

DREAMING DEATH: THE ONANISTIC AND SELF-
ANNIHILATIVE PRINCIPLES OF LOVE IN
FERNANDO PESSOA'S *BOOK OF DISQUIET*

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Love [...] opposes itself to identification (to knowledge) of the object, which is to say that its object is necessarily charged with a heterogeneous character (analogous to the character of the blinding sun, excrements, gold, sacred things).

Georges Bataille¹

INTRODUCTION: A BAPTISMAL SLEW

Fernando Pessoa had many heads, seventy or more, but was essentially just an empty space behind a diverse drama of literary men: poets, essayists, prose writers, translators, philosophers, critics, etc. Pessoa's orthonymic head – itself shredded into various personalities and roles – together with the predominant heteronymic Ghidorah of Alberto Caeiro (philosopher shepherd), Ricardo Reis (doctor and classicist) and Álvaro de Campos (naval engineer and excursionist) formed the drama's core poetic Svetovid. The fictional actors working Pessoa's unique literary universe ranged from mere characters and pseudonyms through to a nucleus of fully-fledged heteronyms, a status derived from the expansion of pseudonyms into autonomous human perspectives, each with its own distinctive literary style and personal history. It is for this reason that Bernardo Soares, so clearly confluent with Pessoa-himself, did not have a head of his own,² and why Pessoa ("person" in Portuguese, a fact which acted like a goad to the endlessly partible referent, who continually

¹ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 2, (Ed. Denis Hollier) 141.

² Even his vocation and place of residence is appropriated from the vacated heteronym Vicente Guedes.

failed to reveal the unity that such a term implies) had no choice but to label him a semi-heteronym, for the two were not merely anent but overlapping. It was possible, and proved no real wrench, for Pessoa to have a hand in the deaths of Caeiro and the Baron of Teive, to see their deaths from a safe distance – the first from TB, the second from suicide. But this was not the case with Soares, for he, unlike the Baron, was made for the inherent incompleteness and open-endedness of *The Book of Disquiet*, and so would be there till the end, slowly accumulating himself in a trunk. In order to kill Soares, Pessoa would have had to commit a partial suicide. Partial, for there were differences and lacunas, or “mutilations” as Pessoa liked to call them – mutilations that make Pessoa’s fragmentary and displaced autobiography a portrait of the troubled emergence of the author who was to eventually write it. Soares, by far the more sombre of the two, has a personality that, while constructed in part from Pessoa’s life (and those convoluted mechanisms for contextualizing the various subtleties and inscrutabilities of his literary existence), is far more prone to indulge in the far reaches of societal disengagement, and it is this increased detachment that allows Soares to restyle Pessoa’s heteronymic territories into the elaborate displacements of some root futility. The book’s slow conception was itself entropic: a rag-bag personage becoming increasingly disorganized the more inclusive it became, for Soares, like Pessoa, is not a single voice but many, a proto-person essentially erased by his own diversity, a stand-in for the undermined multitude, the many-headed void, the entity both made and unmade by its own (un)self-induced polycephaly. It could be argued, then, that rather than being a mutilation of Pessoa, Soares is in many ways a true reflection of the distortion Pessoa had undergone, more a reflected distortion than a distorted reflection, a reflection of what Pessoa had done to himself in order to exist at all, to exist in Soares. Soares is the mirror-image of the reality of the book he’s to author – another false face for the many, a mangled perpetrator of a mangled creation, a mutilation of collectivity, a rimose fabrication. The book is the whole of two disunities: a struggle for concord where none exists, a whole where there can be only parts. Pessoa teaches by example, and his lesson is that every person is many, and the psychological adhesives we employ to hold the various together under one name, one I, all dishonesties and limitations; and being that all alterations are also deaths, he chose to honour those nonreducible roles with names and identities – tagging the involute fragments as he fell apart.

With this in mind, and before proceeding any further with this lovesick commentary, the following abjuration is most likely requisite: Pessoa's central undertaking in the book he eventually entrusted to Soares was no less than that of detailing the veracities (in all their slipperiness, and such as he could locate them), the intellectual and emotional substance, that reside in incompleteness, multiplicity, contradiction, disorder and penumbra; and so to falsely pin him/it/them down beyond this, to territorialize the drifting and merging waters of his/its/their thought, would amount to an assault, a betrothal not of adoration but of violence. The distortion and the conflict found in and between the four core Pessoaan themes, of identity, dreams, death, and impossibility, gathered and ventured into here, will not be served by a process that unsnarls and harmonizes, for such a process would exemplify no kind of love. And so we arrive at the following exhortation: "Every effort is a crime, because every gesture is a dead dream."³ The cogency of this sentence is difficult to ignore and, as Soares himself realized, equally difficult to follow through on. The following efforts are, then, criminal in inception, and can be redeemed only by their preservative (loving) properties. The hope (that accursed and futile accompaniment to all non-accidental creation – our disillusion waiting in the wings) is that Soares's dead dream can here be resurrected – its hawking, bug-eyed corpse no doubt every bit as disconsolate as Schopenhauer's grave-dwellers stirred spitting from their slumber – and then once again dispatched with no grimace added to its twice-dead lineaments.

SELF: LOVE AS AUTOPHAGY

To love is to leave untouched: untouched as both expression of intangibility and withdrawal from alteration. Love cannot change its object without destroying it. But one cannot change what cannot first be captured, and love's true object always eludes our every grasping facility, for it is impervious, and its seeming destruction (over various instantiations) only ever love's own implosion. Love's true object is a "placid abyss,"⁴ the uncertain variant colouration of a moon's insolvable light. Love and love's objects are unseen and unknown: we see/know only the manifestations of our inability to see/know, and it is not worthwhile to construct complaint or remorse from this, for we

³ Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Richard Zenith (Penguin Books, 2002), 263.

⁴ Pessoa (2002), 136.

may see and know its “outskirts,”⁵ and just as virgins who stifle their inclinations to put love into action may see love clearer than love’s most rampant purveyor, we too might find love’s essence residing in the very condition of its veiled disincarnation. The subtractions are not exhausted outside the person; they are as virulent internally as they are externally, a curtailment of self being considered a prerequisite to any hope of preserving love’s purity. A comparable devouring of prurient selfhood can be found in M. K. Gandhi. Explaining the divestment of the person required by ahimsa, he expresses these requirements without equivocation: “to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. [...] I must reduce myself to zero.”⁶ In order to avoid doing violence to love’s objects, one must do violence to oneself instead.

To be removed from love, to pretend it truthfully at a safe distance, is not to dream of love – and such is Soares’s predilection for caution that he issues an emphatic warning: “Let’s not even love in our minds”⁷ – but to dream a mind dreaming of love, and to dream that mind static, chaste, lamenting and unreal, to dream a mind imprisoned eternally in the inanimate imaginings of love. By avoiding the inherent precariousness of love in this way we might expect such a lover, preserved by his rationale of timidity,⁸ to be capable of successfully maintaining a self that would otherwise have been surrendered. After all, it is “running real risks... [that] disturbs and depersonalises,”⁹ not dreaming the dreamt risks of fictions. But love, it seems, cannot so easily be extricated from its terminal appointment, for love in its purest state is death, and these layers of distance and conjecture are themselves tools of purification. The impossibility and falsity of love’s objects are perfectly suited to the unrealisable desire which love names, that of desiring to possess the sensation of possession, and while this desire, such as it is, may be free of the perils of humiliation associated with more worldly manifestations, it is nevertheless itself an acquiescence, a relinquishing

⁵ Pessoa (2002), 235.

⁶ M. K. Gandhi, ‘Truth and Ahimsa’, in Peter Singer (ed.), *Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 220.

⁷ Pessoa (2002), 244.

⁸ Preserved in something resembling a Cioranian state of “enthusiasm”. See E. M. Cioran’s *On the Heights of Despair* (University of Chicago Press 1996), 77-78.

⁹ Pessoa (2002), 73.

of self to non-existence. To renounce the self in this way – as votive offering to the abstract other of love as dreamt dreaming – is to ordain one’s own death, is to sacrifice the self to a state of possession (a possession that possesses in turn its possessor) in which there is nothing possessed and no possessor, and by so doing cease to be.

What, then, of this love that risks nothing? We might be tempted to conceive of Soares’s layered firmaments of dreaming as little more than the high-minded pusillanimous mewling of one who is all too aware that anyone who takes his pursuit of love into the world “will, in so far as he conceives it to be missing, feel pain.”¹⁰ A love in which there is never anything to go missing can never make threat of absence. But this is not to be thought of as a situation structured in degrees: his retreat is not, for instance, the one we find in the soma-saturated society of *Brave New World*, where “the greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving anyone too much.”¹¹ It is not a timorous recoil from the harrowing consequences of love’s physicality, but simply a rejection of the inherent contradiction in love having any kind of genuine physicality. There are times when Soares is hard to distinguish from Rimbaud’s “very young man” from the beginning of ‘Deserts of Love’, a young man of terminal reticence who had not “loved women – although passionate! – [for] his soul and his heart and all his strength were trained in strange, sad errors.”¹² Similarly, Soares’s own explorations of love are symptomatic of a wider epistemological affliction: how in finding the truth of things as they are accessible to him he finds only himself (as an accessed means of distortion), while those things that are always sought after, the concrete abstractions which by their very nature defy life, inevitably presage a state of death, a state in which the forfeiture of the self is enacted to preserve the sincerity of the incommunicable, and the sad sanctity of the perpetually erroneous. Thus evidencing how a commentary on love is just one of several ongoing and unresolved (qua unresolvable) epistemological and ontological commentaries, which (regardless of their object) always lead Soares to (and sometimes even progress from) some form of self-annihilation.

¹⁰ Benedict de Spinoza, *Works of Spinoza: Volume II* (Dover Publications, 1955), 154-5.

¹¹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Grafton Books, 1977), 190.

¹² Rimbaud, *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 287.

To understand love is to at once realize that nothing is, or can ever be, worthy of it. For love's true object is itself a nothing. It is as crass and misguided to love a cup as it is a person, so if one is to love at all, one would be advised to love what is at hand, what can be relied upon, what serves the purposes of one's dreams. Mutuality is not necessary; in fact it's a scourge, as is life itself.¹³ Love's purity (as objectless and impredicative) demands that one first dispose of life and other. Such maximal essentialism is not, of course, the preserve of Soares alone. The tradition is rich, the mythology its own keepsake. In his essay on *The Lady of the Camellias*, Roland Barthes pinpoints this "bourgeois" isolationism in Armand, whose concept of love "is segregative..., that of the owner who carries off his prey; an internalized love, which acknowledges the existence of the world only intermittently and always with a feeling of frustration, as if the world were never anything but the threat of some theft."¹⁴ But here the feared theft is not a removal, an extraction, but an addition, a poisoning, or a branding as one might steal cattle. The world can only steal what's inside if what's inside is nothing and what's there to be stolen is that very emptiness: the world, then, steals by occupying, a squatter in a house left deliberately and vitally empty. Armand's love, like Soares', without flesh to perish, is immutable and without end; both vampires draining the invisible blood of essence, their desire, with the world's objects as mere oblation, will always be "by definition a murder of the other."¹⁵

You can love only the pictures of love, its imagery, its phrases, the bloodless trinkets of its mythology. To know love is to sanctify it with impossibility and absurdity, to know that even that veiled contact is foreign and begets a foreign self: "We do not possess our sensations, and through them we cannot possess ourselves."¹⁶ Although love is possession, such possession is impossible. The approximations of possession are ludicrous and abject, eating without

¹³ 'Friendship' is the term that we might most readily associate with love soured by life and mutuality: "of the love of lifeless objects we do not use the word 'friendship'; for it is not mutual love" in Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, (ed.) Jonathan Barnes, Volume 2 (Princeton University Press, 1984), 1826.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Vintage Books, 1993), 103.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Vintage Books, 1993), 104.

¹⁶ Pessoa (2002), 301.

digesting, digesting without first eating: the awkward nestling of magnets, the chronic bulimia of the soul, the autophagic compromise of love's ideal.

Only love allows us to see (or plant, our fingers caked in our own mud) the self that resides within others.

Love is torment, its devices cast in oblivion. Love is a craving for something that even the imagination cannot deliver. It is the purity of longing, the perfect chastity of the eternally unconsummated (The words 'chaste' and 'chastity' both deriving from the Latin adjective *castus* meaning 'pure') – the dream of some unencounterable other.¹⁷ From the mouth of Diotima via Socrates via Aristodemus, we are told how Love (as spirit not god) truly is: "as the son of Resource and Need, it has been his fate to be always needy; nor is he delicate and lovely as most of us believe, but harsh and arid, barefoot and homeless"¹⁸

The impersonality that Soares envisages for his refinement of love is, in certain respects, not so far removed from love's carnal origins, the perpetuation of which he so thoroughly admonishes. A reminder, in case we needed one, of his impeccable Realism, for Soares's dreams are not the dreams of a blinkered romantic, but the dreams of a Realist who at once recognizes his bloodless reconstructions as being both insignificant and unsatisfactory, while also realizing that the alternative demands that we sleep so that the world may live. Soares knows that freedom, beauty, and the impossible are not in the world, but in how one escapes it. He claims that "love is a sexual instinct," but is quick to qualify this by pointing out that "it's not with sexual instinct that we love but with the conjecture of some other feeling. And that conjecture is already some other feeling."¹⁹ Love's genesis is in impersonality, for instincts are always impersonal, and it is in impersonality that it culminates. The transitory state is, however, speculative, and so no longer entirely

¹⁷ "Unlike love in possession of that which was / To be possessed and is. But this cannot / Possess. It is desire, set deep in the eye, / Behind all actual seeing, in the actual scene, / In the street, in a room, on a carpet or a wall, / Always in emptiness that would be filled, / In denial that cannot contain its blood / A porcelain, as yet in the bats thereof." Wallace Stevens, 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 467.

¹⁸ Plato, 'Symposium', in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1989), 555.

¹⁹ Pessoa (2002), 66.

impersonal, the emotional import of love being a creative extrapolation. But once created Soares no longer finds himself there. The construction excludes self. He experiences love most intensely as an awareness of a feeling of love, rather than as one who merely feels it, thereby dissolving any clear notion of the personal entity that loves. In order to feel, feelings must be disowned; only this way can they remain honest – an honesty precluding all moral encumbrance.²⁰ He loses himself “not like the river flowing into the sea for which it was secretly born, but like the puddle left on the beach by the high tide,” a locus of impassive awareness extruded from the flow through an imagined analysis²¹ of sensations from which it has successfully disembarked, “its stranded water never returning to the ocean but merely sinking into the sand.”²²

The perfect objects of love are, like those staples of Soares’s trance-like animatism, those stain-glass figures or Oriental men and women painted on porcelain, made not born, and made, ordinarily, as receptacles of intimacy, exemplars of a purist and devotional spirit. It comes as no surprise, then, that Soares should make the following disclosure: “Like Shelley,²³ I loved Antigone before time was; temporal loves were flat to my taste, all reminding me of what I’d lost.”²⁴ But this feat, this dismissal of flesh, is not enough. To love a fiction made to be loved is not to stretch for the impossible. Soares, like some poet lover of the Middle Ages for whom, as Bertrand Russell points out, “it had become impossible to feel any poetic

²⁰ The dangers of which Kant extolled at length: “For love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty – although no inclination impels us, and even although natural and unconquerable disinclination stands in our way – is practical, and not pathological, love, residing in the will and not in the propensions of feeling, in principles of action and not of melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone which can be an object of command.” in Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *The Moral Law*, trans. H. J. Paton (Routledge, 1991), 65.

²¹ “Only the eyes we use for dreaming truly see.” Pessoa (2002), 111.

²² Pessoa (2002), 137.

²³ Referencing a letter to John Gisborne, in which Shelley writes: “Some of us have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie.” Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (London: Edward Moxon, 1845), 335.

²⁴ Pessoa (2002), 141.

sentiment towards a lady unless she was regarded as unattainable,”²⁵ is all too comfortable with this aseptic connection, finding its rewards all too possible. His solution lies in establishing love for the most despicable of fictional female characters: “No greater romantic adventure exists than to have loved Lady Macbeth with true and directly felt love. After a love like that, what can one do but take a rest, not loving anyone in the real world?”²⁶ A more venal and murderous repository for love could not easily be found, so to love such a fiction, a fiction created to incite loathing, is an emotional exploit undoubtedly worthy of his talents as dreamer and purveyor of disembodied eroticism. But as Soares makes clear, there is no love that is not love for self and is not also pity for that same self – a sandwiching of self that epitomizes wisdom, whether our focus is the external world or the world of oneiric objects – and so Soares’s passionate entanglement with Lady Macbeth is, to delineate in more detail, ardour attached to his successful conceptualization of impossible love and the self-sympathy requisite to it.²⁷ In perfect accordance with the template laid down by Plato, she becomes “a

²⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Marriage and Morals* (Routledge, 1991), 49. Russell goes on to explain how “nobler spirits of the Middle Ages thought ill of this terrestrial life; ... [and of how] pure joy was to them only possible in ecstatic contemplation of a kind that seemed to them free from all sexual alloy.” (Russell 1991, 50).

²⁶ Pessoa (2002), 290-1.

²⁷ The self-serving core to this anfractuous and insulated artifice can be seen here as a way in which to dissolve the boundaries of selves and the divisive conditions in which they’re realized, a detail brought to the fore in the following passage by Deleuze and Guattari: “it would be an error to interpret courtly love in terms of a law of lack or an ideal of transcendence. The renunciation of external pleasure, or its delay, its infinite regress, testifies on the contrary to an achieved state in which desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence. Pleasure is an affection of a person or a subject; it is the only way for persons to “find themselves” in the process of desire that exceeds them; pleasures, even the most artificial, are reterritorializations. [...] The field of immanence is not internal to the self, but neither does it come from an external self or a nonself. Rather, it is like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves because interior and exterior are equally a part of the immanence in which they have fused.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 156.

mirror in which he beholds himself,"²⁸ his condition, his failure, and the ascendancy he forges from that failure.

Because the dreamer is invisible to others, despite them taking his skin to be their own, he will often, in return, see them as internally barren, clockwork aggregations of flesh alive to the world and all its clumsy impositions while dead to their own – now atrophied – selves. The true (long-subjugated) self of the dreamer, although rarely encountered even by the most skilled practitioner of dreams, is instantly recognized as both genuine and unsustainable. It is a void. The dreamer encounters reality within himself, feeling in a state of revelation that his “soul is a real entity.”²⁹ Waking from life into the reality and the lacuna of his soul, the world is made instantaneously remote, an alien land inhospitable to real persons. This is the self that can be everything because it is nothing, simultaneously everything and nothing, the non-relational entity indifferent to the world and the dreamer’s lesser selves: the dreamer’s true being, the empty variable, the placeholder, the transcendental self, the self spark. Soares tells of his revelation: “To know nothing about yourself is to live. To know yourself badly is to think. To know yourself in a flash, as I did in this moment, is to have a fleeting notion of the intimate monad, the soul’s magic word.”³⁰ After the flash has abated, the dreamer returns to being (embodying) the dreams of that real self, that nothing that can be all things, and that dreamt self in turn, once the flash is over, finds anchor in the fictitious non-existence of a worldly sleeping self, the self that knows no other home but the unconsciousness of the world.³¹ The deepest self comes to us like a vacant apparition, like another person’s emptiness, derailing thought, intelligence, speech, inducing inertia and sleep: “And now I’m sleepy, because I think – I don’t know why – that the meaning of it all is to sleep.”³² The meaning of it all is the return. The meaning becomes the failure to understand it or to sustain it. All its subsequent sense is encapsulated by this impotence, and one sleeps in one’s enthrallment of it. If indeed great men exist in

²⁸ Plato, ‘Phaedrus’, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1989), 501.

²⁹ Pessoa (2002), 40.

³⁰ Pessoa (2002), 40.

³¹ Heidegger’s *Being and Time* must then qualify as the world’s longest treatise on slumber.

³² Pessoa (2002), 41.

this state their whole lives, as Soares tells us, then there can be no real mystery surrounding why he neglects to give their names.

Soares's fleeting ekstasis haunts him, and experiencing the ghost of himself – his true self – leaves him with an irresistible desire for a time when “our deepest selves will somehow cease participating in being and non-being.”³³ According to Sartre's phenomenological systemizations surrounding the void at the centre of our being, “[w]e find ourselves ... in the presence of two human ekstases: the ekstasis which throws us into being-in-itself and the ekstasis which engages us in non-being.”³⁴ But Soares, in the face of being and non-being wants for neither: rather, he concocts a third path, the self existing outside of both. In short, he has the self that eludes him reflect the absurd incomprehensibility of the experience.³⁵ Once again he is thinking with his feelings,³⁶ and whereas for thinkers such as Schopenhauer, for whom heart and head make the person but it is always the latter

³³ Pessoa (2002), 45.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (Methuen, 1984), 44.

³⁵ Here we have not so much a Humean honest bewilderment (as we see expressed in the appendix to *A Treatise of Human Nature*) but rather a bewilderment of honesty, the paradoxes and impenetrable perplexities of conscious experience. Soares writes in earnest: “I'm never where I feel I am, and if I seek myself, I don't know who's seeking me.” (Pessoa, 2002: 161) This is none other than the metaphysical subject revealing its nothingness, the Wittgensteinian eye that does not see itself (see Wittgenstein, 1974: 57), and is to be distinguished from the self that eats into his outwardly-directed consciousness, the scourge of any (sublimely futile) attempt to aestheticise the world: “I see the way I saw, but from behind my eyes I see myself seeing, and that is enough to darken the sun, to make the green of the trees old, and to wilt the flowers before they open.” (Pessoa, 2002: 329)

³⁶ It is important to note that this homogeneity of thought and feeling is among the most prominent points of contact between Soares and Pessoa-as-himself, expressed most clearly by the latter in the lines: “In me what feels is always / Thinking.” (Pessoa, 2006: 284) This proximity led Pessoa to the realization that Soares was not truly autarchic, and so only a “semi-heteronym”, a maimed and depleted version of that most adhesive of selves. Pessoa's inability to cleave Soares from his derivation is connected to this inability to separate thought and feeling: what Soares “thinks depends on what he feels” (Pessoa, 2002: 475), and what he feels depends on Pessoa, and whatever Pessoa feels is, he confesses, felt solely in order that he may write (in a style he shares with Soares) that he felt it, making any separation one that would have Pessoa existing as his own amputee.

that is “secondary” or “derived,” with Soares (especially in the work that is closest to Pessoa himself) they invariably merge. Comparisons with Sartre will help codify Soares’s poetic musings, the eloquence of Soares’s lyrical philosophy coming alive in the contrarities. It is possible to attribute a tripartite theory of the self to Soares, comprising the unconscious worldly self of life, meditating on its detail, the self that is dreamt and itself dreams a world for itself, and the self that is missing, absent from the world and impervious to it. These demarcations fit more or less neatly with Sartre’s three ekstases (three stances on the for-itself, as the inevitable dispersion of human being-in-itself): the first ekstasis involves the realization of existence, the “leaping out” of grounded (worldly) consciousness, the realization of nothingness as the reason for the found disparity between worldly consciousness (living), and awareness of existence as brute human fact (knowing);³⁷ the second involves the failure of justification: a further fracturing, as that which seeks to know and actualize the initial awareness encounters its own difference; while the third has the other emerging as subject, but one that cannot be known as subject, as a subject would know itself. But Soares, with no interest in uniting these perspectives (subjects), turns away from synthesis, from the one *transcendent ego*, and instead accepts (welcomes) the proliferation of such egos that arrive in their wake. For Soares, modes of awareness invariably spawn selves, or levels of dreaming each with a dreamer. Like Sartre, he does not posit the reality of selves,³⁸ but instead sees selves as imaginary devices, through which we can transcend Reality, the reality in which the self is a nothing.

Our adjectives mostly fail to touch the world as it is; they do not chart the skin, but dress it. But this is not a mistake, an error to be corrected; it’s a freedom, a playground replete with bountiful spawning materials. It is for this reason that the deepest self must be an impredicative, unanalysable gap – the something of nothing – “no more than the ray of sunlight that shines and isolates from the soil the pile of dung that’s the body.”³⁹ Instead of a reductionist or eliminativist reading of the self, we get an exploitative one, a rigorous celebration of the diverse possibilities of consciousness. Soares

³⁷ Soares tells of how his “normal, everyday self-awareness had intermingled with the abyss.” Pessoa (2002), 95.

³⁸ In Sartre’s 1936 essay, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, we see him set upon Husserl’s positing of the transcendental reality of the ego.

³⁹ Pessoa (2002), 58.

nurtures the internal remoteness achieved when consciousness turns in on itself; he nourishes the phenomenological state of being somehow host to your own self, as opposed to embodying it, and from this groundwork he starts to build.

At times Soares feels himself becoming that abyssal eye staring out from nowhere and acknowledging the knotted materials of the self, as one might acknowledge the presence of a tumour, or some foreign growth squirming in the rat-infested back alleys of a tale once told about your life and your role inside it. He sees the human soul's unconscious filth, sees it "is a madhouse of the grotesque. [...] a well, but a sinister well full of murky echoes and inhabited by abhorrent creatures, slimy non-beings, lifeless slugs, the snot of subjectivity."⁴⁰ So what does he do with these grotesqueries of the soul once they've been disinterred? He takes them on holiday: they are transformed into "huge heads of non-existent monsters," "Oriental dragons from the abyss,"⁴¹ and finally the hollow stratagems of the city, resignation, and Destiny.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein claims that "What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world'. / The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it."⁴² Soares captures the exact same revelation, saying "We possess nothing, for we don't even possess ourselves. We have nothing because we are nothing. [...] The universe isn't mine: it's me."⁴³ And then even more succinctly: "I'm lost if I find myself."⁴⁴ This constitutes the birth of Soares as dreamer, for this unity of self and world is a convening of two nothings: the self that cannot be mine (cannot be anything for me) and the world itself abyssal in constituting the everything of the absentee self. The challenge is laid out thus: "Everything is us, and we are everything, but what good is this, if everything is nothing."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Pessoa (2002), 208.

⁴¹ Pessoa (2002), 209-10.

⁴² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Routledge, 1974), 58.

⁴³ Pessoa (2002), 112.

⁴⁴ Pessoa (2002), 209.

⁴⁵ Pessoa (2002), 149.

That “*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.”⁴⁶ is something that Soares accepts – he is, after all, the “selfsame prose” he writes – but when he accepts this, it is not merely as some rationally punitive stricture, but as a provocation, an ontological ultimatum.

And the other (psychological) self is a fiction: “It’s only the self who no longer believes and is now an adult, with a soul that remembers and weeps – only this self is fiction and confusion, anguish and the grave.”⁴⁷ This self (this objectified person⁴⁸) is the fiction that the world configures, the self lived into obscurity by the blind processes of its own brute reflexivity. And to realize that there is no destination, that where we’ve been is as unknown and distant as where we’re going, arrives as partial remedy to this state of lost transparency. The dreamer’s prescription is to have as much expectation for, and make as much demand on, the past as on the future, to be deliberately aimless – time’s own magniloquent vagrant – not to simply become one of the world’s clumsy fictions, devoid of identity and “so scattered,”⁴⁹ but to found one’s being in the very impossibility of being anything other than yourself, i.e. to found your being in what you cannot be, forging an escape from materials that confine (and define) you. Evidence that this experiment is even in operation is scant and fragile and pervaded with logical perversity, as when Soares happens on the “absurd remembrance of [his] future death.”⁵⁰ The real world demands artifice of its sleepwalkers, revealing itself most fruitfully when bent out of shape. Bending to fit the world we mimic how the world sees us, not how the world is.

If we consider the exposition of Zeus’ bisection of man found in Plato’s ‘Symposium’, of how those eight-limbed, two-headed men, women and hermaphrodites of myth were cleaved like pieces of fruit, we can begin to see how it is that love came to be seen as some corrective for lost unity, naming the condition which leaves “each half with a desperate yearning for the other, ... [wanting] for nothing

⁴⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Routledge, 1974), 56.

⁴⁷ Pessoa (2002), 129.

⁴⁸ This is the person of the psychological theorist, the indeterminate aggregate of psychological properties to which the self is reduced by John Locke, David Hume, Derek Parfit, Sidney Shoemaker, et al.

⁴⁹ Pessoa (2002), 55.

⁵⁰ Pessoa (2002), 68.

better than to be rolled into one.”⁵¹ Soares internalizes this myth, describing a state which seeks to rectify division within the self, to close the distance not between human beings but between two estranged segments of the same self, “Siamese twins that aren’t attached.”⁵²

UNREALITY: LOVE AS DREAMING

The world is a dead reality, a weightless husk, its dreamable resources sucked out like the guts of some pillaged insect.

Consciousness forces a state of being: act one’s dreams and dream one’s acts. But therein lies a danger: to dream the life that others merely live is to invest yourself in your surroundings, both the animate and the inanimate, having them exist only partially on your terms, leaving the way clear that they may walk away at any time and take parts of you with them. (What’s more, the inevitable disclosures of falsity become a source of disgust, for only pure dreams can enchant, “those which have no relation to reality nor even any point of contact with it.”)⁵³ The consequence of dreaming life is that “Everything that happens where we live happens in us. Everything that ceases in what we see ceases in us.”⁵⁴ Every loss, however insignificant to our state of active dreaming, or to our intellect in which it might barely register, becomes a mortification, a partial amputation of the soul. For else why would Soares cry “My God, my God, the office boy left today”?⁵⁵

You can no more own the objects of love than you can own your dreams. To be skilled at dreaming is to realize a state in which your dreams can own you. And to be owned by a dream is to submit to the plot-less presence of the dead man. Similarly, to submit to the ownership of love is to avoid all of its narrative manifestations, in which its objects possess nothing but love’s ephemera (sensations of the perpetually thwarted possession of its objects), relinquishing all love’s worldly accoutrements, so that there may be something left to act as possessor: love is the unpossessable possessor of its own potentiality. By transcending the boundaries of the internal self, love

⁵¹ Plato, ‘Symposium’, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1989), 543.

⁵² Pessoa (2002), 20.

⁵³ Pessoa (2002), 460.

⁵⁴ Pessoa (2002), 241.

⁵⁵ Pessoa (2002), 241.

realises its own dilution, for as it is lived (exteriorised) into something else it becomes estranged from the pretence on which its existence depends, an imagining both estranged and depleted – a lesser dream, tangible and lost. If sex is the “accident”⁵⁶ of love, then the masturbator expresses, in his very abjectness,⁵⁷ the unfortunate truth (as disclosure of essential pretence) of this aleatoric conjunction. “Let us remain eternally like a male figure in one stained-glass window opposite a female figure in another stained-glass window,”⁵⁸ for there is no other way for us to non-destructively realise (from *réaliser* to “make real”) love’s immanent potential as self-sustained dream. These selfsame conditions for love’s realization, as being necessarily static and outside of time, are revealed to Jorge Luis Borges’ Javier Otárola at the close of ‘Ulrikke’: “Like sand, time sifted away. Ancient in the dimness flowed love, and for the first and last time, I possessed the image of Ulrikke.”⁵⁹

Understanding is inimical to love and to self. In something resembling an extreme take on Stendhal’s aphorism on happiness, in which description becomes diminishment, we see that to understand one must first butcher oneself and then that which one seeks to understand. Love, in contradistinction, leaves no fingerprint, its aristocratic non-touch a hovering hand doubly displaced in dream.

To suffer in love is to want it to be more than it is, to be all at once flesh and idea. Worldly (undreamed) love is a template for suffering. Love is so important to us, enjoys such exalted preeminence in human life, because we imagine it to be all that we want from it. This is how it is able to transcend and enslave us. Having reconstructed our meaningfulness as human beings from an impossible desire, we set about trying to find its objects, and that all objects fall short is no detriment to the love that attaches itself to them, quite the opposite – their loss is love’s gain. “Perfection never materializes. The saint weeps, and is human. God is silent. That is

⁵⁶ Fernando Pessoa, *A Little Less Than the Entire Universe: selected poems*, trans. Richard Zenith (Penguin Books, 2006), 351.

⁵⁷ The plight of those nine grinding bachelors (“malic molds”) in Marcel Duchamp’s *The Large Glass*, all sharing “the same useless expression” Pessoa (2002), 289.

⁵⁸ Pessoa (2002), 289.

⁵⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin Press, 1999) 422.

why we can love the saint but cannot love God”⁶⁰ – although, we can safely love the idea of God.

Love demands distance and intangibility from its objects, so a wise deployment reserves attention for one’s dreams of love or, more precisely, one’s dreaming of the dreamt love of fictional lovers. Only this way can we hope to dissect the emotion of the idea, without mistaking the idea for flesh. Goethe’s Eduard was a precise enough lover to make this distinction when it came to Otilie: “Sometimes she does something that offends the pure idea I have of her, and it is only then I know how much I love her, because I am then distressed beyond all power of description.”⁶¹ Love cannot survive our knowing it or its objects, the latter of which do not really exist: it is the dream of a dream, the dream of a dream that can’t be dreamt. As Soares would put it, “I want you only to dream of you.”⁶² But even the imagination destroys (possibilities) as it builds, so the formula of the dream requires the perpetual immanence of the impossible; if “there’s always at least one dimension missing in the inward space that harbours these hapless realities,”⁶³ then it’s for good reason. The desire for this dimensional deficiency to be healed is to want for love to be nursed to death, to be fortified to the point of extirpation.⁶⁴ The reality we seek for those creatures of our dreams is, then, an empty and self-defeating vanity.⁶⁵ To want the substance of your dreams to mimic that of the world is to will the creation of essentially antithetical beings, a need grounded in the knowledge that “[t]he more a man differs from me, the more real he seems, for he depends that much less on my subjectivity.”⁶⁶ Here resides the dilemma of

⁶⁰ Pessoa (2002), 65.

⁶¹ Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, 1971), 146.

⁶² Pessoa (2002), 101.

⁶³ Pessoa (2002), 90.

⁶⁴ Not unlike the sad accounts concerning those released from Nazi concentration camps who, on liberation, ate themselves to death. Love is a form of starvation, and so requires a thin gruel, the almost figmental substance of Bengal famine mix.

⁶⁵ A reality captured in exquisite detail by Wallace Stevens: “*This image, this love, I compose myself / Of these. In these, I come forth outwardly. / In these, I wear a vital cleanliness, / Not as in air, bright-blue-resembling air, / But as in the powerful mirror of my wish and will.*” in Wallace Stevens, ‘Poem with Rhythms’, in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 245-6.

⁶⁶ Pessoa (2002), 70.

love: the desire to possess when possession is inimical to the desire. That which I love must be mine and not mine: mine so that love is not torture, and not mine so that we can share in the discursive pleasures of propriety, pleasures known to Samuel Beckett's Mr Hackett who, of certain seats, "knew they were not his, ... [though] he thought of them as his. He knew they were not his, because they pleased him."⁶⁷ We want for the absent dimensions of our dreams to be merely hidden, just as the machinations of self-awareness instinctively lead us to suppose that what seems like our own absence is really a mere instance of the search obscuring what it seeks to find. We want what we cannot see and what cannot be seen to be implied by what we can and do see, and yet this implication, should it come, would transform illusion into reality, when the goal for the dreamer is to realize that reality and illusion are codependents and that it is this very codependence that makes not only an internalization of the universe possible, but an internalization of every universe, including the infinite and incomplete, universes whose internal contradictions imply something beyond reality, something transcendent rather than transcendental. But the toll on the self imposed by these Aleph-like internalizations can be considerable: "How much I die if I feel for everything!"⁶⁸

Like the retired librarian in Borges' 'The Book of Sand', a man slowly consumed by the infinite book that has come into his possession, Soares is acutely aware that those that live life do so unconsciously, that life is best lived unconscious of itself and reinforced with spurious limitations. Consciousness exists in defiance of life; to live consciously is to regard life as one would an alien costume tailored to the shape of men, but lacking any safe points of entry. To be conscious is to know feeling (or feel knowing) at a distance, to always maintain a scholarly reserve and perplexity even towards that which would appear most intimate.

When the dreaming of our waking life (that life discernible from lived dreaming because it is peopled with tangible occupants) is disrupted by non-routine elements, it becomes critically compromised. For when dreaming this life, we live the hypotheses and imaginings of these real people – we regret their absence while they are still present, mourn their deaths while they still breathe, witness mutations of character while they remain unchanged – so that

⁶⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (Grove Press, 1953), 7.

⁶⁸ Pessoa (2002), 93.

if such things should really happen, our pre-emptive dreams of them appear disfigured by comparative association. The futures we have constructed for the people around us, futures in which those people are placed, insulated by the dreamer's despotic enchantment, have a reality that has claim to a certain level of solidity, as too do their present-day selves as visited from the dreamer's future reminiscences, a solidity which is impaired (desecrated even) by the crude and unexpected vacillations of reality. The dreamer demands that life obey a certain formulaic continuity, that those people that have been transmogrified into symbols remain unaltered, that one's future recollections of them are not falsified by reality. To live this way is to no longer be one self but two, ("two abysses"): the self that dreams, lost in its attentiveness to the world and the banality of its detail, and the dreamt self reporting back from the vantages of imagination. They are the remote exhibits of a bisected unity, an omphaloskepsis continually swallowed and disgorged by its umbilici.

To act in one's dreams is to maintain an internal state of flux, to move on before having found a place to settle – in short, to play out the futile insanity of real life to much greater effect. Played out because the anchor of the real is never truly lost, even if its impressions elude all recollection, and to greater effect because the range is inexhaustible, the self which lives it infinite (bearing the marks of its extrication), and the pattern of its weave all "intervals," all "nothing," the purest possibilities of the absurd (of its divinity), the confused – a finely delineated oblivion. To attempt (even on a minimal scale) to mimic these conditions externally is to suffocate the infinite self, its lungs ill-formed to breathe the oppressive air of finitude: "The only way to be in agreement with life is to disagree with ourselves."⁶⁹

The internal contradictions that starve the dreamer (of satisfaction) are the same contradictions that have him grow fat (on the nobility of disappointment). The dreamer cannot believe in success; the boundless possibilities consume all sense of it. Everywhere is nowhere. But therein lies an approximation of success, for to know your defeat intimately is to be victorious. He moves amongst "the flagless army fighting a hopeless war,"⁷⁰ and while he and this unaffiliated martial horde share the same vanquishment, he has other wars to continue losing, and losing gloriously and with the

⁶⁹ Pessoa (2002), 27.

⁷⁰ Pessoa (2002), 59.

necessity of his defeat providing fanfare. To be aware that you're what's left of something that's never been anything more, is to be spared the vision of the pernicious and phantom-like augmentations of desire. The dreamer doesn't try to reach the end (the completion, or use) of anything, his own self least of all. Here lies meaning, sense, dignity: "Since we can't extract beauty from life, let's at least try to extract beauty from not being able to extract beauty from life."⁷¹ The only perfection open to us lies in our failure to attain it.

The proficient dreamer never loses sight of the phenomenon of dreaming, or through how many conduits his reverie is being filtered. He dreams "without illusions,"⁷² for he is aware that his entire consciousness bears the mark of the dream, be it the internal dream of others' internal dreams, or the dream of the world, soured by its proximity to claims of truth. It is for this reason that "[e]very dream is the same dream, for they're all dreams"⁷³ (just as every unconsciousness is the same unconsciousness "diversified among different faces and bodies").⁷⁴

Soares has no desire to socialize the self (such as we see in late Sartre, for example), to meld ego with man. Man is a fetid potion, "a monstrous and vile animal created in the chaos of dreams, out of desires' soggy crusts, out of sensations' chewed-up leftovers."⁷⁵ The paganistic "cult of humanity" is grounded in the misguided premise that man is a legitimate replacement for God. Though makers of reality, we do not, as individuals, choose the manner in which it is made. If our dreams were to be made real – by which we mean encounterable in the way the world is encounterable, to be inside it as much as it is inside us – they would be made fact, and the facts would then overwhelm both dream and dreamer. If realities were to become Realities, then the dreamer would be altered as a result, altered into a god. This extra dimension, if added, would render the dream external (for the supplementary dimension must come from outside these realities), see them subsumed into the world; the dreamer would start to dream realities as he dreams the world, unconsciously. You would live (worldly) in your dream and thereby destroy the dreaming self. For these realities to gain this extra dimension the

⁷¹ Pessoa (2002), 261.

⁷² Pessoa (2002), 61.

⁷³ Pessoa (2002), 60.

⁷⁴ Pessoa (2002), 70.

⁷⁵ Pessoa (2002), 63.

dreamer would have to disappear, all distance (that distance that creates nearness) lost. The reality would be yours, in a way that the world never is, its independence (for there must be independence. How else could you meet the friends you've dreamed of as distinct from dreaming such a meeting?) additional rather than inherent, but it would amount to a fundamental limitation of possibilities, namely one's presence as absentee. As when the dreamer returns to the world, the focus would inevitably shift from acting one's dreams to dreaming one's acts.

Love is not for living but observing, as a form of self-awareness: the self that dies daily to the world and the dreaming self each watch the other fail, the former in disillusionment and the latter in artificiality. But the latter, at least, need never lose the object of his love, for he realizes that he has created it, and should it become threadbare can make it again.

To reform reality in the intellect, to tell of the images of one's dreams in a voice nobody will hear: this is how to survive the world and its dismal ministry. Life does not permit its flock to dream, for once the world has colonized all internal space, there's nothing else left to dream and no one left to dream it.

The dreamer does not sacrifice his intelligence, his reason, for the sake of the dream. He unites them; he makes dreaming a response to truth and not its replacement. He accepts, like Wittgenstein, that there are no genuine problems of existence – “When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. / *The riddle* does not exist. / If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it”⁷⁶ – that a logical approach to the world rids us of the necessity of answers, for the world itself poses no questions, but yet he remains speculative, choosing to detail this non-existent riddle and set up home in its absence.

The dreamer's riddle (the riddle that sustains him, for “How everything wearies when it is defined!”)⁷⁷ is the very lacuna left by the riddle of existence which does not exist. His task is not the framing of answers to impossible questions, or even, for the most part, framing impossible questions, but rather framing the very impossibility of certain questions, maddening in their ghostliness, their vague specificity, their uncertain certainty. He senses the

⁷⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Routledge, 1974), 73.

⁷⁷ Pessoa (2002), 138.

questions, senses their non-existence as one would sense the missing. His words construct the impossibility of construction; they are the blueprints not for impossible buildings, but the impossibility of building, thereby constructing a template for impossibility itself, for the necessity of nothingness.

And once again Soares's comments on the comingling of thought and feeling are provided illustration, for it is as a consequence of their fusion that one can be aware of the strictures of logic while at the same time breaking them.

The first task is to overcome *what is* instead of *what can be*. This is the initial flight of the dreamer, in which he anatomizes "the metaphysics of autonomous shadows, the poetry of the twilight of disillusion."⁷⁸ The second, more fundamental, flight turns its attention on the necessary limitations of that first flight i.e. the substance of the nothing of undreamability.

Even loves manufactured in dreams must pass. How else could we dream their allotted nostalgia? Love is an exercise; why else would we willfully replace its objects? "I can change my sweetheart and she'll always be the same."⁷⁹ To love this way is to love indifferently, to experience a paradox of feeling that is the apex of thought-feeling.

In real life man trails behind himself, all the while imagining that he is the one with his head over his shoulder. In the life of dreams the straggler and the vanguard are indistinguishable, united by the dream. Each must surrender to the other in order for the dreamer to be formed. Division implies navigation, and the true dreamer does not navigate his dream, he becomes his dream and each performs the other. *Pace* Paul Valéry, knowing oneself is not foreseeing oneself and so playing the part of oneself, but foreseeing nothing and thereby locating oneself in the pathless landscape of the dream.

Love provides but one service to the dreamer: the increased fondness for what is absent. This fondness drives imagination, animating the dreamer, and when succumbed to without reservation can absent reality itself.

⁷⁸ Pessoa (2002), 133.

⁷⁹ Pessoa (2002), 403.

MELTING: LOVE AS DEATH

The deceased man of action was always “what Death would make of him.”⁸⁰ The deceased man of dreams was always what he would make of Death.

The idea of love, like the idea of death, is frozen, eternal and unoccupied, sensation without the ephemeral trappings of its cause, or its even needing a cause.

There is nothing you can construct in the exterior world which does not first involve you destroying an element of yourself, and the exterior world contains nothing – no cause, no love, no discovery – worthy of a man’s internal annihilation – not that there is especial calamity in the latter. To exteriorize is to submit to cowardice, to submit to the reassuring untruth of reality’s concrete independence. Soares gives us a way out, a way of protecting the internal from the external:

The truly wise man is the one who can keep external events from changing him in any way. To do this, he covers himself with an armour of realities closer to him than the world’s facts and through which the facts, modified accordingly, reach him.⁸¹

This carapace is the actualization of a consciousness, a protective filter maintaining verisimilitude to nothing but awareness itself, and thereby constituting a retreat from the numerous “metaphysical mistake[s] of matter,”⁸² internalizing them. This is Soares tiring of truth, as weary from conflict with the world’s persistence he eradicates all factful concerns, reducing them to an absent-minded dereliction of self.⁸³ And yet he claims to “remember only external things”⁸⁴ and to furnish his dreams, thus upping their intensity, with

⁸⁰ Pessoa (2002), 407.

⁸¹ Pessoa (2002), 94.

⁸² Pessoa (2002), 96.

⁸³ Soares’s burden is that of the philosopher, for as Nietzsche observes, the “philosopher recuperates differently and with different means: he recuperates, e.g., with nihilism. Belief that there is no truth at all, the nihilistic belief, is a great relaxation for one who, as a warrior of knowledge, is ceaselessly fighting ugly truths. For truth is ugly.” in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1967), 325.

⁸⁴ Pessoa (2002), 183.

the rewards of a scrutiny turned outward, with things prose-filtered and yet inescapably visual and spatially ordered. Externalizing impressions is a way to locate them, to have them exist, to establish them as encounterable and so too ourselves as that which encounters, and much rather that than a false name fixed to the collected fragments of an unowned dream.

Love makes but one demand for incarnation, that its promise remain a threat. Seeking love's fulfilment among the objects of the world, seeking therein its vertex and conclusion, is a betrayal of the inherent chastity of loving-as-possession. There is no possession but the dream, a dream itself devoid of possessing. The loving dream, the idea of that loved, is the limit of the lover's claim to ownership, and one does not even own one's dreams. Meticulous attention on the outside should always be a prerequisite for a subsequent act of internalisation: the sexual impulse is a reversal of this. The sexualisation of love is a relinquishment of possibility, and a debasement of the dreamer's singularity, an immolation that Schopenhauer tells us "is the life of the species, asserting its precedence over that of individuals."⁸⁵ When Soares declares that "[l]ife should be a dream that spurns confrontations,"⁸⁶ it is this kind of banal skirmish to which he is referring, the anguished dueling that occurs when the narrator (of dreams) is narrated (by life). To place love in the world importunes an adjectival prefix, such as we see in the phrases, *sexual* love, and *motherly* love, and also in Hegel's somewhat pleonastic clarification: "*Active* love – for love does that does not act has no existence."⁸⁷ Soares would say that active love, by existing, is not love, but rather what is fashioned from love's residual scraps once it's been obliterated by activity. Action is never other than a destructive force, "a disease of thought, a cancer of the imagination. [...And just as] God, becoming man, cannot help but end in martyrdom,"⁸⁸ love's descent into the meat of unclaimed bodies cannot help but end in surrender and eventual death,⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, Volume 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 602.

⁸⁶ Pessoa (2002), 145.

⁸⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), 255; my emphasis.

⁸⁸ Pessoa (2002), 272.

⁸⁹ The fate of Strindberg's Miss Julie, whose post-coital subjugation and suicide provides perfect illustration of the annihilative vigour of corporeal passion.

consciousness abandoned to the inert flesh of the other. And yet there is no escape in essentialism either, for love's fastigium is not free of death but riddled with a brand of abstract necrosis, a state in which we are "chaste like dead lips, pure like dreamed bodies, and resigned to being this way, like mad nuns."⁹⁰ And it does not end with love, for all interaction with others is a corruption of possibilities, a truncation of internal infinitudes: "To associate is to die."⁹¹ Social existence involves crediting others with a level of reality that immediately confines and marginalizes the self, and that part of us that extends into this realm becomes necrotized tissue.⁹²

If love is to be suffered, then it should be suffered only as a possibility for sensation – a sensation of possibility. It is this nympholeptic sterility that conveys permanence, a sterility that while frequently associated with the moral implications of chastity, is concerned with neither the virtue of oneself or others:⁹³ "Women are a good source of dreams. Don't ever touch them."⁹⁴ Not even with the prosthetic hands used to touch life. In summation, Soares's dictum can be seen as a reversal of one half of the Schopenhauerian distinction that couples life with permanence: where for Schopenhauer "it is his *immortal* part [the will to life] that longs for her,"⁹⁵ for Soares it is his immortal (or permanent/infinite)⁹⁶ part as

⁹⁰ Pessoa (2002), 289.

⁹¹ Pessoa (2002), 184.

⁹² Mark Seltzer details the potential destructiveness of socialization in his study on serial killers, in which he painstakingly explores "the manner in which serial violence is bound up with what might be described as the quickening of an experience of generality within: a psychasthenic yielding to generality, to affections with something stereotypical about them, to something statistical in our loves. Serial violence, in short, cannot be separated from experiences of a radical failure in self-difference." (Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (Routledge, 1998), 144.)

⁹³ Like Pausanias' divine lover (as relayed by Aristodemus), Soares advocates a state in which we may "become one with what will never fade." (Plato 1989, 537), but unlike Pausanias he has no interest in this lover's moral status, or the viciousness or otherwise of his counterpart, the earthly lover, who lusts only after gratifications of the flesh.

⁹⁴ Pessoa (2002), 351.

⁹⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, Volume 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 559.

the rejection of life (the will to anti-life) that longs (or ideally provides witness to such longing) for her (as a representation). This sense of there being an underlying aim is also present in Alfred North Whitehead, who saw love for one's child or one's spouse as the exemplification of a feeling concerned with a desired consonance somehow made manifest in loved objects. This love, he claimed, "involves deep feeling of an aim in the Universe, winning such triumph as is possible to it."⁹⁷ Soares would be unable to see any triumphs worth winning. This is the vulgarity of purpose infiltrating the sublime uselessness of love, as if the search and the silence were wanting, weren't themselves everything. Where Whitehead finds an implication of discord and division, Soares finds the opportunity for synthesis.⁹⁸ The conflict lies with "the principles of the generality of harmony, and of the importance of the individual. The first means 'order', and the second means 'love'. Between the two there is a suggestion of opposition. For 'order' is impersonal; and 'love', above all things, is personal."⁹⁹ The trick is to experience the personal from a distance, and thereby establish order. There is an inescapable universality to the personal, and it is this that can be observed dispassionately. It is that aspect of the personal that we consider peculiar to ourselves that allows us to relish the structures of love on a level considered intimate. In this way love and harmony become inseparable. It is only by surrendering love to particular objects that the ideal is forfeited.¹⁰⁰ This proposed experience of love is objectless, and so fraught with none of the deleterious consequences so often associated with love's worldly actualization. But although free of the

⁹⁶ Although Soares is clear that nothing about human life is infinite, the dream, though it may be only momentarily embodied, is not itself asphyxiated by limitations of time.

⁹⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1939), 373.

⁹⁸ Something we also find in Cioran: "Irrationality resides over the birth of love. The sensation of melting is also present, for love is a form of intimate communion and nothing expresses it better than the subjective impression of melting, the falling away of all barriers of individuation. Isn't love specificity and universality all at once?" in E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 84.

⁹⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1939), 376.

¹⁰⁰ Like Platonic forms the objects of love must remain "free from all alloy" (Plato 1989, 497).

raw anxieties of love's frontline, the death of the self remains inevitable. For by turning love into an anti-prosopopoeial conglomerate of abstractions, ideally experienced as a uniquely concerted sensation, Soares makes a simulacrum of the self at every level. There is no room for the self when sensation has been purified to this degree. It's the Cartesian corrective applied to sensation: *there is sensation*. Georges Bataille, recognising the deep connection between the physical entrapment of love and the abdication of self, writes: "I said that I regarded eroticism as the disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question. In one sense, the being loses himself deliberately, but then the subject is identified with the object losing his identity."¹⁰¹ In Soares's idealized picture of love, free of the disequilibrium of eroticism, the subject makes a quandary of its existence not through identification with the body, but through having no available repository for identification whatsoever.

If Soares ever managed to encapsulate his – and so Pessoa's – entire project in a single sentence, then he does so here: "I've externalized myself on the inside."¹⁰² What we see with Schopenhauer's and Whitehead's picture of love, which is to name but two for those with like-minded approaches are legion, is the exact opposite, for they understand the lover as someone who internalizes himself on the outside.

The spiritualized transfiguration of two bodies into one brought on by an individual's craven rapport with another, in Soares's hands becomes a mechanism of intimate self-viewing, the sensation of love facilitating a (Cioranian) "melting" of self-watched and self-watching. But to fuse is to annihilate by contamination. To love is to seek destruction and impurity. To desire the effects of love is to desire a distinctly Empedoclean integration.¹⁰³ Identity, or at the least one's sense of being a something that dreams, a something in dreams, a something that some disclosure of scientific truth could possibly make

¹⁰¹ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Colin MacCabe (Penguin Books, 2001), 31.

¹⁰² Pessoa (2002), 254.

¹⁰³ According to Empedocles, Love was the amalgam of the cosmic cycle – the agency that brought about the coalescence of the four roots (earth, air, fire and water) into a uniform sphere – and Strife the agency that sowed discord through that love-formed sphere, once again estranging its elements. But Love cannot retain the integrity of each root, as running "through one another, they become different in aspect." The natural world is formed in this way, via the integrative betrayal of each of its constituent parts.

nothing, always comes at the expense of others. To relate to others on any level is to have them partake in the composition of your existence, to have their remote paws help put you together. All action assumes company, (a necroid promiscuity of the soul) making the one who acts porous. To act is to recoil from the self, diluting it with alterity, entombing the freedom of nothingness inside the dirt of the world.

Physical love is a contagion (for Bataille “an impersonal growth”) and sterility a partial containment. Soares asks us to pray that his hypothetical wife be sterile and never more than hypothetical. Sexual reproduction is the forging (knocking up) of violent materials, the manufacture of weaponry for a war that your children will fight for you, a war you can no longer see a point in winning, a war that exists only so that there may be soldiers to fight it, war as a reason for parturition. The self-annihilations of love do not mimic suicide, they mimic life; present even in the midst of sterility, they involve the destruction of what cannot be found, the mutilation of uninhabitable bodies: “Only to kill what never was is lofty, perverse and absurd.”¹⁰⁴ If, as Bataille tells us, the human corpse is a “tormenting object,” the object a prophecy of the viewer’s own violent destiny, then human offspring, delivered into the world or preempted by infertility, represents the death of a dream, the snuffing out of possibility, of all opportunity for perfect surrender or love as death – a corpse-less death. A love in which both parties surrender completely to the other is not possible, but if it were each would lay their personality out on the mortuary slab: “The greatest love is therefore death.”¹⁰⁵ All attempts to act out this surrender are failures that work toward death¹⁰⁶ only to document its impossibility, so that if, as Bataille also realized, “the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death,”¹⁰⁷ then it is the urge toward a dream of death, a death made our own now fading, a death found impossible, leaving us staring

¹⁰⁴ Pessoa (2002), 288.

¹⁰⁵ Pessoa (2002), 449.

¹⁰⁶ “I FAINT, I perish with my love! I grow / Frail as a cloud whose [splendours] pale / Under the evening’s ever-changing glow: / I die like mist upon the gale, / And like a wave under the calm I fail.” Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Fragment XXXIII’, in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Edward Moxon, 1870), 577.

¹⁰⁷ Bataille (2001), 42.

down at the vacated corpse of ourselves as it ridicules our dreams for it.

VOID: LOVE AS IMPOSSIBILITY

If all man's words are marginalia on blank sheets of paper, then man can only make or unmake the suppositions of his existence.¹⁰⁸ There can be no true path for that which exists only by hypothesis. The only way for such a contrivance to live according to its (unnatural) nature is through an escalation of such pathways, ignoring the constraints of possibility forged – through misadventures in identification – along the way. Only recognition of the necessity of failure can go towards redeeming the efforts made, wherein failure once again makes its mark. The success of mystery comes at the expense of a solid footing from which to dream, so expediting the collapse of abstraction as possible recourse. From what do we abstract? The universality of Soares's self-professed ignorance is rewarded with the wisdom of his awareness of it; with the dejection of one who'd temporarily submitted to a hope he knew to be false, he writes, "I'll never write a page that sheds light on me or that sheds light on anything."¹⁰⁹ If we can speak of Soares having a moment of triumph, this is it. For what better way to nurture absurdity than by constructing the most elaborate strategies of illumination for that which no darkness could ever hide? (This is what it means to be "spiritualized in Night.")¹¹⁰ It is within these strategies, this endless and sightless lucubration, that he discovers the possibility for integrity: "I've always felt that virtue lay in obtaining what was out of one's reach [...] in achieving something impossible, something absurd, in overcoming – like an obstacle – the world's very reality."¹¹¹ (His Realist credentials are once again in evidence: to consider such a project of overcoming to be impossible and absurd one must first have accepted the concrete independence of that which one seeks to overcome, thereby accepting the limitations – only to

¹⁰⁸ One way of approaching this partitioning of man's control is to see it in terms of Wilfred Sellars' distinction between man's *manifest* self-image and man's *scientific* self-image: only the former can be made or unmade, the latter if it is not to unmake the former must remain (to the persons it threatens) a blank page. See Wilfred Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁹ Pessoa (2002), 134.

¹¹⁰ Pessoa (2002), 192.

¹¹¹ Pessoa (2002), 130.

then discard them in the service of the impossible – that such an acceptance implies.)¹¹²

Clarity, that impossibility of all impossibilities, and one dreamt possible so that we may have a reason to fail.

Whitehead states that “In the extreme of love [...] all personal desire is transferred to the thing loved, as a desire for its perfection.”¹¹³ The thing loved, that whose perfection is desired, is, for Soares, none other than the incarnate love’s impossible telos – which is itself transformed by the abstract telos found in that very impossibility.

Soares, despite his deep-rooted abhorrence of persons of this type, is often almost indistinguishable from the ascetics and mystics of Christianity and Buddhism, those that “long for what they don’t know.”¹¹⁴ The blank page is the unyielding human nothing of the scientifically-present world. The mystics “have emptied themselves of the world’s nothingness,”¹¹⁵ and so too does Soares. How could he fail to admire those who shun the world in favour of mystery and meditative voyage? However, what he cannot embrace about this mystic life is its prescribed loss of whim. He cannot couch his project in quagmires of belief, nor can he regiment his feelings with theoretical manacles. Instead he chooses to create a monasticism of faithless dreams.

The text must not simply remain open, something some slim aperture of inexplicitness would realize, but must be splayed to the point where it cannot even contain itself. This is what it means to be

¹¹² A stance comparable to that which Nick Land finds in the relation between fiction and theory in Bataille: “One might say that at the level of writing theory is a constricted species of fiction, in the same way that the actual constricts possibility (but what matters is the *impossible*).” Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation* (Routledge, 1992), 131. There’s also a striking resemblance to the nameless man (the ‘somebody’ the ‘you’) in Borges’ ‘A Weary Man’s Utopia’, who sounds as if he was schooled by Soares himself: “No one cares about facts anymore. They are mere points of departure for speculation and exercises in creativity. In school we are taught Doubt, and the Art of Forgetting— especially forgetting all that is personal and local.” Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin Press, 1999). 462

¹¹³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1939), 372.

¹¹⁴ Pessoa (2002), 147.

¹¹⁵ Pessoa (2002), 147.

alert to one's willed self-ignorance, mindful of our turning as we turn away, as we strive "[t]o consciously not know ourselves – that's the way!"¹¹⁶ To rewrite what was never written, to give presence to absence and absence to presence, to cultivate the ludic solemnity of a child, to pummel solid rock into the very form of indeterminacy, these are the things required of the fertile dreamer of selves. "We weary of thinking to arrive at a conclusion,"¹¹⁷ and we weary of our emptiness to arrive at ourselves.

Close and sustained scrutiny always reveals an illusion, and in the end even the possibility of illusion reveals itself as illusory.

Soares returns to himself after months spent happy and erased in the dead sleep of life, and embarks upon a bout of nerve-philosophy in which he synthesizes with a blowfly. The experiment is almost Cronenbergian in conception, and the full horror of his altered embodiment felt with an excruciatingly carnal detail. In a revelation worthy of Gregor Samsa, he finds himself present to the hideous fusion: "I was a fly when I compared myself to one. And I felt I had a flyish soul, slept flyishly and was flyishly withdrawn. And what's more horrifying is that I felt, at the same time, like myself."¹¹⁸ All of a sudden becoming reacquainted with the futility of his former absence in life, he transmogrifies his recaptured presence into an imagined presence known, but not felt, to be impossible.¹¹⁹

The nothing (a vacuum) with one view: one's own self spread like tar across the possibility of seeing. Nothing remains for me to see, because I've seen the way I see and the way I will see. Anything I could see has been seen by my seeing that transparency of seeing.

When the sensation of love is at its purest it is possible for one to love excrement, but to translate this love into an impetus, to absorb and be absorbed by excrement, is to forget that the service of love is to create the distance from which such things can be loved. Only a madman can love the shit he's drowning in.

¹¹⁶ Pessoa (2002), 133.

¹¹⁷ Pessoa (2002), 206.

¹¹⁸ Pessoa (2002), 281.

¹¹⁹ An impossibility that Thomas Nagel would later detail in his seminal paper, 'What is it like to be a bat?' *Philosophical Review*, LXXXIII (October, 1974).

Love is (and should remain) a prayer at the altar (the arse-end)¹²⁰ of the impossible.

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¹²⁰ Of which, as Dolmancé informs us, there is none more divine. See The Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*.