another even bigger shock was the discovery of the world with *The Hour of the Star*. Clarice Lispector then became a river that never failed to pass through my life, now more than ever because I have just completed a work of critical reading *from* her texts for the collection that I direct in the Record publishing house. I could go on listing titles and authors, but this is not the intention, it would just be a synthesis.

The third category of authors: those who were read at some moment, developing a passion, but for reasons of time, I seldom return to them. I am thinking of Gregório de Matos, of whose work I only occasionally reread 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 on a course with the teacher and writer 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 sparsely, so as to be moved by life as it is. Marguerite Duras is that author who I would like to reread in her entirety and in the original – but will I still have time for that?

There would be a fourth category, so to speak, *hors concours*. They are authors who are read out of compulsion and the desire to understand what they did: Proust (I recommend, for those who do not have time, reading the first and the last volume: 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. Everything is done to get to write this work, which remained unfinished. All the other volumes of *Recherche* are research as to how to become a writer and when he discovers it, 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 will die with his silence, that is, the true principle of all writing. When he is silent it is because an author could finally truly write, but it is now too late. 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, 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, with that of *confluence*. The most important authors and works for a particular writer are confluents of a small, new stream, which later may one day take on another dimension; that is certainly the bet. I would also quote the names of decisive poets like Pessoa, Whitman and Kavafis.

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 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 to decipher all the codes of that non-book. 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, re-pitch them. All of us are potentially writers. We bring the real soundboxes 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 leaps and bounds 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 *The Man of the crowd*, itself a book that does not allow itself to be read completely, as we shall see below). Some tragedies by Shakespeare, such as *Hamlet*, for instance, would in the same category.

This would be, briefly, my personal list of books. It is a non-dogmatic list by a reader who has long dreamed of being an author through an imitative instinct, strictly instinctual, almost an animal or 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. However, before finally closing the typology of this personal list, 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. As Clarice Lispector says and repeats, 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 other Tolstoy, one or other 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 direct from the Russian in recent decades in Brazil. I have not read Balzac as I would like, 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 deep into Graciliano Ramos, whom I read to this day with great pleasure. Etc. The list is huge by definition, and I could go on quoting names, read and unread, venerated and forgotten. However, I must declare 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 like 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 readers to guess who they are (after all, it is very easy, many of them are in the media the whole time). Factual non-reading – 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 bastion 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 of the other. In this case, the non-reader is always converted to a non-author – or, what is worse, to a mediocre author.

There were also be the many theoretical readings to which I dedicated myself, especially after I went to study in France in the 90s. Works of literary theory and philosophy have been crucial to enhance my sharp appreciation of ideas in fiction, that writers like Thomas Mann, Lispector and Machado, among others, awakened. Right now I find myself involved in questions and themes of Descartes, Foucault and Derrida, developing 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 world²⁴. Without scorning the former category, 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 money to travel. He would not even necessarily travel around (at least this is my interpretation), and his knowledge of things, animals, plants and humans would be of such a vast scope that the mere category of artist would not be enough to characterize 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 latter; in my view, he only judges it insufficient to be so. I infer, therefore, that one must be a man of the world as well as an artist. Someone who could fully achieve this was near

²⁴ Baudelaire, Charles. Le peintre de la vie moderne. In: _____. *Critique d'art*. Text established by Claude Pichois, presentation by Claire Brunet. Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p. 343-384.

perfection: he would have the sensitivity that is particular to the artist and the magnitude of the view of a man of the world. He would be the true painter of modern life, whose prime examples, for Baudelaire, would be Constantin Guys and Eugène Delacroix. This is how the author of *Flowers of evil* defines the two kinds of men: "He 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."²⁵ The combination of both would actually be Baudelaire himself: the great artist who does not give up the rest of the world, uniting the three categories which for him had the highest value (and who would contradict him?): the ethical, the political and the aesthetic.

Later, Baudelaire was to praise artifice to the detriment of nature²⁶. Showing himself to be especially anti-Rousseau (if the latter is not mentioned, at least the eighteenth century is cited as the rival to be crushed), he demonstrates how nature is brutal and barbaric. Art should not embellish nature, making more complex that which is, in its natural state, simple. The artist's work aims to surpass the natural world, founding 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 colours and ornaments of every kind. So what distinguishes the human animal is reason, which enables him to invent artifices in every way imaginable. Makeup is not to hide the aging process or ugliness, but to enhance what is already beautiful. Artificiality is second nature, the more useful because it reveals the talent (not natural) of human labour. 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, for Baudelaire, man in nature is insufficient and inadequate. Only art, in the service of reason, can make it better. In this sense, women's makeup, totally artificial, and so much heavier, would be the paradigm of the artistic. He has, therefore, a very different view from that of Prince Hamlet, who condemns outright masks that beautify feminine traits, as evidence of the malignancy of females – the "chaotic

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Id.*, p. 374-378.

cosmetic" (to quote a dense verse by the composer and singer Caetano Veloso).

The Impossible reading and the rereading

At this point I would like to make reference to a text that I reread recently, for the umpteenth time in my life, causing me a stronger enchantment than at other times. It is the short, magnificent story by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man of the crowd*, which I reread in a trilingual edition, which includes, in this order, the wonderful translation by Baudelaire, the original in English, and the good translation by Dorothée de Brouchard in Portuguese, with excerpts by Benjamin²⁷. I think that if I have read this tiny 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 Man of the crowd*, who, in turn, quotes what the Germans used to say about the booklet *Horticultus Animae*, a prayer book which 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 and repeats 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 the a new time to reread it. This was well understood by Guimarães Rosa, who proposed two indexes for his *Tutaméia*, one for reading, another for rereading²⁸. 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 understand in an entirely new light." Again, Bayard was right, but for very different reasons than he argues in his reducing book: there is always a trail of non-reading 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

²⁷ Poe, Edgar Allan. *O homem da multidão [The man of the crowd]*. Trilingual edition. Original text, French translation by Charles Baudelaire, Brazilian translation by Dorothée de Brouchard, excerpts in Portuguese by Benjamin. Porto Alegre: Paraula, 1993.

²⁸ Rosa, João Guimarães. *Tutaméia: terceiras estórias.[Tutaméia: third stories]* 5th. ed. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1979.

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.

Translation Anthony Lennard