

Introduction

Seen from the dawn of the twenty-first century, the essays of Eduardo Lourenço (b. 1923) are a philosophical arch that spans the twentieth century, analyzing it and revealing its imaginary borders, dreams, contradictions, ghosts and angels. The symbol the Portuguese essayist derives from the previous century, that is, the figure that best portrays the cultural oscillations of that century, is the labyrinth. The act of searching for knowledge impels a person to enter a labyrinth, insofar as he tends to grasp meanings from different sources and phenomena. The more he tries to find his way out of the labyrinth — to transform doubts into certainty — the more he finds himself immersed in contradiction, in a continuous re-memorization of his inner ghosts. Literary works are the best guides Lourenço has found to free himself from the maze of culture, although he is aware that his literary friends may also turn out to be his enemies and nightmares. His philosophical background allows him to deal with literature in an emotional, passionate way — his literary analyses are, most of the time, starting points for mythological interpretations of Portugal and Europe that merge poetry, sociology, anthropology, political science, and art history.

One of the most significant attributes of Lourenço's critical investigations is that he does not reject the cultural tradition; he simply shows us that cultural history possesses the means to challenge itself, to renew its messages and points of view. Thus, his essays are re-elaborations of the cultural tradition without avoiding the fateful question of the cultural identity of Portugal in the Iberian Peninsula as well as of Europe within a world more and more dominated, socially and culturally, by the United States of America. Writing about the cultural manifestations of one people and one continent and attempting to foresee new kinds of imaginary

ative process as a submersion into the deep, fathomless layers of the unconscious or, more properly, of what he considers Portugal's and Europe's unconscious to be. This in part explains why his greatest contributions to literary studies are artistic documents of his own experience, not only with the myths of the past but also with the realities of our own *Zeitgeist*.

Lourenço has been living and writing outside Portugal since 1954, when he felt the need to experience cultural movements and political perspectives that were denied to the Portuguese by the fascist government. Born and raised in a traditional Catholic family, he was politically "awakened" by the Spanish civil war. From then on, he abandoned Catholicism and the fatherland — he lived in Hamburg, Heidelberg, Montpellier, and in Bahia, Brazil. Since 1974 (curiously enough, an important year in Portugal's recent history, insofar as it was in 1974 that the fascist regime was overthrown, an historical event known as the Carnation Revolution), he has been living in Vence, a small village in France. From abroad, one has a tendency to see one's own country from a different perspective; the land left behind is likely to become an item of History that is waiting to be described, thought about, and imagined. For Lourenço, close cultural analysis was not enough — he needed physical distance to be able to interpret Portugal. In order to avoid misjudgments, he would later say, we have to create some kind of separation between ourselves and what we love, be they countries, ideas, or human beings. He may have chosen to live in an isolated spot, but his world is far from being circumscribed by it. He appears to me more as a sage who has observed the world and opted to withdraw only a bit from it, all the better to send it his powerful mythical messages.

Lourenço insists on his right to write not by making rigorous plans, but by being open to all nature of surprises, oscillating between the astonishment provoked by contemporary cultural phenomena and the recreation of memory and historical events. Hence, writing turns out to be the permanent examination of his philosophical-literary language, whose foundations are continually undergoing transformation. The reader of Lourenço's essays has to discover the way out of the labyrinth, to find the Ariadne's thread that will reveal some light to guide him through the weaving and counter-weaving of textual meanings. While Lourenço's style is unabashedly contemporary, it nonetheless conveys a baroque-like tone, as if sometimes he were writing from an obscure convent or highway tavern of the seventeenth century. Whatever the future will say about his importance to the twentieth-century essay, one should not expect to come

of my knowledge, it is likely that only the Italian Roberto Calasso will be seated next to him in the Olympus of our time). He is as yet unknown in the United States, and one of the goals of this selection of essays is to put his ideas on the radar screen of American readers. His texts are always in the process of establishing connections with other texts and epochs. Sentences and rhetorical devices, that is to say, his structural elements, ripple through ideas and speculations. Meaning arises when they merge, at the moment when literary values, stylistic experiments, and historical schemes run into each other. Then, when all these correlations have been made, what arises is the awareness of time passing, of a singular type of melancholy that can best be translated as Lourenço's tragic view of History.

A sense of timeless time is the crucial theme that underlines Lourenço's essays, that brief moment achieved through the melding of critical images of History, philosophy, and poetry, as well as of himself. Once, both Portugal and Europe were able to provide themselves and the rest of the world with exceptional self-images, that is, powerful descriptions of themselves through literature and other artistic means; nowadays, however, that capacity is slowly escaping them — this crucial cultural tool is being grasped and used in new and creative ways by other empires, namely the United States. But Lourenço still seizes that timeless time precisely when he describes the tragic incapacity of Europe to pass on inventive self-images. He gives the screw one final twist by singing the end of an era, of a time, of a particular conception of History. The supreme irony is that the final, tragic image he presents is a compelling *imagologia* (critical self-image) of Portugal and Europe. Paradoxically, the twilight of History is also its Polaroid image, in the sense that it gives man an ephemeral picture of uneasiness. All things considered, History is a theatrical play, and Lourenço is aware that the last act, the one we are now performing, is a tragic one for mankind, because man is being inescapably attracted to evil and disorder. In this stage, though, conflict is the necessary condition for avoiding Hell — by revisiting the conflicts that have led Europe to the abyss of its forgetfulness, Lourenço returns to the place of origin as a ghost. Here is the crux of his tragic view of humankind: we live separated from ourselves because we know that the mythical place from which we came into view cannot be reoccupied. There have been too many silent, painful and tragic moments, all the more so because Europe has forgotten what it thought it was impossible to forget.

The first chapter of this volume, "Chaos and Splendor," deals precise-

end of everything. For centuries, Catholicism has resisted and reacted against the idea of chaos, but now, since the Bible has ceased to maintain its position as the guiding philosophical principle of the Western world, chaos is celebrated. According to Lourenço, the “Americanization” of culture is one of the symptoms of the chaos that pervades the contemporary world. Yet, it was not Mickey Mouse that invaded the European landscape; on the contrary, it was Europe that opened its doors and invited American products to enter, with their absence of hierarchy among cultural products, with their notion of the democratization of culture. Above all, chaos is the inevitable consequence of the abandonment of the idea that cultural products have to be concentrated in certain traditional elites. Or, to put it differently, Europeans became seduced by the common American practice of turning what is culturally inaccessible into something irresistibly banal. Therefore, given that Europe is no longer the center of the Western world, it was not difficult for the idea of chaos to become part of the European cultural vocabulary. However, Lourenço does not hesitate to state that the current meaning of chaos is different from the idea of chaos invented by the Greeks, since they conceived chaos because they loved order. By the same token, Lourenço tries to analyze his *Zeitgeist* in order to grasp the sense of order that may be more or less obstructed by the sumptuous veil of chaos. It is true that chaos can be salutary, and even valuable, if it is confined within the limits of order. Lourenço’s rhetorical plan is to illustrate some of the most dreadful consequences of the chaos that introduced Hell into that most fascinating of centuries, the twentieth, so that he can emphasize the ambiguous nature of the human being, who inhabits the territory of chaos with an opulent smile. So, the critical image Lourenço creates of himself shows him simultaneously surrounded by chaos — totalitarianism, hellish landscapes, all the horrors human nature can achieve and nurture — and outside of it. The pessimism that comes out of his awareness of cultural chaos is offset by his literary appetite to establish some kind of order, providing intense snapshots of the conflicts and performances that legitimize chaos. He concludes that his tragic view of History is deeply linked with the world of the spirit, the same world that has been systematically challenged by chaos.

Originally published in 1949, in his first book called *Heterodoxia I*, Chapter 2, “On the Permanence of the World of the Spirit,” expands on the idea that it is the task of the philosopher to confer a clear form on the obscure facts of life. What Lourenço designates as “the world of the spir-

human history. The latter is a continuous succession of moments; it is a chain of events that are not only attached to the present time but that also permit the human subject to foresee his future. As a result, at each moment the future is affected by the past, and the awareness of this flow of time is another sign of his tragic view of History. The historical unconscious is made up of gaps or hiatuses, which make man unable to comprehend the totality of his relation with History and time. History becomes tragic because, although we all try to learn the signs of reality, the way we learn them is not consensual; i.e., the human spirit takes divergent paths to fulfill its History. Consequently, the human spirit is based on a plurality of values and beliefs, and that condition turns the future into something unpredictable. Lourenço tries to overcome this tragic sense of History by grasping the world through its metaphysical, theological, poetic, artistic, and political meanings; like Benedetto Croce, he wants to carry the burden of the universe on his shoulders. Memory becomes, therefore, the foundation of his knowledge of History. Since the contemporary world has chosen to provide chaos with a majestic aroma, memory no longer plays the role that it used to. It is important to note that Lourenço, more than half-a-century ago, was already talking about the divine privilege of surviving — to survive is to end up in the place where humanity is defined: along the paths taken by the great minds of the past. That is the significance of the permanence of the spirit in human History. To be human is to let the dead survive within ourselves, seizing the eternal moments Kierkegaard, Plato or Goethe have already lived.

“Object Without Painting and Painting as Object” (chapter 3) is a short survey of the history of painting, whose goal is to argue that the development of art parallels the dynamics of History as configured by Lourenço. Basically, what the history of painting teaches us is that it is impossible to abolish the subject/object dyad. The subject is like a god, it is everywhere, and the object is what allows us to reach the subject. In 1971, when this essay was published, pop art and conceptual art were seen as the last steps in the twilight of beauty — what was important was to perceive manifestations of art all around, thus dissolving the very notion of art. The world was trying to experience the splendor of the absence of subject and object, and this is the chaos of painting according to Lourenço: the ritual of painting becomes non-painting, and art simply refuses to create self-images. Non-art became the splendid negation of the artistic gesture. Curiously enough, at that time, Lourenço considered

Rothko, and Barnett Newman, among others — as the greatest artistic minds of the recent past, for they had eliminated the idea of art as mere representation, choosing instead the path of “pure subjectivity,” or, as the American critic Clement Greenberg would say, they accepted art through feeling and intuition, insisting on a direct, physical experience of art. Like Greenberg, the Portuguese essayist, in his essays on art interweaves observation with explanation, insisting on the primacy of the artistic experience. A canvas painted by Rothko, for instance, does not belong exclusively to the world of art — its nature as a radical experiment of color, light, and, why not?, metaphysical content places it in the world of the spirit (sometimes Lourenço even uses the expression “worldness of world,” as if one world were not enough to contain the excellence of this fundamental aesthetic experience). This abstraction was a fascinating American *imagologia*, being simultaneously the cause and effect of a plurality of meanings, of a cosmic texture, as well as of a variety of perceptions. But what really is of greatest importance is Lourenço’s realization that painting is above all the supreme will of the painter, his being and his reality — the object of painting is the painter as a human consciousness. Painting is a critical self-image of the artist, the being who searches for his image in the universal mirror.

For Lourenço, Fernando Pessoa is probably the Portuguese artistic mind of the twentieth century that best illustrates this spirit, one which constantly seeks out a critical self-image. Pessoa invented an entire universe in order to provide a myriad of images of himself — he used literature to interpret Portugal and to create a universal mirror for it, providing the Western world with one of its most splendid images. Pessoa was in the habit of conversing with countless (fictional or real) personalities, and Lourenço considers the poet to be the great “dead” figure that survives in himself, in his own writings. Pessoa is the crucial being Lourenço is determined to revisit critically. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are double literary projections or dialogues: Lourenço with Pessoa, as well as the existential and philosophical interconnections the former imagines the poet would have had with Friedrich Nietzsche, Walt Whitman, and King Ludwig of Bavaria (1845-1886). From Walt Whitman, Pessoa drew a tendency to appreciate the union of contrary instincts, of good and evil, of shadows and light. This is what Lourenço calls “tragic optimism” — the attempt to conciliate what is supposedly irreconcilable. In the universe a wonderful cacophony coexists with the original wound, and the splendor the poet

invisible harmony. In Ludwig, the mad king, Pessoa sees the mirror of his own pessimism, which is the natural consequence of life experienced as a labyrinthine library of the literature of decadence; Ludwig is the unreal being whose ideal of existence the poet tried to emulate by inventing his maze of *personae* and heteronyms. In Pessoa's imaginary, Ludwig and Whitman are in conflict: the latter accepting the reality that surrounds him, with a beatific smile, and the former creating for himself an uncanny reality, detached from nature's most common features.

Lourenço's reading of Pessoa's philosophical relation to Nietzsche is based on a negative dialectic: what Pessoa admired in the German philosopher was the fact that he was able and ready to think against himself. Pessoa, too, started to think against himself, and the culmination of this process was the consolidation of his poetic imaginary. By learning to think against himself — through the creation of self-contradictory fables and his failed attempt to explain them — he became aware of the potentiality of his poetic nature. The final madness of Nietzsche was a sort of mirror in which Pessoa saw the climax of the action of thinking against himself and, in a way, when Pessoa wrote against himself, he was also writing against Nietzsche. The death instinct is also present in Ludwig's will to melancholy, and Lourenço asserts that Pessoa sublimated that will by dreaming of Ludwig's melancholy. In the wake of Antero de Quental, one of the most melancholic of Portugal's poets, Lourenço acknowledges that our relation to death is a fiction, and, therefore, Pessoa's relation to death is a fiction within a fiction, or a double death. Ludwig may be the emperor of death, but Pessoa is the melancholy page who has the honor to carry his crown. As for Lourenço, he seems to be the myth-teller, the one who is in charge of the ritual of placing imaginary mirrors in multiple layers, so that he can see his own image, always new, always nonconforming, in this magnifying lens. It is Lourenço who sees the reflection of Ludwig in Pessoa, who does not hesitate to call them brothers in melancholy — one lived in an opera and the other dreamed of a theater where an opera was to be staged every day. It is as if he realized that the dead king could only be reborn in a fiction, all the more so because Pessoa was fully aware of the chaos of his time, and that, for this reason, the wondrous world was the most reliable place for his spirit to linger.

Without any doubt, Alberto Caeiro is, for Lourenço, the most beloved of Pessoa's heteronyms: Caeiro symbolizes the reduction of Whitman to the act of seeing — Whitman wants to feel and touch everything, while

ity. He is the melancholy side of the American poet. At this point, Lourenço reads against Pessoa, who for a long time hid Caeiro's debt to Whitman. Yet, since Pessoa was particularly fond of a poetics of counter-action, this reading appears to be in consonance with the theory of the unhappiness of consciousness he invented in Caeiro, a system that asserts that what really causes pain is not so much the misfortunes and hardships of life and nature, but rather the awareness that one's life is pervaded by little daily tragedies. Therefore, to be conscious, i.e., to be aware of the existence of things, is like an original sin or wound that only leads to more and more unhappiness. This sort of anxiety was probably one of the reasons why Pessoa was not really eager to declare Whitman's influence on Caeiro. On the contrary, he did not hesitate to make an absolute link between Whitman and one of his most extroverted heteronyms, Álvaro de Campos: in both we can see a celebratory affirmation of life and nature that leads to a unified poetic self existing within the sometimes contradictory features that constitute his nature. Lourenço, however, avoids being fooled by this expansive glorification of diversity and unrestrained opulence — he claims that the somber Caeiro is the most accurate heir of Whitman. And the same goes for the influence of Nietzsche, who has been thought of as the major precursor of Campos. It is true that if Nietzsche wrote philosophy with a hammer, Campos sometimes seems to smash poetic conventions with nothing lighter than a sledgehammer. But Lourenço thinks that there are more insightful connections between Caeiro's keeper of sheep and Zarathustra; after all, both dismiss metaphysics, accusing it of being a virus of thought — both think that to live is most likely the most dangerous way of thinking.

Pessoa, Lourenço tells us, saw in Nietzsche an image of himself; he dreamed the dream of the German thinker in the same manner as he dreamed the literary life King Ludwig had never actually had. As he transformed Ludwig's melancholy into literary form, he also appropriated Whitman's language in order to become a different poet. Pessoa tried to put on as many masks as possible so that he could fully achieve a fundamental presence within European culture. The multiple, irreconcilable, and contradictory aspects of his aesthetics were nothing more than the reflection of the world of culture, for he knew he was contributing to the torrent of the European spirit. Just as Pessoa invented a particular world for himself, in the same way, Europe (and this is the main argument of chapter 7, "On Europe as Culture") has had to re-invent a critical, cultur-

the spirit” that once made it the cultural continent par excellence. But the process of re-invention is only possible if Europe abandons the excess of political structures that threaten to overwhelm it — Europe is either a continent of culture or it becomes something else. What used to distinguish the so-called old continent was the important role played by culture as an autonomous entity, but, nowadays, and at this point we feel Lourenço’s pessimism striking back, Europe seems to be lulled into a collective forgetfulness in terms of culture. What has been lost is the notion of culture that has within itself the means and tools to challenge and transform itself. Therefore, the main enemy of Europe is Europe itself, due to the obliteration of its cultural tradition and subsequent over-emphasis on its political and economic dimension. The erasure of conflict from the domain of culture is another aspect of the chaos that has invaded our world. The tragedy, to use Lourenço’s vocabulary, is that Europeans stopped seeking the sort of contentious relationship they used to maintain with culture: the tragedy is now the absence of *imagologias*, or intense and litigious dialogues with themselves.

The longest chapter (8) is an account of Portugal’s cultural history (because of the possible remoteness of many of the topics dealt with in this chapter, some notes were added to guide the reader through the story Lourenço is telling). The key topic to which Lourenço wants us to pay attention is that the idea of Portugal can only be possible if it is seen as something with a powerful destiny, that is, with a future. To generate a dialogue of Portugal with itself, with its own tradition, he re-writes the history of Portugal, from the Middle Ages to Romanticism and to the Generation of 1870, and from the fascist regime of António Salazar to the post-revolutionary period of uncertainty of the last decades of the twentieth century. The destiny of the nation is linked with the “marvelous imperfection” of the world — to provide critical images of this world is a way of traveling within ourselves, and these dialogues may, in turn, influence the relation Portugal sustains with Europe as a culture. It is not history that supplies a people with meaning, Lourenço warns us; the affirmation of the identity of a people is strongly linked to the images and myths that they are able to create. What this means is that Lourenço wants to reinsert the notion of myth into the discussions about the historical formation of Portugal, something that most of the time was rejected by rationalist sociological schools. Furthermore, this imaginary function is crucial to the elaboration of dynamic acts of self-knowledge (or, as Lourenço calls

cific nation to think about its destiny, which is to say, its future. One of the most commanding images Lourenço uses to describe his version of Portugal's cultural tradition is the idea of decadence. He certainly knows that several historiographic schools have used that particular image. But his intention is precisely to re-write the history of Portuguese decadence. One crucial moment of this narrative is the famous battle of Ksar el-Kebir (or Alcazar-Kebir), which occurred on August 4, 1578, where the Portuguese army was severely and mercilessly beaten in North Africa. After that historical moment, Lourenço says, Portugal ceased to be the subject of its own history. Ksar el-Kebir is, therefore, the great wound, the supreme tragedy that, for centuries, was impossible to overcome. The defeat of the army entered the realm of myth, and Portuguese cultural destiny began to be permeated by a messianic idea according to which King Sebastian, who died in the battle, would rise from the ruins of Ksar el-Kebir on some foggy morning to save the country by granting it a new future. This is the prophecy of the formation of a new empire blessed by Christ, the so-called Fifth Empire. This utopia, encouraged by literary figures such as Father António Vieira and Fernando Pessoa, has been kept alive for centuries in the Portuguese imaginary.

The importance of the Romantic movement in Portugal (focused on two main personalities: Alexandre Herculano and Almeida Garrett) lies in the fact that, for the first time, both the history and the destiny of the nation were thought about and analyzed from a different perspective. As Lourenço states, by critically examining the very idea of Portugal, romanticism rescued it from its misty past, placing the notion of critical self-images on the cultural agenda. All things considered, both Herculano and Garrett took the risk of reading Portugal's imaginary in terms of its mythological implications. The next step, transforming history into a cultural time aimed towards the future was taken by the Generation of 1870 (Antero de Quental, Eça de Queirós, and Oliveira Martins, among others) when they realized that Portugal was culturally outside Europe. As a consequence, their images were tinged with a decadent tone, but that attitude contributed to the return to life of the corpse that had been Portugal. Although this generation was defeated by the nineteenth-century traditionalists, Lourenço still finds in their analysis a source of optimism, because their "disenchantment with the world" became, in his opinion, one of the most powerful stances of the Portuguese imaginary. Antero de Quental, whom more and more Lourenço considers to be the symbol of

about their role in history and, by doing that, he ironically established Portugal as the privileged topic of Portuguese culture, without however calling for self-indulgent nationalist elegies. More precisely, he announced that culture had to be the destiny and the future of Portugal. Antero is a solitary figure, a visionary who embodies the tragic destiny of Portugal — the images of Portugal he builds are painful, showing the miserable condition of the country at that time. He paid an obviously high price for that attitude, and his suicide was his last attempt to touch God's face. But he failed, Lourenço adds. Antero was one of Portugal's most eloquent failures, assuming the symbol of the "death of God" for the country. His achievement would only be accomplished a century after his death by means of Lourenço's impressive, dramatic and astonishing images of his failure. Antero is the emblem Lourenço uses to illustrate Portugal's tragic destiny — it is a failure, but it is also an imposing image to project into the future. With it, the apathy of the Portuguese spirit is confronted with a counter-image of its destiny: the unpredictability of the future, a condition Portugal now shares with Europe. Portugal has now the critical elements to profit from Antero's heritage: there are no more external enemies, no more revolutions, no more ideological heroic poems to block the ability to "think Portugal." Culturally speaking, Europe is increasingly aware of the existence of Portugal. Nevertheless, so far there has been no important critical "cry" to unsettle the castle of art, with the notable exception, in my opinion, of the apocalyptic, scatological universe of the filmmaker João César Monteiro.

After all, as Lourenço states in "The Dance of Time" (Chapter 9, written especially for this volume), art is a way of filling the void brought about by the absence of God. And the masks humanity wears will be incorporated into its destiny. But, by the end of the twentieth century, humanity was losing its sense of time, becoming less and less human. For several centuries, Europe was the master of its own time, thus establishing its own ideals and responsibilities. Or better: time was a European invention for defining the way the European mind was accustomed to looking at things. Yet, at this moment, time seems to be absent, seems to be escaping from Europe insofar as the images that used to be grasped by the temporal dimension that defined the European spirit are no longer available. Europe has ceased to provide itself with self-images, and that fact is, paradoxically, the "image" that perpetuates its splendor, a splendor with no end or destiny. Again, Lourenço finds an image of European culture to

angels, with no guides to show us our future. And nothing will give us back the splendor of the past, not even history, for we live in a different history. From now on, if we want to provide future time with an image of ourselves we are condemned to forget what we were. What is tragic now is that we consciously live in an empty eternity and we have to experience its pure horror. The flame of the spirit is now carried by others, especially by the United States. The counter-image of a European era without time is the new “American” time. Will Europe one day be its Greece or Egypt? Will the American Ulysses be willing to travel around European lands?

Overall, Eduardo Lourenço’s analysis of culture is an important counter-image of Europe and especially of Portugal. This was a country that relied too much on its past until the emergence of the Generation of 1870, a group of writers that developed a critical mirror in which the Portuguese were able to observe their own stagnation. The tone they used was mostly pessimistic, gloomy, and hypercritical and was the means they found in their present to prepare for and anticipate the future. Lourenço does not hesitate to affirm that, from that time on, Portugal has changed; the past is no longer the crucial point of reference it used to be. Civilizations do not die; they simply transform themselves, if only because they renew their conditions. And the current condition of Portuguese society cannot ignore that the memory of the past only makes sense if it addresses a time to come. It is not necessary to elaborate a rigid discourse on identity, for at each instant we are ourselves the subject and the object of identity or, more properly, identity is a self-regulating body: it is the way memory accepts or reacts against political, historical, and artistic circumstances in the present. Hence, in Lourenço’s terms, identity is better defined as a capacity to elaborate *imagologias*, that is, a critical discourse on the images we build of ourselves — Lourenço takes most of these images from literature, to illustrate the tragic nature of collective self-knowledge. The images of our labyrinth always ask for more images, the exploration of the labyrinth never ceases, and the endings are nothing but new beginnings. It was with a similar view that T. S. Eliot, in the last of his “Four Quartets,” defined the circularity of the unending journey to our unknown destiny, an idea to which Lourenço most certainly subscribes:

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started