



The Book of Disquiet

'A Modernist touchstone... no one has explored alternative selves with Pessoa's mixture of determination and abandon... In a time which celebrates fame, success, stupidity, convenience and noise, here is the perfect antidote, a hymn of praise to obscurity, failure, intelligence, difficulty and silence' John Lanchester, *Daily Telegraph*

'His prose masterpiece... Richard Zenith has done an heroic job in producing the best English language version we are likely to see for a long time, if ever' Nicholas Lezard, *Guardian*

'*The Book of Disquiet* was left in a trunk which might never have been opened. The gods must be thanked that it was. I love this strange work of fiction and I love the inventive, hard drinking, modest man who wrote it in obscurity' Paul Bailey, *Independent*

'Fascinating, even gripping stuff... a strangely addictive pleasure' Kevin Jackson, *Sunday Times*

'Must rank as the supreme assault on authorship in modern European literature... readers of Zenith's edition will find it supersedes all others in its delicacy of style, rigorous scholarship and sympathy for Pessoa's fractured sensibility... the self-revelation of a disoriented and half-disintegrated soul that is all the more compelling because the author himself is an invention. Long before postmodernism became an academic industry, Pessoa lived deconstruction' John Gray, *New Statesman*

'Portugal's greatest modern poet... deals with the only important question in the world, no less important because it is unanswerable: What am I?' Anthony Burgess, *Observer*

'Pessoa's rapid prose, snatched in flight and restlessly suggestive, remains haunting, often startling, like the touch of a vibrating wire, elusive and persistent like the poetry... there is nobody like him' W. S. Merwin, *New York Review of Books*

Fernando Pessoa was born in Lisbon in 1888 and was brought up in Durban, South Africa. In 1905 he returned to Lisbon to enrol at the university, but soon dropped out, preferring to study on his own. He made a modest living translating the foreign correspondence of various commercial firms, and wrote obsessively – in English, Portuguese and French. He self-published several chapbooks of his English poems in 1918 and 1922, and regularly contributed his Portuguese poems to literary journals such as *Orpheu* and *Portugal Futurista*. *Mensagem*, a collection of poems on patriotic themes, won a consolation prize in a national competition in 1934. Pessoa wrote much of his greatest poetry under three major ‘heteronyms’, Alberto Caeiro, Alvaro de Campos and Ricardo Reis, whose fully fleshed-out biographies he invented, giving them different writing styles and points of view. He created dozens of other writerly personas, including the assistant bookkeeper Bernardo Soares, the fictional author of *The Book of Disquiet*. Although Pessoa was acknowledged as an intellectual and a poet, his literary genius went largely unrecognized until after his death in 1935.

Richard Zenith lives in Lisbon, where he works as a freelance writer, translator and critic. His translations include Galician–Portuguese troubadour poetry, novels by António Lobo Antunes and *Fernando Pessoa and Co. – Selected Poems*, which won the 1999 American PEN Award for Poetry in Translation.

The Book of Disquiet

Edited and translated by Richard Zenith



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Introduction

I'm astounded whenever I finish something. Astounded and distressed. My perfectionist instinct should inhibit me from finishing, should inhibit me from even beginning. But I get distracted and start doing something. What I achieve is not the product of an act of my will but of my will's surrender. I begin because I don't have the strength to think; I finish because I don't have the courage to quit. This book is my cowardice. (Text 152)

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa was born in Lisbon in 1888, died there in 1935, and did not often leave the city as an adult, but he spent nine of his childhood years in the British-ruled, English-governed town of Durban, South Africa, where his stepfather was the Portuguese consul. Pessoa, who was five years old when his natural father died of tuberculosis, developed into a shy and highly imaginative boy, and a brilliant student. Shortly after his seventeenth birthday, he returned to Lisbon to enrol in the university but soon dropped out, preferring to study on his own at the National Library, where he systematically read major works of philosophy, history, sociology and literature (especially Portuguese) in order to complement and extend the traditional English education he had received in South Africa. His production of poetry and prose in English during this period was intense, and by 1910 he was also writing extensively in Portuguese. He published his first essay in literary criticism in 1911, his first piece of creative prose (a passage from *The Book of Disquiet*) in 1913, and his first poems in 1914.

Living sometimes with relatives, sometimes in rented rooms, Pessoa supported himself by doing occasional translations and by drafting letters in English and French for Portuguese firms that did business abroad. Although solitary by nature, with a limited social life and almost no love life, he was an active leader of Portugal's Modernist movement in the 1910s and he invented several of his own movements, including a Cubist-inspired 'Intersectionism' and a strident, quasi-Futurist 'Sensationism'. Pessoa stood outside the limelight, however, exerting influence through his writings and in his conversations with more conspicuous literary figures. Respected in Lisbon as an intellectual and a poet, he regularly published his work in magazines, several of which he helped to found and run, but his literary genius was largely unrecognized until after his death. Pessoa was convinced of his own genius, however, and he lived for the sake of his writing. Although he was in no hurry to publish, he had grandiose plans for Portuguese and English editions of his complete works, and he seems to have held on to most of what he wrote.

Pessoa's legacy consisted of a large trunk full of poetry, prose, plays, philosophy, criticism

translations, linguistic theory, political writings, horoscopes and assorted other texts variously typed, handwritten or illegibly scrawled in Portuguese, English and French. He wrote in notebooks, on loose sheets, on the backs of letters, advertisements and handbills, on stationery from the firms he worked for and from the cafés he frequented, on envelopes, on paper scraps, and in the margins of his own earlier texts. To compound the confusion, he wrote under dozens of names, a practice – or compulsion – that began in his childhood. He called his most important personas ‘heteronyms’, endowing them with their own biographies, physiques, personalities, political views, religious attitudes and literary pursuits (see Table of Heteronyms, [pp. 505–9](#)). Some of Pessoa’s most memorable work in Portuguese was attributed to the three main poetic heteronyms – Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos – and to the ‘semi-heteronym’ called Bernardo Soares, while his vast output of English poetry and prose was in large part credited to heteronyms Alexander Search and Charles Robert Anon, and his writings in French to the lonely Jean Seul. The many other alternate egos included translators, short-story writers, an English literary critic, an astrologer, a philosopher and an unhappy nobleman who committed suicide. There was even a female persona: the hunchbacked and helplessly lovesick Maria José. At the turn of the century, sixty-five years after Pessoa’s death, his vast written world had still not been completely charted by researchers, and a significant part of his writings was still waiting to be published. ‘Fernando Pessoa, strictly speaking, doesn’t exist.’ So claimed Álvaro de Campos, one of the characters invented by Pessoa to spare himself the trouble of living real life. And to spare himself the trouble of organizing and publishing the richest part of his prose, Pessoa invented *The Book of Disquiet*, which never existed, strictly speaking, and can never exist. What we have here isn’t a book but its subversion and negation: the ingredients for a book whose recipe is to keep sifting, the mutant germ of a book and its weirdly lush ramifications, the rooms and windows to build a book but no floor plan and no floor, a compendium of many potential books and many others already in ruins. What we have in these pages is an anti-literature, a kind of primitive, verbal CAT scan of one man’s anguished soul.

Long before the deconstructionists began to apply their sledgehammers to the conceptual edifice that sheltered our Cartesian sense of personal identity, Pessoa had already self-deconstructed, and without any hammer. Pessoa never set out to destroy himself or anything else. He didn’t attack, like Derrida, the assumption that language has the power to mean, and he didn’t take apart history and our systems of thought, in the manner of Foucault. He just

looked squarely at himself in the mirror, and saw us all:

Each of us is several, is many, is a profusion of selves. So that the self who disdains his surroundings is not the same as the self who suffers or takes joy in them. In the vast colony of our being there are many species of people who think and feel in different ways. (Text 396)

The problem with *Cogito, ergo sum*, for Pessoa, wasn't in the philosophical principle but in the grammatical subject. 'Be what I think? But I think of being so many things!' cried heteronym Álvaro de Campos in 'The Tobacco Shop', and those myriad thoughts and potential selves suggested anything but a unified I. Much more than a literary ploy, heteronymy was how Pessoa – in the absence of a stable and centred ego – could exist. 'We think, therefore we are' is what, in effect, he says. And even this form of self-affirmation is chancy, for in his moments of greatest doubt and detachment, Pessoa looks within and whispers, with horror, 'They think, therefore they are.'

Doubt and hesitation are the absurd twin energies that powered Pessoa's inner universe and informed *The Book of Disquiet*, which was its piecemeal map. He explained his trouble and that of his book to a poet friend, Armando Cortes-Rodrigues, in a letter dated 19 November 1914: 'My state of mind compels me to work hard, against my will, on *The Book of Disquiet*. But it's all fragments, fragments, fragments.' And in a letter written the previous month to the same friend, he spoke of a 'deep and calm depression' that allowed him to write only 'little things' and 'broken, disconnected pieces of *The Book of Disquiet*'. In this respect, that of perpetual fragmentation, the author and his *Book* were forever faithful to their principles. Pessoa split himself into dozens of literary characters who contradicted each other and even themselves, *The Book of Disquiet* likewise multiplied without ceasing, being first one book and then another, told by this voice then that voice, then another, still others, all swirling and uncertain, like the cigarette smoke through which Pessoa, sitting in a café or next to a window, watched life go by.

Pessoa's three major poetic heteronyms – the Zennish shepherd called Alberto Caeiro, the classicist Ricardo Reis, and world traveller Álvaro de Campos – burst on to the stage of Pessoa's life together, in 1914. *The Book of Disquiet* was born one year before that, with the publication of Pessoa's first piece of creative writing, called 'In the Forest of Estrangement' where the '[h]alf awake and half asleep' narrator, stagnating 'in a lucid, heavily immaterial torpor, in a dream that is a shadow of dreaming', reports on his imaginary stroll with his unreal female double:

And what a refreshing and happy horror that there was nobody there! Not even we, who walked there, were there... For we were nobody. We were nothing at all... We had no life for Death to have to kill. We were so tenuous and slight that the wind passing left us prostrate, and time's passage caressed us like a breeze grazing the top of a palm.

Written under his own name, this long and languid prose text was presented in a literary magazine as an excerpt 'from *The Book of Disquiet*, in preparation'. Pessoa worked on the book for the rest of his life, but the more he 'prepared' it, the more unfinished it became. Unfinished and unfinishable. Without a plot or plan to follow, but as disquiet as a literary work can be, it kept growing even as its borders became ever more indefinite and its existence as a book ever less viable – like the existence of Fernando Pessoa as a citizen in the world.

By the early part of the 1920s the directionless *Book* seems to have drifted into the doldrums, but at the end of that decade – when little more was to be heard from Alberto Caeiro (or from his ghost, since the shepherd supposedly died of TB in 1915) and nothing at all novel from Ricardo Reis (stuck in his role as a 'Greek Horace who writes in Portuguese') – Pessoa brought new life to the work in the person of Bernardo Soares, its ultimate fictional author. Over half of *The Book of Disquiet* was written in the last six years of Pessoa's life, competing for his attention, and we may even say affection, with the irrepressible Álvaro de Campos, the poet-persona who grew old with Pessoa and held a privileged place in his inventor's heart. Soares the assistant bookkeeper and Campos the naval engineer never met in the pen-and-paper drama of Pessoa's heteronyms, who were frequently pitted against one another, but the two writer-characters were spiritual brothers, even if their worldly occupations were at odds. Campos wrote prose as well as poetry, and much of it reads as if it came, so to speak, from the hand of Soares. Pessoa was often unsure who was writing when he wrote, and it's curious that the very first item among the more than 25,000 pieces that make up his archives in the National Library of Lisbon bears the heading *A. de C. (?) or B. D. (or something else)*.

Bernardo Soares was so close to Pessoa – closer even than Campos – that he couldn't be considered an autonomous heteronym. 'He's a semi-heteronym,' Pessoa wrote in the last year of his life, 'because his personality, although not my own, doesn't differ from my own but is a mere mutilation of it.' Many of Soares's aesthetic and existential reflections would no doubt be part of Pessoa's autobiography, had he written one, but we shouldn't confound the creature with his creator. Soares was not a replica of Pessoa, not even in miniature, but

mutilated Pessoa, with missing parts. Soares had irony but not much of a sense of humour. Pessoa was endowed with large measures of both. Though shy and withdrawn, Pessoa wouldn't say he felt 'like one of those damp rags used for house-cleaning that are taken to the window to dry but are forgotten, balled up, on the sill where they slowly leave a stain' (Text 29). Like his semi-heteronym, Pessoa was an office worker in the Baixa, Lisbon's old commercial district, and for a time he regularly dined at a restaurant on the Rua dos Douradores, the site of Soares's rented room and of Vasques & Co., the firm where he worked. But whereas Soares was condemned to the drudgery of filling in ledgers with the prices and quantities of fabric sold, Pessoa had a comparatively prestigious job writing business letters in English and French, for firms that did business abroad. He came and went pretty much as he wanted, never being obliged to work set hours.

As for their respective inner lives, Soares takes his progenitor's as a model: 'I've created various personalities within... I've so externalized myself on the inside that I don't exist there except externally. I'm the empty stage where various actors act out various plays' (Text 299). Coming from Soares, this is a strange declaration. Are we supposed to believe that the assistant bookkeeper, one of the actors who played on the stage of Pessoa's life, had his own troupe of heteronyms? If so, should we then suppose that these subheteronyms had subheteronyms? The notion of an endless heteronymic lineage might have amused Pessoa, but the reason for his alter egos was to explain and express himself, and perhaps to provide a bit of reflective company. Soares, in the passage cited, is describing Pessoa's own dramatic method of survival. And whatever he may be saying about himself, Soares is clearly speaking for Pessoa in the passage that begins 'Only once was I truly loved' (Text 235), written in the 1930s, not long after Pessoa broke up with Ophelia Queiroz, his one and only paramour. Surely it is Pessoa who believes, or wants to believe, that 'Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life' (Text 116). And isn't it he, after all, who one day happened to look out his neighbour's window and identified with a crumpled rag left on the sill?

Soares had no inner life of his own, and the full-fledged heteronyms hardly had more. A novelist's characters are often based on friends or family members, but all of Pessoa's characters were carved out of his own soul – of what he really was (in the case of Soares) or of what he wanted to be (in the case of the early, adventurous Campos) – and they each received only a piece of him. When we read Soares or Campos, we get lost in their universes and forget about their author, but they *are* Pessoa, or parts of Pessoa, who made himself in

nothing so that he could become everything, and everyone. Pessoa was the first one to forgo
Pessoa.

If Bernardo Soares does not measure up to the full Pessoa, neither are his reflections and
reveries the sum total of *The Book of Disquiet*, to which he was after all a Johnny-come-lately.
The book went through various permutations before the bookkeeper arrived with his well-
wrought but emotionally direct style of prose, and even the word 'disquiet' changed meaning
over time.

In its early days *The Book of Disquiet*, attributed to Pessoa himself, consisted largely of post-
Symbolist texts cast in the rarefied register of 'In the Forest of Estrangement' but usually
without the shimmery finish, and some of them weren't finished at all. This did not
necessarily make them less beautiful, but it was an understandable frustration for the
author. 'Fragments, fragments, fragments,' Pessoa wrote to his friend Cortes-Rodriguez
because certain texts abounded in blank spaces for words or phrases or whole paragraphs
to be inserted later (but they rarely were), while other 'texts' were no more than sketches or
notations for prose pieces that never materialized. *The Book of Disquiet* always remained –
if this were a condition for its existence – a work that was still waiting to happen, that
needed to be written in large part, rewritten in other parts, then articulated and fine-tuned.
Or was it time to rethink the whole project? Pessoa was never sure.

The initial idea was a book of texts with titles, for which he left various lists. Certain titles
such as 'Dolorous Interlude' and 'Rainy Landscape', became generic designations, applied to
various texts that shared the announced theme or atmosphere but remained autonomous.
Other titles, such as 'Our Lady of Silence', denoted ambitious works in progress, made up of
passages written at different times and varying in length from a few scribbled sentences to
several pages crammed with tiny letters. And there are titles for which no texts have been
found, perhaps because they were never written. (Pessoa's archives contain dozens of lists
with titles for non-existent poems, stories, treatises and entire books. Had he even halfway
realized all his literary projects, the tomes would fill up a respectable library. *The Book
of Disquiet*, a non-book in the non-library, is emblematic of the capricious author's difficulty.)
These early texts attempted to elucidate a psychic state or mood via a deliberately archaic
use of gothic and romantic themes. Lush descriptions of court life, of sexless women, of
strange weather and unreal landscapes prevail. The underlying psyche belongs to Pessoa but
is abstracted. The writing is impersonal and the narrative voice ethereal, with the things and

the words that name things all seeming to hover in a yellowish space. The word 'disquiet' refers not so much to an existential trouble in man as to the restlessness and uncertainty everywhere present and now distilled in the rhetorical narrator. But other forms of disquiet start to impinge on the work, which takes unexpected turns.

Not so unexpected, perhaps, was the theoretical and pedagogical dimension that emerged here as it did almost everywhere in Pessoa's *œuvre*. It was only natural, even inevitable, that the oneiric texts of *Disquiet* would lead to expository texts that set forth the why and how of dreams, with the four passages titled 'The Art of Effective Dreaming' constituting a veritable manual for dreamers at all levels, from beginner to advanced. 'Sentimental Education', in much the same way, serves as a kind of primer to accompany the many 'Sensationist' texts.

It was likewise in this didactic spirit, but with a rather bizarre result, that Pessoa wrote his 'Advice to Unhappily Married Women', in which he teaches dissatisfied wives how to cheer on their husbands by 'imagining an orgasm with man A while copulating with man B', a practice that yields best results 'in the days immediately preceding menstruation'.

Pessoa's sexual abstinence (it is probable, though not provable, that he died a virgin) was by his own account a conscious choice, which he apparently sought to justify in *The Book of Disquiet*, with passages insisting on the impossibility of possessing another body, on the superiority of love in two dimensions (enjoyed by couples that inhabit paintings, stained-glass windows and Chinese teacups), and on the virtues of renunciation and asceticism. *The Book of Disquiet*, indeed, is rife with religious vocabulary, although the mysticism preached by Pessoa hallowed no god, except perhaps himself ('God is me,' he concludes in 'The Art of Effective Dreaming for Metaphysical Minds').

But more than anything else, it was existential concerns – operating on both a general and personal level – that subverted the initial project of *The Book of Disquiet*. On a general level, since *The Book's* author belonged 'to a generation that inherited disbelief in the Christian faith and created in itself a disbelief in all other faiths'. And since 'we were left, each man to himself, in the desolation of feeling ourselves live', the generational sense of lostness quickly became a personal struggle for identity and meaning (Text 306). Pessoa's inner life, registered in 'Fragments of an Autobiography', 'Apocalyptic Feeling' and similar texts, with and without titles – invaded the pages of what had begun as a very different kind of book. Pessoa realized that the project had slipped out of his hand (if in fact he'd ever firmly grasped

it), for in yet another letter to Cortes-Rodrigues he wrote that *The Book of Disquiet*, ‘the pathological production’, was going ‘complexly and tortuously forward’, as if of its own accord.

And so Pessoa let the book go, scribbling *B. of D.* at the head of all sorts of texts, sometimes as an afterthought, or with a question mark indicating doubt. *The Book of Disquiet*— forever tentative, indefinite and in transition – is one of those rare works in which *forme* and *fondo* perfectly reflect each other. Always with the intention of revising and assembling the variously handwritten and typed passages, but never with the courage or patience to take up the task, Pessoa kept adding material, and the parameters of the already unwieldy work kept expanding. Besides his post-Symbolist flights and diary-like musings, Pessoa included maximum sociological observations, aesthetic credos, theological reflections and cultural analyses. He even put the *B. of D.* trademark on the copy of a letter to his mother (in Appendix II).

Though Pessoa hatched dozens of publication plans for his works, he saw only one real book, *Mensagem (Message)*, make it into print, the year before he died. (He self-published several chap-books of his English poems.) Pessoa was so addicted to writing and scheming and the schemes included unlikely business ventures as well as the publication of his *œuvre* that he had no time or energy left over to get that *œuvre* into publishable shape. Or perhaps it was just too tedious to think about. Nothing better illustrates the problem than *The Book of Disquiet*, a micro-chaos within the larger chaos of Pessoa’s written universe. But this consummate disorder is what gives *The Book* its peculiar greatness. It is like a treasure chest of both polished and uncut gems, which can be arranged and rearranged in infinite combinations, thanks precisely to the lack of a pre-established order.

No other work of Pessoa interacted so intensely with the rest of his universe. If Bernardo Soares says that his heart ‘drains out... like a broken bucket’ (Text 154) or that his mental life is ‘a bucket that got knocked over’ (Text 442), Álvaro de Campos declares ‘My heart is a poured-out bucket’ (in ‘The Tobacco Shop’) and compares his thinking to ‘an overturned bucket’ (in a poem dated 16 August 1934). If Soares thinks that ‘Nothing is more oppressive than the affection of others’ (Text 348), a Ricardo Reis ode (dated 1 November 1930) maintains that ‘The same love by which we’re loved/Oppresses us with its wanting.’ And when the assistant bookkeeper longs to ‘notice everything for the first time... as direct manifestations of Reality’, we can’t help but think of Alberto Caeiro, whose verses are a continual hymn to the direct, unmediated vision of things.

We can leaf through *The Book of Disquiet* as through a lifelong sketchbook revealing the artist in all his heteronymic variety. Or we may read it as a travel journal, a ‘book of random impressions’ (Text 442), Pessoa’s faithful companion throughout his literary odyssey that never left Lisbon. Or we may see it as the ‘factless autobiography’ (Text 12) of a man who dedicated his life to not living, who cultivated ‘hatred of action like a greenhouse flower’ (Text 103).

The Book of Disquiet, which took different forms, also knew different authors. As long as *The Book* was just one book, consisting of post-Symbolist texts with titles, the announced author was Fernando Pessoa, but when it mutated to accommodate diaristic passages, inevitably more intimate and revealing, Pessoa followed his usual custom of hiding behind other names, the first of which was Vicente Guedes. In fact Guedes was initially responsible only for the diary (or diaries) that pushed its (or their) way into *The Book of Disquiet*. The ‘autobiography of a man who never existed’ is how Pessoa, in a passage intended for a Preface, described Guedes’s ‘gentle book’, which is referred to in another passage as the *Diary*, as if this were its actual title. Pessoa, in his publication plans, began to cite Vicente Guedes as the fictional author of *The Book of Disquiet*, which suggests that it and the ‘gentle’ *Diary* were one and the same book. On the other hand, the archives contain a fragmentary passage from a ‘Diary of Vicente Guedes’, dated 22 August 1914, which pokes fun at a second-rate Portuguese writer and surely does not belong in *Disquiet*. Diaries usually have dates, but almost no dated material entered *The Book of Disquiet* until 1929, when Vicente Guedes had already been given his walking papers. Whatever intentions Pessoa may have one day had, the early *Book of Disquiet* never boiled down to a diary, though it did encompass a ‘Random Diary’ and a ‘Lucid Diary’ – or single entries from projected diaries with these names – as well as the forecited ‘Fragments of an Autobiography’, all of which date (according to manuscript and stylistic evidence) from 1915 to 1920, when Guedes was active.

Vicente Guedes was one of Pessoa’s busiest and most versatile collaborators in the 1910s. Besides his diary writings, Guedes translated, or was supposed to translate, plays and poems by the likes of Aeschylus, Shelley and Byron, as well as ‘A Very Original Dinner’, a mysterious story penned by Alexander Search, the most prolific of the English-language heteronyms. Though he shirked his duties as a translator, Guedes ‘really’ wrote a few poems, a number of short stories and several mystical tales. In one of these tales, ‘The Ascetic’, the title character tells his interlocutor that paradises and nirvanas are ‘illusions inside other illusions. If you

dream you're dreaming, is the dream you dream less real than the dream you dream you're dreaming?' This sort of musing is vaguely reminiscent of *Disquiet* in its formative phases, which may be why Pessoa decided to entrust it to Guedes, whose wide-ranging literary talents made him a potentially excellent author-administrator of such a capacious work.

The manuscript identifying Vicente Guedes as the author of a *Diary* that was supposed to be part (or perhaps all) of the early *Book of Disquiet* also includes a passage titled 'Games Solitaire' (Text 351), which evokes the evenings that the narrator spent as a child with his elderly aunts in a country house. The passage is preceded by this notation:

B. of D.

A section entitled: *Games of Solitaire* (include *In the Forest of Estrangement*?)

In its language and tone, 'Forest of Estrangement' has absolutely nothing in common with the passage about old aunts playing solitaire while their sleepy maid brews tea. Perhaps this was conceived as a mere port of entry to the section that would have the same name and whose 'games of solitaire' would be exercises in daydreamy prose such as 'Estrangement', written by Pessoa for the same reason we play cards: to pass the time. Whatever the case, *The Book* was in trouble. Pessoa didn't know what to do with the early texts that wafted in the misty atmosphere of the strange forest, and perhaps he considered excluding them altogether. What place could they have in a diary? Or even next to a diary?

More than ten years later, Bernardo Soares would reformulate the games of solitaire (Text 12):

I make landscapes out of what I feel. I make holidays of my sensations... My elderly aunt would play solitaire throughout the endless evening. These confessions of what I feel are my solitaire. I don't interpret them like those who read cards to tell the future. I don't probe them, because in solitaire the cards don't have any special significance.

In the same passage, Soares compares his mental and literary activity to another domestic pastime, crochet, as Álvaro de Campos also does in a poem dated 9 August 1934:

I also have my crochet.

It dates from when I began to think.

Stitch on stitch forming a whole without a whole...

A cloth, and I don't know if it's for a garment or for nothing.

A soul, and I don't know if it's for feeling or living.

What's highly significant about the assistant bookkeeper's crochet is that 'between one and

another plunge' of the hooked needle, 'all enchanted princes can stroll in their parks'. The observation would seem odd or just plain weird, were it not for the royal dreams and reveries that filled up many pages of *Disquiet* in its early days. In Soares, as we shall see, Pessoa managed to conciliate (though never to his full satisfaction) the sumptuous, imperial dreams of *The Book's* first phase with the concerns of a modest, twentieth-century office clerk. Vicente Guedes, who was also an assistant bookkeeper, seems to have been groomed for the same conciliatory role, but in spite of his several mystical tales, Guedes was too coldly rational in his diary entries to be believable as a writer of wispy post-Symbolist texts, and Pessoa never directly named him as their author. But Guedes held the title of general author of *The Book of Disquiet* for at least five years and perhaps as long as ten, for whatever it's worth, since the manuscript evidence suggests that most of the 1920s was (as indicated earlier) a fallow period for *The Book*.

It was probably in 1928 that Pessoa, now wearing the mask of Bernardo Soares, returned to *The Book of Disquiet*, which became a resolutely confirmed diary, as acutely personal as it was objective – as if the world around and inside the diarist were all the same film that he stared at intently, sometimes listened to, but never touched. Many of the passages were dated, though this practice was never systematic and seems to have been only gradually adopted. It's curious that the first passage from this period with a date, 22 March 1929 (Text 19), is post-Symbolist in flavour, with drums, bugles and 'princesses from other people's dreams' but with no mention of the assistant bookkeeper, whose fiction was perhaps still hazy and needed to be fleshed out. It was only in 1930 that Pessoa began to date a large number of the passages destined for *The Book of Disquiet*, which had finally found its street: the Rua dos Douradores, where Soares worked in an office and where he also lived, in a humble rented room, writing in his spare time. And so Art, notes Soares, resides 'on the very same street as Life, but in a different place... Yes, for me the Rua dos Douradores contains the meaning of everything and the answer to all riddles, except for the riddle of why riddles exist, which can never be answered' (Text 9).

We know almost nothing about Bernardo Soares before he moved to the Rua dos Douradores. His name heads a list of ten stories in one of Pessoa's notebooks, where we also find a rather extensive publication programme for Pessoa's *œuvre*, with Soares identified only as a short-story writer. *The Book of Disquiet*, listed in the same programme, isn't attributed to any author. Had Vicente Guedes already been sacked? Perhaps not yet. But once Soares

assumed *The Book's* authorship, he also assumed, more or less, the old author's biography. More accurately, Vicente Guedes, who died young (it was Pessoa who was to publish and present his manuscript to the public), was apparently reincarnated in Bernardo Soares, who had the very same profession, who also lived in a fourth-floor room in Lisbon's Baixa district (only the name of the street changed), and who was also a highly motivated diarist. To judge by his elderly aunt who spent long evenings playing solitaire, Soares even inherited Guedes's childhood.

Though not identical to Guedes, Soares came to replace him, and since Pessoa could move his pawns forwards and backwards, this replacement was able to have retroactive effect. The eleven excerpts from *Disquiet* published in magazines between 1929 and 1934 were naturally attributed to Bernardo Soares, but Pessoa also credited him (in a typed inventory of Soares's literary production) with the only previously published excerpt, namely 'Forest of Estrangement', dating from long before Soares was ever conceived. In Pessoa's notes and extensive correspondence from the 1930s, in which he discussed in detail the heteronymic enterprise, Guedes never merits the slightest reference, and the three *Disquiet* passages from the teens that mention him by name were left out of the large envelope in which Pessoa, some time before his death, gathered material for the book. That same envelope includes a typed 'note' (in Appendix III) explaining that the earlier passages would have to be revised to conform with the 'true psychology' of Bernardo Soares. It may be argued that since Pessoa never actually brought off this revision, the early passages retain Vicente Guedes's style and tone – more analytical, less emotionally impressionable than Soares – and therefore his authorship. But this is to take the game even further than Pessoa did. What is actually happening? The narrator – whether his name is Guedes or Soares – ages as the creating and informing spirit of Pessoa ages, and so the voice naturally changes, but not as strikingly as the voice of Álvaro de Campos, whose short and melancholy poems of the 1930s were vastly different from the loud 'Sensationist' odes of the 1910s.

Yet another disquieted persona, the Baron of Teive, was vaguely or potentially connected to *The Book of Disquiet*, not as its author but as a contributor. Pessoa gave birth to aristocrat Teive in 1928, probably the same year that Bernardo Soares went from being a minor short story writer to the author of Pessoa's major prose work. Like Soares, Teive also suffered from tedium (one of the most oft-occurring words in *The Book*), also found life stupid and meaningless, and was also sceptical to the point of no return, no salvation. His 'only

manuscript', written on the eve of his suicide and titled *The Education of the Stoic*, was found in the drawer of a hotel room, presumably by Pessoa, who compared the Baron with the bookkeeper in a fragmentary Preface (see [Appendix III](#)). Their Portuguese, wrote Pessoa, the same, but whereas the aristocrat 'thinks clearly, writes clearly, and controls his emotion though not his feelings, the bookkeeper controls neither emotions nor feelings, and what he thinks depends on what he feels'. Pessoa himself was not always certain of this subtle distinction, for he labelled one passage (Text 207) *B. of D. (or Teive?)*, and there were a handful of other passages clearly labelled *Teive* that he subsequently placed in the large envelope with *Disquiet* material. Was he thinking of pillaging parts of the Baron's 'only manuscript' for the benefit of Bernardo Soares? Quite possibly so, since *Teive's* opus, contrary to what its 'only' designation suggests, was a hodgepodge of unassembled and fragmentary pieces that Pessoa had perhaps despaired of ever pulling together and cleaning up. *The Book of Disquiet*, much vaster, was that much more unorganized, but Pessoa loved it too dearly to ever dream of giving up on it.

Besides threatening the Baron's intellectual property, the ostensibly unassuming bookkeeper almost took over a large chunk of poetry signed by Pessoa himself. The above-mentioned inventory of Bernardo Soares's literary output includes not only the poetic prose texts of *The Book's* inaugural period but also 'Slanting Rain' (written in 1914, published in 1915), 'Station of the Cross' (written in 1914–15, published in 1916) and other poems by Pessoa founded on 'ultra-Sensationist experiences'. These poems are nearly contemporaneous with 'Forest of Estrangement' and drink from the same post-Symbolist waters, so Pessoa thought – for a moment – that they might as well live under the same roof, on the Rua dos Douradores, which is cited at the top of the inventory. In fact the inventory is probably both a c.v. for Soares and a Table of Contents for *The Book of Disquiet*. And at the bottom of the page we find this strange observation: 'Soares is not a poet. In his poetry he falls short; it isn't sustained like his prose. His poems are the refuse of his prose, the sawdust of his first-rate work.'

Pessoa, in the late 1920s, felt ambivalent about the Intersectionist and ultra-Sensationist poems he had written under his own name almost fifteen years previous. Reassigning them to *The Book of Disquiet* would not only save Pessoa's name from the momentary embarrassment he may have felt for being their author; it could also help redeem them, by providing an enhancing context. But it was a short lived idea. In a follow-up note (see [Appendix II](#)

written on the same typewriter as the inventory, we read:

Collect later on, in a separate book, the various poems I had mistakenly thought to include in *The Book of Disquiet*; this book of poems should have a title indicating that it contains something like refuse or marginalia – something suggestive of detachment.

Pessoa, forever indecisive, just like his semi-heteronym, had gone back to his original plan: a book of prose, in elegant and even poetic Portuguese, but still and always prose. What had ever given him the idea of bringing poetry into it?

The Book of Disquiet had become one of Pessoa's pet projects, and he desperately, somewhat ineptly, tried to make its disparate parts cohere. The prose that had made its way into *The Book* was so heterogeneous that its new agent of cohesion, Bernardo Soares, would have to be much more than a diarist. To make Soares a believable author of such a multifaceted work, Pessoa decided to widen his literary horizons in a big way, making him even a poet. If Álvaro de Campos and Ricardo Reis, fundamentally poets, also wrote prose, why shouldn't Bernardo Soares write verses? But no: this would have only complicated matters. Pessoa realized this and backed down, repossessing the poems he had passed on to Soares, as we can deduce from a letter, written in 1935, which cites 'Slanting Rain' as a 'orthonymic' work (attributed to Pessoa himself). Soares retained possession of the poetry in prose he had inherited, however, and he legitimated that inheritance by his own practice, admirably demonstrated in the excerpt (Text 386) he wrote on 28 November 1932, an obvious sequel to 'In the Forest of Estrangement'. And in another text (420), Soares ingeniously brings the 'Funeral March of Ludwig II, King of Bavaria' to the Rua de Douradores. Fighting his incurable tendency to creative and intellectual entropy, Pessoa sought at least a relative unity for his *Book of Disquiet*, 'without giving up the dreaminess and logical disjointedness of its intimate expression' (from the cited 'note' in Appendix III).

In Bernardo Soares – a prose writer who poetizes, a dreamer who thinks, a mystic who doesn't believe, a decadent who doesn't indulge – Pessoa invented the best author possible (and who was just a mutilated copy of himself) to provide unity to a book which, by nature, couldn't have one. The semi-fiction called Soares, more than a justification or handy solution for this scattered *Book*, is an implied model for whoever has difficulty adapting to real, normal, everyday life. The only way to survive in this world is by keeping alive our dreams without ever fulfilling it, since the fulfilment never measures up to what we imagine – that was the closest thing to a message that Pessoa left, and he gave us Bernardo Soares to show

us how it's done.

How is it done? By not doing. By dreaming insistently. By performing our daily duties by *living*, simultaneously, in the imagination. Travelling far and wide, in the geography of our minds. Conquering like Caesar, amid the blaring trumpets of our reverie. Experiencing intense sexual pleasure, in the privacy of our fantasy. Feeling everything in every way, not in the flesh, which always tires, but in the imagination.

To dream, for example, that I'm simultaneously, separately, severally the man and the woman on a stroll that a man and a woman are taking along the river. To see myself – at the same time, in the same way, with equal precision and without overlap, being equally but separately integrated into both things – as a conscious ship in a South Sea and a printed page from an old book. How absurd this seems! But everything is absurd, and dreaming least of all. (Text 157)

To dream one's life and to live one's dreams, feeling what's dreamed and what's lived with an intensity so extreme it makes the distinction between the two meaningless – this credo is echoed in nearly every reach of Pessoa's universe, but Soares was its most practical exemplar. While the other heteronymic stars *talk* about dreaming and feeling everything, Bernardo Soares actually has vivid, splendid dreams and feels each tiny circumstance of his workaday life on the Rua dos Douradores. The post-Symbolist texts with misty forests, lakes, kings and palaces are crucial, for they are the imaginary substance, the very dreams of Soares, put into words. And the various 'Rainy Landscapes', with their excruciating descriptions of storms and winds, are illustrations of how to really *feel* the weather and, by extension, all of nature and the life that surrounds us.

Pessoa was keenly aware that 'Nature is parts without a whole' (from Caeiro's *The Keeper of Sheep*, XLVII) and that the notion of unity is always an illusion. Well, not quite. A relatively provisional, fleeting unity, a unity which doesn't pretend to be smooth and absolute or even unambiguously singular, which is built around an imagination, a fiction, a writing instrument – this was the unity that Fernando Pessoa, in Bernardo Soares, was betting on. And he won his bet. *The Book of Disquiet*, whose ultimate ambition was to reflect the jagged thoughts and fractured emotions that can inhabit one man, achieved this modest but genuine unity. There was perhaps, in the twentieth century, no other book as honest as this *Book*, which can hardly claim to be one.

Honesty. It went unmentioned until now, and it's what most distinguishes *The Book of Disquiet*. It is probably fair to call honesty the pre-eminent virtue of great writers, for whom the most personal things become, through the alchemy of truth, universal. Strangely or not,

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