

*THE BOOK OF RESEMBLANCES REMAINS
TO BE WRITTEN.
FROM LA RESSEMBLANCE IMPOSSIBLE: EDMOND
JABÈS*

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... *The Book of Resemblances* remains to be written. Is it the book of the collective outcry, that of freed speech? Is it the book of revolt and distress? In the lack of continuity of time, in the separation and numbering of words, and in the wounded space of their passionate games, it represents, without the reductiveness of reading, all these things at once. Like a ship whose moorings are close to breaking, the book tends to snap the thread of its reading, to cast off the anchor point which temporarily ties it to the fugitive detour of resemblance, between words whose pronunciation would bring about the plunge, the flight into oblivion in the night of no references. As a biographical diversion, the narrative of the book sets itself like an exiled blind man, blurring the tracks and infringing on the traditional rites of writing. With the bloody mutations of the universe as paradigm, the book without resemblance, in its itinerary of oblivion, proves the existence of the breach, the solitude. It surrenders itself to reading (as a body is said to surrender to love) and there is precisely the elusive issue, the void of meaning, that which cannot be made memorable, the maze of unbearable absence. . . . In the drifting, the gap, the loss . . . in the heartrending starts of a painful memory where the nudity of an amorous flesh simmers, where its humid cleft opens itself, it is always the exclusion, the nothingness of the rupture which prevails, an unfolding of silence which cannot be reversed. The alteration, the "otherness." "Everything is set back when the resemblance emerges. The being is not the being; things are not things, the book is not the book."

In the shimmering dust of anonymous and forgotten names, the book mimes the motionless flight of time. . . . After their unbearably

silent presence, the effacing of their pseudo-naming, and in the abyss, after their masquerades, the escape in all its permanence and invisibility is that of the letters and the readings, the words and the writing (beyond the letter and the figure, the word and the number, in addition to their respective values of usage and exchange). An ambiguous flight where nothing apparently moves as obscure signs appear on the page, but where at the same time everything unravels, rushes into another new non-place, another blazing non-time.

The escape of meaning, affecting the stillness of the book, places the book in an indefinable, unforeseeable movement where, from the escaping to the making, from the making to the escaping, synonyms and recurrent wandering reveal themselves (yet there are so many books motionless forever, glued till death in their resemblances). . . . *The Book of Resemblances* is the *Book of Flight*, . . . the escape . . . in front of all escape, the escaping from the escape, the multiple movement of loss which empties the words and implicitly starts the resemblance all over again. This takes part in the break-through or the return to the original difference, a shying away that the overwhelming multiplicity of the site of the book underlines in misleading terms. A shimmering constellation of non-places.

Who could stop us in our progress? asks Jabès superbly! Against any power, any domination, the escape is the secret force, one of the secret laws of the book, together with the love for change, a devouring change whose virtue would be a shattering truth.

The Trial: the Dialectic

Would the order of the book, harassed in its silence and its agony, be only a condemned order, a hopeless carrying away of the void, as it comes into virtual being by putting on the numerous trials of questions and the false mirrors of resemblances?

Such an interrogation is not to be separated from the problem of reading, the production and the detection of meaning: in a word, the commentary. The rejection of the book or its debilitating reduction are to be found in a secular trial made in the name of a comforting significance to all who pretend historically to be situated in its beyond, in another meaning, without restraint, wandering nomadically in the infinite expanse of texts.

The book without model, without resemblance, lies beyond certainty, beyond failure. It is the highest challenge of the word to the word, the cruel expectation of reading. . . . Its whiteness confounds itself with the whiteness of the future, the breathtaking void of the

future. Its order is only the outline of nothingness where the sole fascination of the meaning gleams . . . where the non-thought pierces through, the thought of tomorrow.

From this perspective, the non-resembling book of Edmond Jabès appears as the broken object of an incoherent flight, a passionate passage (what passes away may have the passage as passionate object), fascinating, full of longing, where the thought to come bursts out of the page into the word, the *vocable*, the word absent from the book whose non-thought ensures the blinding light.

Thought always wages an unfair battle with thought. . . . Through the assertion of the impossible conflict where the writer fights against himself, against his shattered, dissembling double in the course of a confused competition, Edmond Jabès does not put forward an obvious and trivial dialectic between the written word and the world, but rather an inner, complex dialectic, animated by the plural, enigmatic factors of the questions and the resemblances that preside over the ghostly, maddening propagation of the book.

The book that disturbs encounters the arbitrary. Its illegibility, its daringness in breaking the ancestral mould, have brought the charge against its author, accused and condemned to the death sentence. . . . A metaphorical trial of the book and the writer, the last outrage to his silence.

The anonymity, the solitude, the exile have emptied the book, bleached its pages, annihilated its torn body. Its evocation of God and his destruction, as well as the subversion of the Jewish word, are the chief motives for the accusation. "You evoked God, the Book, but it was to confound them and reduce them to dust."

The leading astray of the divine, the opening on the void and the identification of the word of the Jew with that of the writer have, moreover, burdened the prosecution's speech. . . . Putting the book back in question, the multiplication of the ways of reading and writing, the fascination with the desert which stifles in its pages of sand (metaphorically the fiery soaring of speech) and dooms the text to an infinity of interpretations: all these "faults" confirm and sanction the "betrayal" of the writer reduced to a ghost-figure.

He who has dared to rise against the unity of God shall perish, as will he who has doubted His oneness and violated the divine resemblance of the book in its origin and its rule.

Whoever writes the book of the breaking-up of the Jewish name, the book of the breaking up of any word of risk and changes, in which the dismembering of the writing subject takes place, must disappear

when there is neither prelude nor end, in the extinct sky of the resemblance with nothingness. . . .

The broken voice of the convict ends the trial, at the same time its advocate pleads the cause of any profaner, any stranger, any law-breaker. Through his ruptured word, there awakens a thought without morning, a passage without ending, an anonymous ordeal which confounds the accusation since the guilty subject has already lost his identity and taken on the fragmentation of his being in the scattered landscape of the text. This gap in the self that Maurice Blanchot discussed in his "Le Pas au-delà" has taken effect here in the bodily absence of the writer and the book. The original cleft has restored the gap, just as the preliminary *written form* of death would have marked with its annihilating whiteness the fore-place and the after-place. So in the end, the trial remains without effect, since the culprit, multiplied and already scattered, insofar as he is a single being, cannot face any sentence. . . . In his death, the death of all the words of the book is taken on. Such is the greatest risk of the quest of resemblances, the non-resemblance of the Jew for the Jew, the non-belonging to Judaism as the trial of the impossible identity.

The illusion or the obsession of the *one* book is overtaken in this way, so that the words of the book (the *vocables*) represent each one of the different entries and endings, according to the order and enigmatic laws of reading. To these numerous entrances, to these multiple releases of the meaning that is always shifting, there should not correspond keys and especially no definable codes. At the most, one can foresee a problematic renewal in the extreme openings of the book. And if God was confirmed by the void, assimilated to the abyss as in any messianic appeal, it is because the writer, through the masterless, sinless, mediating rabbis, by leading the tradition astray, has never stopped diversifying, revolutionizing the complex law of the book, the unpronounceable law of the word, were it God's name itself. "Nothing is written. There is no book." "It is in these unlimited barriers of the mind, this devastated yet insurmountable frontier, that the resemblance sees its power denounced. . . ."

The book is free from all suspicion, all accusation. Its letter and content are but the obvious or disguised reproduction of the master's speech, the faithful and slavish reflection of the traditional model and order, the possible resemblance.

On the other hand, the court whose white scenario negatively marks the last lines of *The Book of Resemblances*, brings an action against a new book without any judge or model: the trial of a language

which is the negation of the reason for any language. A language of contraries, not allowing resemblances, which sets all discourse against itself and in which the divine void and silence are let loose. This trial is that of thought without resemblance, of silence and nothingness, the wandering and the fragment, the Jew and the atheist, the writer and his double. . . . A devilish debasement, an undermining, demeaning process within the cancelled non-thought.

The trial is the work of the forces owning the book and the ancestral places, the totalizing and reductive good consciences. It is directed against the expansion of an operative negation, against the infinite persistence of nothingness. It is that of the stranger without land, the wanderer who can be neither settled nor known for he has no identity, for he does not resemble. . . . for he represents the radical questioning of a subject made of the story and the book.

The court was all white: walls, ceilings, doors, windows, floors. The judges themselves were clad in white from head to foot. . . .

The penultimate words of *The Book of Resemblances*, the epilogue of a parodic, defenseless trial in which the writer/culprit, in his absent delegation, assumes and lives the metamorphosis of the book, while never exhausting the meaning? An identification without resemblance whose impossibility draws the white portrait of the Jewish essence. . . .

The main stakes here, apart from the absence of a universal symbol and the death of the soul, are located at the crucial, open, deserted point that the Name and the Book cling to, unfixed and inaudible thanks to the denounced resemblance.

Translated by Claude Jandard.