

Walt Whitman and Pessoa

"So I pass,
a little time vocal,
visible, contrary."
Walt Whitman "So Long,"
Leaves of Grass

"My password? Walt Whitman!
But I give no password at all."
Álvaro de Campos,
"Greetings to W.W."

As I indicated in a hypothesis in another study, the entirety of Pessoa's heteronymic architecture arose from his encounter with the poetry of Walt Whitman. The heteronymic scheme — latent and underlying Pessoa's poetic experiences that predated this encounter — could have manifested itself in forms completely different from those we now know. But the heteronyms, such as they were concretized textually, are the result of the conflagration of Pessoa's universe when confronted with that of Walt Whitman. Alberto Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos were for Pessoa the manner by which he integrated the glaring impact of Whitman without disintegrating from the contact. Everything leads us to suppose that the discovery of Walt Whitman took place in a period close to the heteronymic explosion, which is to say, the end of 1913 or the beginning of 1914. It is simplest to assume that the awareness of Whitman came about through the direct reading of *Leaves of Grass*. The underlined copy that one finds in Pessoa's library has on the frontispiece the signature of Fernando Pessoa, followed by the date, 1916. The motives that caused Pessoa to affix his signature on this copy with such a late date escape us. Alberto Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos, "sons" of Walt Whitman, were already two years old. With their appearance, the poet of *Leaves of Grass*

attains, without doubt, although in an uncommon and unforeseen manner, his point of greatest irradiation and saturation in the cultural space of the West. Contrary to that which would take place in his encounters with other poets, the one with Whitman would not be an occasion for a mere formal or exterior influence (although on this level no one had exceeded him), but of an absolute disturbance of his creative mechanism and of his vision, the very origin of a re-creation of “Sameness” without parallel. The most visible result was to have converted Pessoa — through the vibrant and maternal mediation of Whitman — into a different two-headed entity that bore the names, sundered from and tied to the interior, of Alberto Caeiro/Álvaro de Campos.

Whereas the birth of Caeiro from the womb of Whitman was not always as evident as it today appears to be, the relationship of Pessoa to Whitman in the spectacular form of Álvaro de Campos could still be considered as a specific modality of the dithyrambic and parodic relationship, in sum, as a confessed Walt-Whitmanism without particular reach. The carefully erased filiation with Whitman that Caeiro represents, however, confers upon the poetry of Pessoa and of Whitman another and more complex dimension that removes them from the classical plane of *influence* and introduces us into the very heart of the vision and the essence of Pessoa’s poetic practice. In effect, what is most important is not to verify the tie that unites Whitman and Caeiro — and notably the presence in Caeiro of almost literal syntagmas of Walt Whitman, some underlined by Fernando Pessoa in the pages of his copy of *Leaves of Grass* — but this marking out, at the same time applied and organic, of the essential vision of Whitman as far as the sensorial and sensual appropriation of the exterior world. Caeiro is a fleshless and bloodless Whitman, a Whitman reduced to the pure function of gaze, and occasionally of another sense, but without the mental appropriation of the object of this gaze. Above all, without any particularization of these objects, always referred to in the universality of their significant function. Only the perceptive function is the object of the gloss. Here, as in the remaining poetry, Pessoa reveals himself to be a poet of the act of becoming aware and his poetry the poetry of the perplexities of awareness. The contact with real things, and his phantasmization are less important in the poetry of Caeiro than the abstract fact, more calming and decisive, of being real. It is the permanent reiteration of the *reality of the real perceived and felt* that he coldly exalts, an exaltation that is at the same time dialectic, ironic and polemic. This certainty of the “reality” of real things — incarnated in epic terms in this

very Walt Whitman from which Caeiro bursts as the most recognizable “transvestite” — permits him the ironic contestation of those poetic visions (Pascoaes, Symbolism, but above all that which is his own before the discovery of Whitman) that “they” see in all that is not there. Caeiro is the one who says that he sees what is there and “is content with that.” One need not underline that this kind of gaze is not Walt Whitman’s. His acceptance of the exterior world is not of an ironic or polemical nature, in the sense that Caeiro’s visibly is. Whitman’s is an epic, genesis-like, proliferating exaltation, a joy in the face of multiplicity, of diversity, of particularized difference. It is true that the vision of Whitman also is not — as those who do not know him well suppose — a mere song of materialist inspiration, more or less in the line of nineteenth-century positivism. His monumental odyssey of the material and visual world implies a complex dialogue with all American transcendentalism, as it was incarnated by Emerson. Whitman is, simply, a poet of corporeality such as poetry had never seen before, a poet preoccupied and ecstatic before the functions — all of the functions of his own *body*. This mark is entirely original in poetry and inscribes itself in the margins of an ethical and philosophical Puritanism with an audacity and a force superior to the “realists” who, before him, had alluded to the presence and function of the body. Whitman is never a *realist*, however, even when his images are the most crudely corporeal: he is a mystic of corporeality detailed, alluded to, blessed and glorified in ecstasies parallel or analogous to those that spiritual poets with Romantic filiations reserve for the *spirit* or the *soul*. This mysticism of bodiliness, this imagination possessed by the corporeal reality, this assumption of the human body (beginning with his own) as glorious body, summary of creation and its path, finds no echo whatsoever in Pessoa. The multiple corporeal allusions that cross the poetry of Álvaro de Campos signify instead of this glorious body a *mutilated body*. Their pathological character and the sado-masochistic essence of their relation with the body itself are manifest and have already been noted. The body alluded to by Álvaro de Campos — above all, Álvaro de Campos from 1914 to 1917 — is not a Walt-Whitmanish body, brimming with sap, violent, happy, expansive, in solidarity with other bodies, but a corporeal image that sends us again to the temptations of Hieronymus Bosch or to the detailed anatomical pictures in which man appears as muscles, bones and viscera — which is to say, dissected. The narcissistic relationship of Whitman to his body runs counter to that in Pessoa — when the body is not totally hidden as the center of functions as it is in Caeiro — an

intensely guilty relationship. Walt Whitman could glorify a machine as a body, transfer to it the sap, the happy and tumultuous violence of his veins, but not the opposite, as the poet of *Triumphal Ode* did. Álvaro de Campos imagines his unimaginable (that is to say, untouchable) body as a machine, and thus metaphorically lives in and through the machine devised or imagined frenzies, the spasms of fictitious ardors, but, above all, the tortures with which his corporeal imagination feeds itself and by which it is so effusively delighted. Álvaro de Campos represents, without doubt, as has been noted many times, the maximum adherence that Pessoa conceded to exterior reality. It is, however, an adherence that is hysterical, sick, frenetic, paralyzed in its excessive imaginary, a prodigious debauché of a thirsty person without any real thirst. In the most Whitman-like apparel of which one can possibly conceive — and in so doing offering proof of an assimilation almost without compare in the history of poetry — Álvaro de Campos is an *anti-Whitman*, as Caeiro is a *non-Whitman*. Both cases are, however, intelligible as the double and inverse form which was that of their creator Pessoa — that of *being Whitman while continuing to be Pessoa* or of being Pessoa in spite of being Whitman. What immediately characterizes the poetry of Walt Whitman is his positiveness. If the poet writes:

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it [atmosphere] to be in contact with me.

this declaration has nothing of the ironic or dialectic, although one would not include it solely in the circle of pure description since it does not formulate the desire of a simple habit but exalts a type of mystic nudity inserted into the paradisiacal vision of Whitman. The elements with which the poet enters into contact do not figure in the poems as signs so that one may inscribe in them the *reality of the real*: they are used as the real itself and it is in them that Whitman submerges. They smell or possess, and in them one bathes. His experience is the experience of the real, a perceptive experience, feeling and sensual, a fervid promenade through the fascinating multiplicity of the universe:

To behold the day break!
The little light fades the immense and diaphanous shadows,
The air tastes good to my palate.

This attitude has nothing to do with the purely contemplative enjoyment of generic *reality*, as in Caieiro. There is an osmosis between the activity of the body and the live and active substances of other bodies, an osmosis that is the source of a contentment without reflection. Caieiro's contentment is unfolded and thus wounded, like the act of consciousness which it is, as a result of the radical unhappiness that it presupposes. It is this unhappiness from which Pessoa tries to extract himself, through the mediation of Whitman, inventing himself as uselessly Caieiro. He declares himself content with his existence at the margin of things and drags behind him, like a snail, the sad slime of "being conscious." What pacifies and makes Caieiro happy are not things but the affirmation of their real existence, the only answer to the game of infinite mirrors in which he would and does fix his radical feeling of the *unreality of the Self*, as if this reiterated affirmation (which is the very essence of Caieiro) would remove him from that perpetual and vain game of mirrors. In no dominion is the *difference* more profound between the vision of Walt Whitman and that of Pessoa than that of *erotic sensibility*, in the broad meaning that *sexuality and sensuality* encompass. A difference all the more interesting since it is certain that Whitman was for Pessoa, without any doubt, the poet of anomalous eroticism, whose manifestation he comprehended and with which he had a translucid affinity. All of the poetry of the singer of *Leaves of Grass* mirrors a triumphant sensuality or, at least, triumphal, in its immediate and happy banality. It was unimportant to him that such "triumphalism," or, if one prefers, exhibitionism, was but the ostensible face of a less epic reality. No trace exists in Pessoa's poetry of a similar sensuality, since that which the *English Poems* configures constitutes an opposed signal and, as might be hoped, is in perfect harmony with the mutilating vision of imaginary eroticism that is ignited in *Triumphal Ode* and *Maritime Ode*. It is useless to search in Pessoa for such an open surrender to the "perfume" of the sentient as that which one finds Whitman so naturally confessing:

Houses and Rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
 I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
 The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

Only as a synonym of *non-consciousness* and viewed with this label do multifarious sentient experiences and the sentient matter to Pessoa, as much from the perspective of Caieiro's *serene indifference* as from the pre-

tended exaltation of Álvaro de Campos. Walt Whitman is, in a certain sense, less modern, to the extent that one may still inscribe him in the Romantic tradition of the *deification of Nature* and in its mystic expression, which is to say, Pantheism. Walt Whitman perceives in things the manifestation of the cosmic life and thus confers upon it that “aura” to which other authors allude when they speak of the “soul” or the “interior of things,” precisely the soul and the interior which, for Caeiro, Nature does not have and

for this reason it is Nature.

Simply, and in opposition to Romanticism, Walt Whitman — above all, the Walt Whitman of the first phase — does not commune with the immediate *spiritualization* of the sentient world and does not search for symbols below the visible face of the Universe. As he himself writes, he is “sensitive to the marvelous character of things and perhaps to the spiritualities in their concrete and physical manifestations.” The symbols are inscribed in this visible face and are indissoluble from *corporeal* realities. It is in terms of the *body* that he feels connected, reconnected to the Universe. Caeiro retained from the vision of Whitman this new spirituality without spirit and his poems are precisely the result of the heroic attempt to persuade himself with the impossible naturalness of the Master that:

God is the flowers and the trees
The mountains, the sun and the moonlight.

It is to Whitman that, in truth, Caeiro, being who he is, could attribute that which he puts in the mouth of the Eternal Child in poem VIII of *The Keeper of Sheep*:

You taught me everything
You taught me to look at things.
You point out everything there is in the flowers.
You show me how funny the stones are
When we have them in our hand
And look slowly at them.

But if Whitman was able to teach him not only reality but the immediate divinity of the real, he did not teach him to integrate in it, with the

sublime naturalness of the poems of the *Leaves of Grass*, the body itself, or the body of the other, and in it, the unspoken corporeal par excellence, sex. Sex is precisely what Whitman decides to celebrate in terms unknown in the history of the Christian West before Freud, and it would be useless to search for this celebration in the clear poetry of Caeiro (one also finds no trace of this kind of sexuality in the other apparently less demure poetry). For Whitman, “*un chat est un chat*” — which had happened before only in a parodic and very base scatological mode as a means of alluding to the famous “lower parts” — and it is a *chat* that reinvents and returns one to the entire universe. The hymn he claims for himself has in it no naturalistic or realistic elements. Like everything else in Whitman, it is epically symbolic and mythical, to the exact extent to which it is *natural*, which is the same as saying it is divine:

If I worship one thing more than another, it shall be the spread of my own
body, or any part of it,
Translucent mould of me it shall be you!
Shaded ledges and rests it shall be you!
Firm masculine colter it shall be you!
Whatever goes to the filth of me it shall be you!
You my rich blood! Your milky stream pale strippings of my life!

With the most tranquil pose he chants his hymn to “man-balls, man-root,” evoking them as

This poem drooping shy and unseen that I always carry, and that all
men carry

One of Whitman's great exegetes writes, in reference to these poems, that they deal not with traditional mysticism impregnated with sensuality but with sensuality impregnated with mysticism. Nevertheless, these terms seem inadequate to the extent that they return us by means of semantic habit to a plane of values that Whitman's vision specifically subverts. Without this subversion he would not be Walt Whitman. Sensuality is a concept that, whether one wishes or not, connotes a certain *negativity*. In reality, Walt Whitman does not see himself as sensual, nor as an actual singer of *sensuality*, but as a multi-toned echo of all corporeal manifestations and, among them, sexuality, which is integrated, as are all the others, in a great and diffuse cosmic symphony. He makes of sex the center of the world:

Sex contains all, bodies, souls,
 Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations.

No doubt he is referring to explicit, real sex, but, beyond that, he is referring to universal and terrified sexuality and to the divine germination of the cosmos that human sexuality recapitulates and synthesizes. Without fail, everything has two faces; the body is a soul and the soul is a body. Walt Whitman is the opposite of an unhappy, lacerated consciousness. His *unanimous* intuition of being (in which he participates as a man and, above all, as a poet) is in the end the only theme of his song. It would appear, therefore, that there is nothing more contrary to Pessoa's divided self without the possibility of unification — which the poet always knew how to achieve — than Walt Whitman. Such matters can become dense to the point of running the risk of making mysterious and unintelligible the enigma of an empirically verified and unquestioned contact between the two poets. At what level does one place what has here been established as a creator-destroyer encounter, from which the entire textual, heteronymic architecture proceeds? What relationship can there be between a poet who declares copulation a means of knowledge — updating in its own way the Biblical suggestion — and a Fernando Pessoa, particularly under the mask of Caeiro, whose poetry exudes an uncommon horror of sex and the sexual?

In psychological terms, the mystery of this impact inscribes itself within the mystery, transparent after all, of other impacts exercised upon Pessoa — although none with the glaring consequences of Whitman's — whose obvious motivation is organized as a *system*. I am referring here to the type of affinities which on a merely phantasmal plane, as acknowledged by Pessoa himself, connect him to Shakespeare, Browning, Whitman or António Botto. But this “explanation,” useful with caution in the space of phantasmal refractions caused in the poems by the presence or latency of a split which could bring Pessoa closer to the worlds of Shakespeare or Whitman, does not take into account the concrete textuality of the poems of Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos and of their relationship with the text of Whitman, their most indisputably complex source. Moreover, one may reduce, in terms of poetic creation, the relationship of Whitman and Pessoa to that of eminent *intertextuality*. One may view the matter with special sharpness in relation to Caeiro, who was so intimately linked to the very essence of Whitmanism, although in the hidden sense of a textuality apparently less literal than that of Álvaro de Campos — hidden even to the extent of exiling from the Whitmanian vision the

obsessive reference that makes of Walt Whitman a kind of Homer of Sex and a future father of all the Henry Millers. Where, therefore, does one establish this connection? That Whitman — Whitman the singer of Sex, beside the others — is present in Álvaro de Campos (and at the same time abolished by the excess of this presence and the distortion that this usage creates, as has been shown) is obvious. This presence was always acknowledged, although readers did not always notice the complexity of this mutual relationship. It seems obvious to this writer and to various exegetes that one may interpret this presence of Whitman in Campos in terms of textual psychoanalysis, as a liberation in the imaginary form of an ambiguous and unconfessable *erotic drive*, which Whitman's poems confer upon de Campos. It happens, however, that this type of insertion — specular and spectacular — of one text into another, of one vision into another, and this *liberating* function of both, text and vision, in relation to Caieiro, appears to function backwards. There is, in effect, no trace in Caieiro of Whitman the singer of vital energies, poet of the reality of the world as a tumultuous and ceaselessly reborn dynamic, and singer of sex and its ambiguities and of universal multiplicities. Pessoa will only assume in the most provocative form as Álvaro de Campos the imitation or the visible link of dependence — in reality, a deglutition of Walt Whitman. For this reason, the essential question of the relationship between Whitman and Pessoa must assume, above all, the following concrete form: at what level does one, therefore, locate the Walt-Whitmanism of Caieiro?

It was not one poet only that Pessoa met when he met Walt Whitman, but two — an immanent multiplicity of them — since Whitman's vision is one of difference and multiplicity sung by their very selves. The “different being” and the “multiple being” denote the character of all the existing ones, constituting, therefore, the authentic richness of the Totality, which is made of nothing except the parts, as in a symphony, although its empirical sum does not add up. Whitman is a far more complex poet than his stereotyped image of the singer of vital energy and fraternal democracy would allow one to suppose. In his own way, Whitman possesses a profound consciousness of the *dialectical* structure of reality, of its intrinsic complementarity, of its essential contradiction in a perpetual exaltation of the coexistence of contraries, in the manner that Hegel's philosophy popularized it but without the unifying obsession with synthesis. He is no mere saintly optimist in permanent ecstasy before the multiple aspects of the real, but instead a *tragic optimist* who one day understood the indecipherable mystery of the coexistence of good and evil, of the sun and the

rain, of light and darkness. His accumulative and enumerative version of reality – the immense litanies by which he evokes and celebrates the most diverse and antagonistic aspects of the world — is his manner of reconciling the irreconcilable, of showing before Totality that “impartiality of snow,” to which Pessoa refers, which is analogous to the divine indifference of God before his Creation. It is, in sum, his manner of saying yes to the marvelous cacophony of the Universe as a means to attempt to recreate with his hyperbolic acceptance, a voluntaristic everything-nothing, that *invisible harmony*, that music which his being needs to feel *tranquil*, at peace with himself and the world. Like God, he refuses to choose in the spectacle of the world, offering equal enthusiasm or approval to its most opposite manifestations:

Piety and conformity to them that like,
 Peace, obesity, allegiance, to them that like,
 I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations,
 Crying, Leap from your seats and contend for your lives!

This vision does not emphasize an abstract complementarity or a skin-deep syncretism. It translates a deep personal experience and proceeds from the most intimate wound — that of original suffering in which the singer’s song is raised, as from the throat of a skylark — a throat that bleeds, the task of death evoked by the poet:

Song of the bleeding throat,
 Death’s outlet song of life (for well dear brother I know
 If thou wast not granted to sing thou wouldst surely die.)

All of these elements, without ceasing to be what they are, run toward a cosmic synthesis in which difference collaborates with identity and both of them drain into a *universal happiness* that is beyond universal suffering. It is in the name of this happiness that Whitman can, in the poem *Excelsior*, declare himself “the happiest of men”:

And you has been happiest? O I think it is I — I think no one was ever happier than I

We should understand: happy in this “cosmic happiness” that summarizes and assumes the entire earthly shadow, the happiness of one who comprehended

[...] that the truth includes all, and is compact just as much as space is compact

And that there is no flaw or vacuum in the amount of the truth — but that all is truth without exception.

It is in this sense that Whitman is the poet of absolute positiveness and is able to be the singer of “hymns fit for the earth”:

And who has made hymns fit for the earth? for I am mad with devouring ecstasy to make joyous hymns for the whole earth.

Such optimism, in spite of being an optimism of overcoming, in much the manner of a Hugoesque nineteenth century, could only operate as something revulsive and at the same time a challenge for a Fernando Pessoa in a post-Symbolist crisis from which he is seeking an escape at the moment of his encounter with Walt Whitman. It would be useless to search for this type of encounter with Whitman in Caeiro or Álvaro de Campos. In both, however, one finds what might be called the *maximum refraction* of Whitman that the innate nihilism and pessimism of Pessoa would allow. As Whitman, Caeiro “comprehended”

that things are real and all different from each other

As Whitman, Caeiro confesses that he is “happy” or “content” with the accepted and assumed contradiction:

The day full of sun or smoothness of rain
Or stormy as if the world had come to an end

“Happiness” and “contentment” that have nothing to do with attachment, with the vehement and carnal acceptance of things and of the world; they are instead made of great sadness owing to a previous renunciation of everything that could confer upon them a truly positive meaning. If one comes to feel happy (almost happy) it is:

like someone who tires of being sad,

If one was ever “happy” it is:

because I asked nothing
 I neither sought anything,
 Nor found there to be more explanations
 Than that the word explanation has no sense at all.

In his positiveness (or, rather, in his desire to attain it as he identifies himself with the non-consciousness that things are) Caeiro is nothing more than Whitman's Moon, a dead planet that recalls the sun. As far as Álvaro de Campos, we will not repeat what has already been written previously: the often imitated Whitmanian vehemence, the apparent celebration of the modern and multi-featured face of modern life, which is infiltrated with and re-examined by a complacency whose exultant aspects have nothing in them of the fervid or solar. If Walt Whitman in his "A Song of Joys" exclaims:

O the engineer's joys! to go with a locomotive!
 To hear the hiss of stream, the merry shriek, the steam-whistle, the laughing locomotive!
 To push with resistless way and speed off in the distance.

this "locomotive" does not even serve as a metaphor for his body and the *retained* drives of the fictitious actor, nor does it distill images destined to underline the mutilating relationship of the poet with his body. In the same poem, Walt Whitman writes:

O to realize space!
 The plenteousness of all, that there are no bounds,
 To emerge and be of the sky, of the sun and moon and flying clouds, as one with them.

and if we are able to find in Álvaro de Campos the same resonance of this cosmic appetite, we do not ever find it except inscribed in a background of metaphysical anguish that in him changes the positive and exultant function it has in *Leaves of Grass*.

The objective heterogeneity created by the treatment to which Pessoa submitted the poetry of Whitman — or, more correctly, the revolution that the poetry of Whitman caused in the poetic world before his eruption as a poet — explains the feeling so often affirmed by the author of *Maritime Ode* of its indisputable originality and even of its *superiority* in

relation to Walt Whitman. In reality, Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos, the only Whitmanian outcroppings (to use a geological image) of Pessoa's poetry, are something besides Whitman, but something that is unintelligible if one loses view of the primordial inscription of both in the tumultuous and ecstatic magma of *Leaves of Grass*. The deepest root, that of Caeiro, is the least visible, so deep that Pessoa hid it from himself for a long time. Nevertheless, even in the mythification to which Pessoa submitted the Caeiro-campaing, inventing a "biography" for him, one can perceive this so carefully hidden filial relation. In a review of his book appended to *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman claims never to have kept company with men of letters, nor to have read anything, exactly like the Caeiro evoked by Álvaro de Campos. And in the typology of Master Caeiro, Pessoa-Álvaro de Campos appears to have been guided by a synthetic image in which the *blue eyes and blonde hair* of the Nordic Whitman would amalgamate with the *tuberculosis* of Cesário (or of Pessoa's own father) in the same way that in Caeiro's poems — which are characterized by "a complicated lyricism" — elements of Cesário's universe are effectively mixed with the perspective of Walt Whitman minus the elements incompatible with being Fernando Pessoa. In the Pessosan universe of poetic creation we are never on the present horizon but always on one with various *mediations*. The scheme that is Caeiro is formed from Pessoa, Cesário, some others (Pascoaes, Junqueiro) and Whitman, who is the catalytic agent. It is also interesting to observe, even from an external point of view, the decisive affinities that closely bind the world of Caeiro to that of Whitman. One of the first critics of *Leaves of Grass* described in the following manner the impression that the poems produced on him in 1855: "One reads and appreciates the freshness, the simplicity, and the reality one reads exactly as a fatigued man lying on a hillside in summer appreciates the spots the sun leaves on the ground, not because of what they suggest, but because of what they are." Is this not the impression that Álvaro de Campos wishes to transmit to us in his evocation of the Master? Is this not the very attitude which is suggested to us within the poems as being that of Caeiro's before reality?

Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos did not burst forth from the magma of Walt Whitman like water from a rock but were instead carved in him. Literally in power and powerfully literary, one and the other coexist in the interior of Whitmanian poems, so to speak, without consciousness of the contradiction that this coexistence represents. Coming into being through the heteronymic process that suddenly pulled them into this coexistence,

Fernando Pessoa, the poet of this same contradiction, separated what was still joined and instituted his *Self-Same* as an *Other*. What in Whitman appears overlaid or amalgamated — the dithyrambic evocation of reality gathering in it the *contradictory* manifestations of the world as its natural ingredient — is dissociated and transfigured in Pessoa as a result of this same process of dissociation. Like Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos, Fernando Pessoa separates visions that walk side by side in *Leaves of Grass* without antagonism. There is, however, a supplementary complication: Pessoa leaves within the interior of each of these heteronyms clearly visible echoes and traces that send us back to the not unhappy world of accepted contradiction of Walt Whitman. There is more confessed frenzy and barbarism in Álvaro de Campos than in the barbaric Whitman; there is more impassibility and mystical impartiality before the brutal contradictions of reality in Caeiro than in the ecstatic and affirmative passages of Walt Whitman. But both Campos and Caeiro stem literally and dialectically from the same Whitman, the effusive singer of plurality as the essence of Totality.

This innovative and unanimous song that introduced Whitman into the circle of great universal poetry is more complex than its apparent spontaneity of expression would indicate. It is an epic and lyric response to the historical and metaphysical darkness of the previous vision of Totality as distinct and separate from plurality. This response only makes sense and has existence on the level of and departing from plurality. To an Absolute separated or separable from its plural manifestations in space and time and a Transcendence viewed as “pure Spirit,” Walt Whitman opposes a mystic contemplation of this same plurality and its endless diversity — the “god coming into being” which all his activities are and ceaselessly constitute. Perhaps to integrate his marginality into the choir of human normality, his vast, innumerable heart makes a God out of an inexhaustible sum of all manifestations, experiences and ideas, and the following contradiction: the fact that Whitman’s coexistence determines and, as he proclaims, does not exclude anything. Whitman contented himself with this solution. Caeiro contented himself with it likewise while remaining discontent. The perpetual interrogation that is the center of this solution feeds the vision of de Campos with the appearance of acceptance in his specifically Whitmanian phase (until 1917) and afterwards with desperate resignation or agonizing fury.

The human and poetic adventure of Walt Whitman was, like that of Pessoa, a religious and prophetic adventure in the most radical sense of the

term. As the Whitmanian Christ of love of plurality, the beloved brother and the comrade, is at the center of *Leaves of Grass*, the Eternal Child — the fugitive from heaven separated from the divine banality of men, “the god who was lacking,” identical to the poet himself — is at the center of Caiero’s poems. Thus there is an identity, but also included in it, difference. The Eternal Child is the link between a solitary I and Nature, in that they go “the three, by what paths there are.” The Christ of Walt Whitman is the brother crucified on the altar of a fraternity that scatters solitude, a Christ who is not at the center of History, who is crowned with a golden halo, apart from men but in the middle of them and with an identical aureole:

Painters have painted their swarming groups and the center-figure of all,
 From the head of the center-figure spreading a nimbus of gold-color’d light,
 But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-
 color’d light,
 From my hand from the brain of every man and woman it streams, effulgently
 flowing forever.

What there is in Whitman on the order of celebration of all and everything is in Caiero bland assent, without personal glory, to the plurality of the things that constitute Nature without consciousness and, therefore, constitute a peaceful balm for the original unhappiness of the conscious being. As a solution for this structural unhappiness of consciousness Caiero constitutes an answer, an answer with clear metaphysical and religious resonance, although one that is inseparable from this unhappiness of consciousness. The “happiness” of Caiero is less exalting participation in the flux of the universe and positive enjoyment before the spectacle of multiplicity than it is *absence of compassion* and prompt forgetting of the unforgettable fatality of “being conscious.” Out of this “happiness” comes the umbilical relationship with the sad and heroic paganism of Ricardo Reis, who, in the heteronymic birth order, appears, not by accident, after Caiero, as his truth poorly hidden. Without doubt, Pessoa wanted, through Caiero, to accede to this ideal paganism, capable of perfectly responding to his thirst for an absolute and rational truth, something that goes beyond the religion of unhappy consciousness which Christianity was for him, as it was for Nietzsche. Caiero displays less the marks of a success than the limits of an unfeasible aspiration for Pessoa. In reality, what Caiero signifies is rather the difficulty of lifting oneself up to this ideal paganism, a kind of request on his own behalf, in sum, his desperate attempt to establish himself in this paganism with the natural-

ness of Whitman. In effect, the Gospel of this ideal paganism is already written: it is the very poetry of the *Leaves of Grass*, which offers itself up as a new Bible, or rather, as the truth of the Eternal Bible. Walt Whitman did not ever hide the truth of his intention to found, or design, a new religion, a third, religion — synthesis capable of resolving the tragic dualism that separates consciousness from the world — life from death — introducing onto the Earth a new reign, a terrestrial Jerusalem in which the Body has the properties and privileges of the Soul, as the transcendentalists (Emerson) envisioned, and the Soul has the visibility of the Body. It is known that the title itself of his poems is a symbolic and mystical title (a new mysticism): the leaf of grass is life without death, life triumphant over death, encircling all reality. The Poet is one leaf of this life, one among millions of others, and in this vision, reposing upon the exteriority of Self, his exaltation of fraternity and universal camaraderie is submerged.

No vision could be more appropriate than this one of Whitman's in provoking a regenerative shock upon the spirit of a young poet who could, even in 1913 in the writing of *The Mariner*, carry to rare extremes of deliquescence his fundamental feeling of the absolute unreality of Reality and of consciousness as a barrel of Danaides and a reflection of a reflection. Having come into contact with Whitman, Pessoa descended to earth and anchored himself in Reality. He did so not in the manner offered to him by Cesário — who offered a port without any place for mystery, mere prose of life — but, instead, he transferred this feeling of the divine (which for him was inseparable from the perception of the Real in the form of the Unreal, similar to the way in which it was cultivated by Symbolism and Post-Symbolism) to terrestrial reality.

In Walt Whitman, Pessoa discovers that transcendent pantheism or that immanent transcendentalism that had been the object of his prophecy in 1912 — something that would represent in poetry a kind of Hegel incarnated in images and not in concepts. It still happened — and the miracle was no less — that this vision capable of saving him from his idealist subjectivity was molded in the very form of familiar language, in an explicit rupture with the noble traditions of Romantic poetry that were still praised in Symbolism and Post-Symbolism. It was a wild, rude, voluntarily and aggressively free language that, as one of his critics wrote, mixed the language of the Boston Transcendentalists with the wagon drivers of New York. Although this style of language had already reverberated through other intermediaries (Unanimists, Futurists), it could still be received, in Portugal in 1914, as a form of liberation. And that effectively

is what happened, in two different and complementary poles, producing on the level of form a dissociation analogous to that which it had on the level of vision. Caeiro inherited the familiar, calm descriptive enunciation and Campos the apostrophe, the interjection, the epic and provocative vulgarity. Cesário, the Master (the admitted Master, under which the real one is hidden), had already communicated to Pessoa the lesson of the things of quotidian reality evoked with simplicity. Junqueiro was also more present in Caeiro than one is accustomed to suppose (it is enough to read poem VIII of *The Keeper of Sheep*): simplicity as a mythic end, although with Romantic language. Only in the poems of Whitman, however, was the vision-answer to the same lacerated vision of Reality — which is, in its turn, the expression of the experience of the I as a consciousness separated from the world and from itself — effectively and poetically incarnated. From this vision he retained the essential, the intuition of the absolute as absolute multiplicity, crossing out from it the mysticism of Democracy and the masculine camaraderie, but retaining the sense of the divine character of this same multiplicity, as Whitman expresses it:

I hear and behold God in every object ...

[...]

I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and I my own face is the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is signed by God's name.

It is with this Whitman that the effective dialogue is established, and the result is Caeiro, who opposes the satisfactory plurality and consoling difference that it incarnates to the inaccessible and unthinkable unity that undermines plurality and transforms our contact with it into a source of unhappiness:

If God is the trees and the flowers

Why do I call him God?

I call him flowers and trees and mountains and sun and moonlight;

Why, if he made himself for me to see,

Sun and moonlight and flowers and trees and mountains,

If he appears to me being trees and mountains

And moonlight and sun and flowers,

It is because he wishes me to know him

As trees and mountains and flowers and moonlight and sun.

The affirmation without previous interrogation of Whitman, in Caeiro turns into an unquiet affirmation, slightly aggressive and provocative, because, in truth, although he presumes an identical vision, he places a new accent upon it, an intense desire to confuse the divine with the purely unconscious. For this reason Caeiro, while being the same, is different.

Metaphysics? What metaphysics do those trees have?
 That of being green and topped and of having branches
 Of giving fruit in their hour, which does not make us think,
 Us, who take no notice of them,
 But is there any better metaphysics than theirs,
 Which is that of not knowing why they live
 Nor that they do not know.

Passages such as these (in truth, the totality of Caeiro's poems) show to what point the previous Pessoa is whole inside the new Pessoa mediated by Whitman, which is Caeiro. This assimilation of happiness into unconsciousness (the only theme and obsession around which all of Pessoa's universe revolves) separates, in the very place where identity appears most unrefuseable, the original Whitmanism from the complex, ironic and labyrinth-like Whitmanism (whether in Caeiro or in Álvaro de Campos). The conscious-being is for Whitman exactly the absolute and inexhaustible source of joy and human happiness, as he confesses in the brief and essential poem "Beginning My Studies":

Beginning my studies the first step pleas'd me so much,
 The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of motion,
 The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love,
 The first step I say awed me and pleas'd me so much,
 I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any farther,
 But stop and loiter all the time to sing it in ecstatic songs.

Álvaro de Campos will echo with a hallucinatory literalness the paroxysmic, Whitmanian celebration, but destroying it from the inside as a result of pushing it to the limits and, above all, using it, one more time, so that through it he can dispossess himself of his conscious condition. Álvaro de Campos does not accept nor become ecstatic from the multifarious spectacle of reality in the "ingenuous" manner of the Whitman who enjoys diversity and loves it just because it is diverse: instead, he invokes and scatters

reality so as to lose himself in it, so as to metaphorically become the non-Self who would liberate him from himself, separated from All and Everything:

The more cohesively disperse and all-pervadingly heedful
 I am, I feel, I live,
 The more I will possess the whole existence of the universe
 The more complete I will be throughout the totality of space.

The fantastic "Greeting to Walt Whitman" testifies to the abyssal identification with Whitman and to the distance written in the heart of a creative assimilation, perhaps without compare in universal literature. If, in the body of the same poem, Álvaro de Campos does not clearly inscribe the difference that separates the two poets:

I so contiguous with inertia, so easily full of tedium,

the shining and unequalled precision with which he summarizes, in genius-like formulas the genius of Walt Whitman, would be enough to create this distance. The poem, however, takes this distance upon itself and incarnates it. The hyperbolic moment of an identification that is unity:

You know that I am You and you are content with that!

is succeeded by the clear perception of this hyperbole, using the gloss of its effects of diversion and alterity, which end up conferring on the meditation-appropriation of the world of Whitman a merely metaphoric and fictitious meaning.

I can never read your verses in one sitting... There is in them too much feeling
 [...]

In your verses, at a certain point I do not know if I am reading or living

I do not know if my real place is in the world or in your verses.

I do not know if I am here, standing on natural earth,

Or on my head, hanging from a kind of establishment,

On the natural ceiling of your tumultuous inspiration

In the center of a ceiling of your inaccessible intensity.

In effect, it is the center of the intensity inaccessible for him — that Álvaro de Campos lets fly, claiming Whitman for himself:

Open up the doors!
I need to come in!
My password? Walt Whitman!

but soon refusing it:

But I give no password...
I enter without explanations...

in the hysteria-causing assertion of a will to absolute power, in an attempt at a “consubstantiation with God” that does not bring with it the positive mark of Walt Whitman, although it utilizes his language and lays claims to his appetite for identification with the entire universe. It is not the song of an I that includes the diversity of the universe in itself, but of an I that annuls itself in this diversity, requesting masochistic contact with the real, in a manner exactly like that of *Triumphal Ode*, which does not express an effective and expansive glorification of the I (as happened with “Song of Myself,” by Whitman), but compensates the congenital impotence with which this same I feels wounded. They are not litanies but injunctions or anti-Whitmanian imprecations in a poem in which Walt Whitman is the mediator convoked in vain:

I do not want bolts on doors!
I do not want locks on safes!
I want to intercalate myself, thrust myself in, be carried away,
I want them to make me into the crazy appurtenance of anyone else
To dump me from crates,
To fling me in the ocean,
To grab me at home for obscure reasons
Only so as not to always be here seated and quiet,
Only so as not to simply be writing these verses!

There is, beneath the invocation of Whitman that the pseudo and fraternal brother of the singer of *Leaves of Grass* configures, an abyss separating de Campos from Whitman. This poem, however, recuperates the exhibition of this open wound without the possibility of suture, i.e., Álvaro de Campos:

Doubtless I had an end to my personality.
Doubtless because it expressed itself I wanted to say something

But today, looking back, for me only an anxiety remains —
Of not having had your calm, superior to yourself
Your liberation lit by stars in the Infinite Night.

The clamorous mediation of Walt Whitman transformed Fernando Pessoa into an other, this other that we designate, like him, with the immortal names of Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos. But it did not liberate him from himself. Whitman did not represent for Pessoa the great Wharf — previous and divine — that he had already seen in advance, and forever, in the form of the Symbolist Mist. He was only, and decisively, the most vast port scintillating in the sun of real things that Pessoa's clairvoyant gaze was destined to contemplate. Pessoa's issue, however, is not so much this contemplation that is capable of giving him a world as the consciousness that contemplates it. Because of this contemplation he separates himself, establishing between consciousness and the world a game of reflections in which the obvious meaning of reality is shipwrecked. The Whitmanian clarity, his broad, realistic, fervor, was able, in a minute, to complicate and transfigure this endless game of divine and solitary consciousness, but these qualities of his did not have the magic to abolish the game. One could even say that the encounter with the vision and the language of Whitman furnished Pessoa the ideal material to carry to an extreme refinement that which, without doubt, he could not have become aware of without Whitman. This encounter and combat were necessary for him, the magnificent poet of *Presence*, so that, in the end, he would transform himself, with his breadth and black splendor, into one of the supreme poets of Absence in the modern world.