A few days before retiring, Jurandir—a worker in a textile company—travels to Recife, Brazil in order to settle a labor issue in court. He ends up committed to a psychiatric asylum. At his doctor’s request, he reports on his memories, dreams, and daily life. A different perspective on his past life starts to unfold. Jurandir observes the transformation in the relationships between the nurses and the patients, between the clinic and the city, and between life during the day and at night. In his dreams, he feels magnificent; in his dealings with others, he realizes the eccentricity of old habits and the need to change his notion of what constitutes a fair relationship with people past and present.

Followed by the old nurse Ramires, Madame Góes, and memories of a former boss and childhood friend, Jurandir discovers the possibility of putting into practice the heroic talents experienced in his dreams. His recalling of amorous game playing with Minnie, a young female coworker, echoes his youth. His fixation on heroics leads to a role reversal precisely when the clinic gets caught up in the political activities of the late 1960s. Jurandir seeks a new self free from his inauspicious past. In this reluctant hero’s new persona, the cloak and dagger destiny and the disasters in his love life are framed by a melancholy search for justice and better company. The Amateur Sleepwalker chronicles the adventures of a disenchanted, humble protagonist whose life oscillates between forceful demands in friendship and politics.

Praise for Our Finer Grain, 2009:

The magazine VEJA considers Our Finer Grain a powerful novel: “The sugarcane landscape that serves as a background to the story of love and family decadence created by Passos is haunted with ruins. The novel depicts one of the most spectacular suicides in Brazilian literature.” The newspaper Correio Braziliense compares the novel’s narrative style to that of William Faulkner, pointing out that “José Luiz Passos’s first novel is another good example to prove that in recent years Brazilian literature has improved considerably. Displaying a series of very intense scenes presented through recollections, Our Finer Grain ends with an extremely powerful epiphany.” For Jornal do Commercio, this is “a daring novel in its attempt at unpeeling the identity game of a ‘regional’ self.”

The literary supplement of the business newspaper Valor points out: “Deep moments of nostalgia, in this sophisticated novel, float over the narrative sections as something extricated from time. This twofold framework gives time itself an incredibly dense and flexible pattern.” The review concludes that the novel is “a meticulously designed fictional construction.” Jornal do Brasil argues that in Our Finer Grain “language grows bolder, there is a return to poetic prose,” and the novel “undermines the literature of here-and-now, which focuses on the fleeting and is indifferent to the past. As a result, this work represents within Brazilian literature a truly modern novel.” The literary supplement Pernambuco concludes: “A matured prose style, bordering on poetry, makes this novel an adventure of language and sensibility.”

José Luiz Passos was born in 1971 in Pernambuco, Brazil. He is the author of two books of essays on Mário de Andrade and Machado de Assis. His short stories have appeared in Berkeley, São Paulo, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro, in Granta. He lives with his wife and two children in Los Angeles, where he teaches at UCLA.

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