

# My Pessoa: Uncovering “the others in me”

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## Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Identity, Portuguese literature, Portuguese identity, Azorean identity, Immigration, Emigration, Identity creation.

## Abstract

After presenting two translations and three poems written by him, the author, a poet and memoirist, turns to Fernando Pessoa for clues to understanding the distinctly Portuguese form of identity creation as it is exhibited in Portuguese literature, as well as the immigrant/emigrant experience, finally understanding his own relationship to Azorean Portuguese identity.

## Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Identidade, Literatura portuguesa, Identidade portuguesa, Identidade açoriana, Imigração, Emigração, Criação de identidade.

## Resumo

Após apresentar duas traduções e três poemas da sua autoria, o autor, um poeta e um escritor de memórias, recorre a Pessoa em busca de pistas para entender a forma distintamente portuguesa de criação de identidade, tal como é exibida na literatura portuguesa, bem como a experiência de imigrante/emigrante, compreendendo finalmente a sua própria relação com a identidade portuguesa açoriana.

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## Two Poems by Fernando Pessoa

### TABACARIA

Não sou nada.  
Nunca serei nada.  
Não posso querer ser nada.  
À parte isso, tenho em mim todos os sonhos do mundo.

Janellas do meu quarto,  
Do meu quarto de um dos milhões do mundo que ninguém sabe quem é  
(E se soubessem quem é, o que saberiam?),  
Daes para o mysterio de uma rua cruzada constantemente por gente,  
Para uma rua inacessível a todos os pensamentos,  
Real, impossivelmente real, certa, desconhecidamente certa,  
Com o mysterio das coisas por baixo das pedras e dos seres,  
Com a morte a pôr humidade nas paredes e cabellos brancos nos homens,  
Com o Destino a conduzir a carroça de tudo pela estrada de nada.

Estou hoje vencido, como se soubesse a verdade.  
Estou hoje lucido, como se estivesse para morrer,  
E não tivesse mais irmandade com as coisas  
Senão uma despedida, tornando-se esta casa e este lado da rua  
A fileira de carruagens de um comboio, e uma partida apitada  
De dentro da minha cabeça,  
E uma sacudidella dos meus nervos e um ranger de ossos na ida.

Estou hoje perplexo, como quem pensou e achou e esqueceu.  
Estou hoje dividido entre a lealdade que devo  
À Tabacaria do outro lado da rua, como coisa real por fóra,  
E á sensação de que tudo é sonho, como coisa real por dentro.

Falhei em tudo.  
Como não fiz proposito nenhum, talvez tudo fôsse nada.  
A aprendizagem que me deram,  
Desci d'ella pela janella das trazeiras da casa.  
Fui até ao campo com grandes propositos,  
Mas lá encontrei só hervas e arvores,  
E quando havia gente era igual á outra.  
Saio da janela, sento-me numa cadeira. Em que hei-de pensar?

Que sei eu do que serei, eu que não sei o que sou?  
Ser o que penso? Mas penso ser tanta coisa!  
E ha tantos que pensam ser a mesma coisa que não pode haver tantos!  
Genio? Neste momento  
Cem mil cerebros se concebem em sonho genios como eu,  
E a historia não marcará, quem sabe?, nem um,  
Nem haverá senão estrume de tantas conquistas futuras.

Não, não creio em mim.  
Em todos os manicômios ha doidos malucos com tantas certezas!  
Eu, que não tenho nenhuma certeza, sou mais certo ou menos certo?  
Não, nem em mim..  
Em quantas mansardas e não-mansardas do mundo  
Não estão nesta hora genios-para-si-mesmos sonhando?  
Quantas aspirações altas e nobres e lucidas –  
Sim, verdadeiramente altas e nobres e lucidas –,  
E quem sabe se realizaveis,  
Nunca verão a luz do sol real nem acharão ouvidos de gente?  
O mundo é para quem nasce para o conquistar  
E não para quem sonha que pode conquistal-o, ainda que tenha razão.  
Tenho sonhado mais que o que Napoleão fez.  
Tenho apertado ao peito hypothetico mais humanidades do que Christo.  
Tenho feito philosophias em segredo que nenhum Kant escreveu.  
Mas sou, e talvez serei sempre, o da mansarda,  
Ainda que não more nella;  
Serei sempre o *que não nasceu para isso*;  
Serei sempre só o *que tinha qualidades*;  
Serei sempre o que esperou que lhe abrissem a porta ao pé de uma parede sem porta,  
E cantou a cantiga do Infinito numa capoeira,  
E ouviu a voz de Deus num poço tapado.

Crer em mim? Não, nem em nada.  
Derrame-me a Natureza sobre a cabeça ardente  
O seu sol, a sua chuva, o vento que me acha o cabelo,  
E o resto que venha se vier, ou tiver que vir, ou não venha.  
Escravos cardiacos das estrellas,  
Conquistámos todo o mundo antes de nos levantar da cama;  
Mas accordámos e elle é opaco,  
Levantámo-nos e elle é alheio,  
Sahimos de casa e elle é a terra inteira,  
Mais o Systema Solar e a Via Lactea e o Indefinido.

(Come chocolates, pequena;  
Come chocolates!  
Olha que não ha mais metaphysica no mundo senão chocolates.  
Olha que as religiões todas não ensinam mais que a confeitaria.  
Come, pequena suja, come!  
Pudesse eu comer chocolates com a mesma verdade com que comes!  
Mas eu penso e, ao tirar o papel de prata, que é de folha de estanho,  
Deito tudo para o chão, como tenho deitado a vida.)

Mas ao menos fica da amargura do que nunca serei  
A calligraphia rapida d'estes versos,  
Portico partido para o Impossivel.

Mas ao menos consagro a mim mesmo um desprezo sem lagrimas,  
Nobre ao menos no gesto largo com que atiro

A roupa suja que sou, sem rol, p'ra o decurso das coisas,  
E fico em casa sem camisa.

(Tu, que consolas, que não existes e por isso consolas,  
Ou deusa grega, concebida como estatua que fôsse viva,  
Ou patricia romana, impossivelmente nobre e nefasta,  
Ou princeza de trovadores, gentilissima e colorida,  
Ou marquezeta do seculo dezoito, decotada e longinqua,  
Ou *cocotte* celebre do tempo dos nossos paes,  
Ou não sei quê moderno – não concebo bem o quê –,  
Tudo isso, seja o que fôr, que sejas, se pode inspirar que inspire!  
Meu coração é um balde despejado.  
Como os que invocam espiritos invocam espiritos, invoco  
A mim mesmo e não encontro nada.  
Chego á janella e vejo a rua com uma nitidez absoluta.  
Vejo as lojas, vejo os passeios, vejo os carros que passam,  
Vejo os entes vivos vestidos que se cruzam,  
Vejo os cães que também existem,  
E tudo isto me pesa como uma condenação ao degredo,  
E tudo isto é estrangeiro, como tudo.)

Vivi, estudei, amei, e até cri,  
E hoje não ha mendigo que eu não inveje só por não ser eu.  
Olho a cada um os andrajos e as chagas e a mentira,  
E penso: talvez nunca vivesses nem estudasses nem amasses nem cresses  
(Porque é possível fazer a realidade de tudo isso sem fazer nada d'isso);  
Talvez tenhas existido apenas, como um lagarto a quem cortam o rabo  
E que é rabo para quem do lagarto remexidamente.

Fiz de mim o que não soube,  
E o que podia fazer de mim não o fiz.  
O dominó que vesti era errado.  
Conhecera-me logo por quem não era e não desmenti, e perdi-me.  
Quando quiz tirar a mascara,  
Estava pegada á cara.  
Quando a tirei e me vi ao espelho,  
Já tinha envelhecido.  
Estava bebado, já não sabia vestir o dominó que não tinha tirado.  
Deitei fóra a mascara e dormi no vestuario  
Como um cão tolerado pela gerencia  
Por ser inoffensivo  
E vou escrever esta historia para provar que sou sublime.

Essencia musical dos meus versos inuteis,  
Quem me dera encontrar-te como coisa que eu fizesse,  
E não ficasse sempre defronte da Tabacaria de defronte,  
Calcando aos pés a consciencia de estar existindo,  
Como um tapete em que um bebado tropeça  
Ou um capacho que os ciganos roubaram e não valia nada.

Mas o Dono da Tabacaria chegou á porta e ficou á porta.  
Ólho-o com o desconforto da cabeça mal voltada  
E com o desconfôrto da alma mal entendendo.  
Elle morrerá e eu morrerei.  
Elle deixará a taboleta, eu deixarei versos.  
A certa altura morrerá a taboleta tambem, e os versos tambem.  
Depois de certa altura morrerá a rua onde esteve a taboleta,  
E a lingua em que foram escriptos os versos.  
Morrerá depois o planeta girante em que tudo isto se deu.  
Em outros satellites de outros systemas qualquer coisa como gente  
Continuará fazendo coisas como versos e vivendo por baixo de coisas como taboletas,  
Sempre uma coisa defronte da outra,  
Sempre uma coisa tam inútil como a outra,  
Sempre o impossivel tão estúpido como o real,  
Sempre o mysterio do fundo tam certo como o somno de mysterio da superficie,  
Sempre isto ou sempre outra coisa, ou nem uma coisa nem outra.

Mas um homem entrou na Tabacaria (para comparar tabaco?),  
E a realidade plausivel cahe de repente em cima de mim.  
Semiergo-me energico, convencido, humano,  
E vou tencionar escrever estes versos em que digo o contrario.  
Accendo um cigarro ao pensar em escrevel-os  
E saboreio no cigarro a libertação de todos os pensamentos.  
Sigo o fumo como a uma rota propria,  
E góso, num momento sensitivo e competente,  
A libertação de todas as especulações  
E a consciencia de que a metaphysica é uma consequencia de estar mal disposto.

Depois deito-me para traz na cadeira  
E continuo fumando.  
Emquanto o Destino m'ó conceder, continuarei fumando.

(Se eu casasse com a filha da minha lavadeira  
Talvez fosse feliz.)

Visto isto, levanto-me da cadeira. Vou á janella.

O homem sahiu da Tabacaria (mettendo troco na algibeira das calças?).  
Ah, conheço-o: é o Esteves sem metaphysica.  
(O Dono da Tabacaria chegou á porta.)  
Como por um instincto divino o Esteves voltou-se e viu-me.  
Accenou-me adeus, gritei-lhe *Adeus ó Esteves!*, e o universo  
Reconstruiu-se-me sem ideal nem esperança, e o Dono da Tabacaria sorriu.

(PESSOA, 2014b: 199-205)

TOBACCO SHOP<sup>1</sup>

I am nothing.  
 I'll never be more than nothing.  
 I cannot wish to be more than nothing.  
 Apart from this, within me are all the dreams of the world.

Windows in my room,  
 From my room, one of the millions in the world, that no one knows  
 (And if they knew who I am, what would they know?),  
 You open to the mystery of a street constantly crossed by people,  
 To a street inaccessible to all thoughts,  
 Real, impossibly real; right, unknowingly right,  
 With the mystery of things beneath the stones and beings,  
 With death putting moisture on the walls and white hair on men,  
 With Destiny driving the wagon all the way down the road of nothing.

I'm defeated today, like I know the truth.  
 I'm lucid today, like I'm about to die,  
 And feeling no more brotherhood with things  
 If not a farewell, this house and this side of the street becomes  
 A row of train carriages, and a whistled departure  
 From inside my head,  
 And a jolt of my nerves and a creaking of bones as it leaves.

I'm perplexed today, like one who thought and found and forgot.  
 I'm torn today, between the loyalty I owe  
 To the Tobacconist's across the street, something real on the outside,  
 And the feeling that everything is a dream, something real on the inside.

I failed at everything.  
 Because I had no purpose, perhaps it was nothing.  
 The education they gave me,  
 I left it as through the back window of the house,  
 I went to the field with great purpose.  
 But there I found only herbs and trees,  
 And when there were people, they were the same as the others.  
 Away from the window, I sit in a chair. What will I think about?

How do I know what I'm going to be, I who don't know what I am?  
 Be what I think? But I think there's so much!  
 And there are so many who think of the same thing—there can't be so many!  
 Genius? Currently,  
 One hundred thousand minds are dreaming they are geniuses like me,  
 And will history remember any of them, who knows?  
 Neither will there be manure from so many future achievements.

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Pessoa (writing as Álvaro de Campos), translated from the Portuguese by Scott Edward Anderson.

No, I don't believe in myself.  
 In every madhouse there are crazy people with so many certainties!  
 I, who am not sure at all, am I more certain or less certain?  
 No, not even me...  
 In how many attics and basements of the world  
 Are there, at this hour, geniuses-to-themselves dreaming?  
 How many high and noble and lucid aspirations—  
 Yes, truly, high and noble and lucid—  
 And who knows if they are achievable,  
 Will they never see the light of day or reach people's ears?  
 The world is made for those born to conquer it,  
 And not for those who dream they can conquer it, even if they're right.  
 I've dreamed more than what Napoleon achieved.  
 I have pressed more humanity than Christ to my hypothetical breast,  
 I've conceived secret philosophies that no Kant has written.  
 But I am, and perhaps I may always be, the one in the attic,  
 Although I don't live in it.  
 I'll always be *the one who wasn't born for this*.  
 I'll always be *the one who had qualities*.  
 I'll always be the one who waited for you to open the door of a wall without a door  
 And sang the song of Infinity in a henhouse,  
 And heard God's voice in a covered well.

Believe in myself? No, not at all.  
 Pour Nature over my burning head  
 Your sun, your rain, the wind that combs my hair,  
 And the rest will come if it comes, or must come, or doesn't.  
 Slaves of the heart's stars,  
 We conquered the entire world before getting out of bed.  
 But we woke up and it's opaque,  
 We got up and it's rubbed-out,  
 We left home and it is the whole earth,  
 Plus the solar system and the Milky Way and the Undefined.

(Eat chocolates, little one;  
 Eat chocolates!  
 Look, there's nothing more metaphysical in the world than chocolates.  
 Look, all religions teach nothing more than confectionery.  
 Eat, dirty little one, eat!  
 Would that I could eat chocolates with the same truth with which you eat!  
 But I think and when I take out the silver paper, which is tin foil,  
 I throw everything on the floor, as I've thrown out my life.)

But at least it stays the bitterness of what I will never be  
 The rapid handwriting of these verses,  
 Broken portico for the Impossible.

But at least I dedicate myself to contempt without tears,  
 Noble at least in the broad gesture with which I shoot

The dirty clothes that I am, without a list, for the course of things,  
And I stay home shirtless.

(You, who console, who doesn't exist and therefore consoles,  
Or Greek goddess, conceived as statue but that came alive,  
Or Roman patrician, impossibly noble and nefarious,  
Or princess of troubadours, truly kind and colorful,  
Or eighteenth-century marquise, distant in décolleté,  
Or celebrated prostitute of our parents's time,  
Or, I don't know, something modern—I can't quite conceive what—  
All of this, whatever it may be; if it can inspire, let it inspire!  
My heart is a dumped-over bucket.  
As those who invoke spirits invoke spirits, I invoke  
Myself and I find nothing.  
I reach the window and see the street with absolute clarity.  
I see the stores, I see the sidewalks, I see the passing cars,  
I see the living beings, well-dressed, in the intersection,  
I see the dogs that also exist,  
And all this weighs on me like a condemnation of exile,  
And all this is foreign, like everything.)

I lived, studied, loved, and even believed,  
And today there's no beggar I don't envy just because he's not me.  
I look at the rags and the wounds and the lies of each one,  
And I think: maybe you've never lived or studied or loved or believed  
(Because it is possible to make a reality of all this without doing any of it);  
Maybe you just existed, like a lizard with its tail cut off,  
And that tail, shorn from the lizard, is stirring.

I did what I didn't know,  
And what I could do with me I didn't.  
The costume I wore was all wrong.  
They took me right away for who I wasn't, and I didn't deny it, and I got lost.  
When I went to remove the mask,  
It was stuck on my face.  
When I finally took it off and saw myself in the mirror,  
I had aged.  
I was drunk, I no longer knew how to put on the costume I hadn't taken off.  
I threw away the mask and slept in the armoire.  
Like a dog tolerated by management  
Because it is harmless  
And I'll write this story to prove that I'm sublime.

My useless verses with their musical essence,  
I wish I found you as something I did,  
Rather than always standing in front of the Tobacconist's across the street,  
Stepping on the feet of the awareness of being,  
Like a rug on which a drunk man stumbles  
Or a worthless doormat the gypsies stole.



But the Tobacconist came to the door and stood there.  
 I looked at him with the discomfort of a badly cocked head  
 And with the discomfort of the misunderstood soul.  
 He will die and I will die.  
 He'll leave the shop-sign, and I'll leave verses.  
 At some point the shop-sign will die too, and so will the verses.  
 After a certain time, the street where the shop-sign was will die,  
 And the language in which the verses were written.  
 Then the spinning planet on which all this took place will die.  
 On other planets in other systems beings like people  
 Will continue to write verses and live under things like shop-signs,  
 Always one thing in front of the other,  
 Always one thing as useless as the other,  
 Always the impossible as stupid as the real,  
 Always the underlying mystery as sure as the surface mystery of sleep,  
 Always this or that or neither one thing nor the other.

But a man went into the Tobacconist's (to buy tobacco?),  
 And the plausible reality suddenly dawns on me.  
 I look energetic, convinced, human,  
 And I intend to write these verses in which I say otherwise.  
 I light a cigarette when I think about writing them  
 And I savor in the cigarette the release of all thoughts.  
 I follow the smoke as a route of my own,  
 And I enjoy, in a sensitive and competent moment,  
 The release of all speculations  
 And the awareness that metaphysics is a consequence of being in a bad mood.

Then I lie back in the chair  
 And I keep smoking.  
 As long as Fate allows, I'll keep smoking.

(If I married my laundress's daughter,  
 Perhaps I'd be happy.)

Given this, I get up from my chair. I go to the window.

The man is leaving the Tobacconist's (putting change in the pocket of his pants?).  
 Oh, I know him: it's Stevens, who is without metaphysics.  
 (The Tobacconist arrived at the door.)  
 As if by a divine instinct, Stevens turned and saw me.  
 He waved goodbye to me; I shouted, "Goodbye, O Stevens!", and the universe  
 Restored me, without ideals or hopes, and the Tobacconist smiled.

## Second Poem by Fernando Pessoa

[*Só a natureza é divina / Only Nature is divine*]

Só a Natureza é divina, e ella não é divina...

Se ás vezes fallo d'ella como de um ente  
É que para fallar d'ella preciso usar da linguagem dos homens  
Que dá personalidade ás cousas,  
E impõe nome ás cousas.

Mas as cousas não teem nome nem personalidade:  
Existem, e o céu é grande e a terra larga,  
E o nosso coração do tamanho de um punho fechado...

Bemdito seja eu por tudo quanto não sei.  
É isso tudo que verdadeiramente sou.  
Goso tudo isso como quem está aqui ao sol.

(PESSOA, 2016b: 58)

Only Nature is divine, and she is not divine...

If I speak of her as of an entity  
it is for to speak of her it is necessary to use the language of men,  
which gives personality to things,  
and imposes names on things.

But things have neither name nor personality:  
they exist, just as the sky is big and the land is wide,  
and our hearts are the size of a closed fist...

I am blessed by everything as far as I know.  
That is all I truly am.  
I enjoy everything as one who is here in the sun..<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fernando Pessoa (writing as Alberto Caeiro), translated from the Portuguese by Scott Edward Anderson.

### Three Poems by Scott Edward Anderson

#### SAUDADE

*I feel beliefs that I do not hold.  
I am ravished by passions I repudiate.*  
Fernando Pessoa

We're surrounded by people  
who sentimentalize collegiate life,  
swoon over first marriages,  
would kill to return to Rome, or  
wish for the restitution of days  
gone by, or worse, days  
they've never known.  
(The Portuguese have a word for it,  
*saudade*, a longing for lost things.)  
For myself, I have fond memories  
of houses in New England  
(where my childhood  
blossomed, disappeared);  
of a life of the mind,  
of places for a brief time mine.  
But the only thing I long for  
is the old cherry tree,  
in front of our home  
— we were newly wed —  
how it dashed its branches  
against our roof.

#### AN IMMIGRANT'S COUNTRY CLUB DREAMS

"At a meeting of the Board of Governors,"  
the letter begins, under a stylized portrait  
of King Philip, the Wampanoag sachem,  
"your application for membership was accepted  
and we wish to take the opportunity  
of welcoming you into the Club." Metacomet,  
as King Philip was known to his people,  
would never have been asked to  
"take an active part in the social functions"  
of the club that bears his name.  
To Ed Perry, a young Portuguese American,  
this was the ticket to a life of links and cufflinks,  
bloody marys and Cadillacs, insurance deals at the "19th Hole,"  
and a marriage grafted to Puritan stock.

My Portuguese grandfather spent forty-odd years  
 enjoying the privileges of membership.  
 He later became two-term president of the club.  
 (Not bad for a "Portagee" kid from Providence.)  
 At his funeral, a chortle rose up from the front pews  
 when the priest called him "a dedicated family man."  
 The priest read the obituary from the *Providence Journal*,  
 believing the petty details of a man he never knew.  
 A tacky pastel statue of Martha of Bethany,  
 mixing bowl and spoon in her hands,  
 surveyed the congregation.  
 She had the eyes of my grandmother.

#### THE TROPHY ROOM

As a child, all I knew of my Portuguese grandfather  
 was the room full of his accomplishments: golf trophies,  
 framed "Frank Lanning Award for the Most  
 Outstanding Contributions to Rhode Island Sports"  
 (with its cartoons and caricature),  
 and *Providence Journal* articles on the walls.

The sight of my grandmother at her nightly ritual:  
 placing half a grapefruit, a glass of tomato juice,  
 and a bowl of dry, bran cereal on the kitchen table—  
 my grandfather's morning repast.  
 While other children kept vigil for St. Nicholas,  
 I never bothered, knew *he* existed —

My Portuguese grandfather was another story.  
 I'd sneak down to catch him in the act of leaving,  
 concealing myself in the kitchen cupboards  
 until he came down for his breakfast. I rarely caught him,  
 falling asleep among cereal boxes and  
 cases of Narragansett Beer. Tracing the letters  
 on the cardboard, "*Hi-Neighbor! Have a 'Gansett!*"  
 His broken fast on the table like Santa's milk and cookies.

Did he smile to himself as he passed  
 the trophy room on his way out to his *other* life?

## Post-scriptum

Even his surname speaks to an identity crisis: “Pessoa” means “person” in Portuguese, and the roots of the word are close to the Latin root for *persona*, which originally referred to a mask worn in Ancient Classical theater. Fernando Pessoa’s “imaginary lives of imaginary poets,” as Édouard Roditi referred to the poet’s heteronyms (RODITI, 1955: 41), were, in many ways, an exploration of the “others” within him and, I would argue, symptomatic of an identity crisis of the Portuguese that has had its cultural identity constantly remade and redefined through mythmaking and self-examination.

Each of Pessoa’s heteronyms picked up aspects of himself, with perhaps Bernardo Soares—what Pessoa referred to as his semi-heteronym—being closest: a clerk resigned to the tediousness of work and futility of desire. As Pessoa wrote in a letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, Soares was “myself, less rational and less emotional” (PESSOA, 1988: 12) [*Sou eu menos o raciocínio e a affectividade*] (PESSOA, 2016a: 560). On the other hand, it was another of his heteronyms, Álvaro de Campos, who wrote, “The strangest case is that of Fernando Pessoa, who doesn’t exist, strictly speaking” (PESSOA, 2007: 49) [*Mais curioso é o caso do Fernando Pessoa, que não existe, propriamente fallando*] (PESSOA, 2014b: 461). Rather, Pessoa existed in multiplicity and his own distinctively Portuguese ability to create myths of identity in the plural.

In this it occurs to me that Pessoa’s use of heteronyms is linked to a sense of identity-creation inherent in Portuguese culture—, I think of the great Portuguese poet Camões and his mythmaking of the heroes from the age of discovery in his great Portuguese epic, *Os Lusíadas*. The legacy of the “Marinheiros de Quinhentos” and the “Golden Age” where the Portuguese were personified as brave and valiant warriors and “colonizing-adventurers” (BAPTISTA, 2013: 290) are part of an ethnic mythmaking and identity-creation that dates back to the “Reconquista” of 1249, with the driving out of the Moors and the final capture of the Algarve.

This same identity creation was, in many ways, behind my Azorean Portuguese grandfather’s assertion of his own identity as “Ed Perry”: golfer, administrator, and insurance executive, who had little or no involvement with his own Portuguese heritage and identity by choice. Born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1915 as Edward Casquilho (or Casquilha, as it was recorded in the 1920 U.S. Census), he thought that being Portuguese in southern New England would limit his choices, so he asserted himself as an American.

This kind of identity crisis, which seems to have roots deep in the Portuguese psyche, appears symptomatic of the mixed cultures of the country itself, its heritage both as conqueror and conquered, by the Moors and Spaniards in particular, and later Napoléon Bonaparte, and perhaps it is a legacy, too, of the Inquisition, when many Portuguese Jews were forced to convert and assume Catholic identities (including some of my own ancestors).

How is it that Portuguese identity can be so fragmented? What is the cultural legacy of such fragmentation? Is it a collective sense of inferiority in the wake of the triumphs of the age of discovery, the subsequent loss of domination over the seas, and ceding of colonial territories to the British in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? Throughout its history, the Portuguese have had an outsider status within Europe in which they are simultaneously part of and outside of the continent and European identity. For much of its history, Portugal looked outward, towards the ocean it faces on its western shores, away from Europe, and far off to its colonies.

By the time of the “Carnation Revolution” in 1974, however, with the relinquishing of its remaining colonies, Portugal had to remake its identity yet again. Further, joining the European Union in 1986—and, later, the austerity measures imposed by the EU earlier in this decade of the current century—forced yet another series of identity changes. (One could argue the recent resurgence of the Portuguese economy and remaking itself as a tourist destination is yet another identity change. And now, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Portugal will have to remake itself again—what will it become?)

The constant remaking of its identity creates a kind of “traumatic memory,” wrapped up as it is in “denial, concealment and shame,” especially in the post-colonial psyche of the “returned-colonists,” who were “exiled from nowhere” (BAPTISTA, 2013: 300). This has led to a consequent national self-examination of Portugal’s historical acts of violence and domination, including a recent reckoning with its involvement in the slave-trade, all of which renders the “Golden Age” a little tarnished.

What does it mean that Pessoa basically wrote in different poetic idioms and three genres, left much of his work unpublished and, in the case of what many consider to be his masterpiece, *Livro do Desassossego*, consigned to a trunk full of 30,000 disorganized fragments so that no two versions—whether in the original Portuguese or in translation—are ever the same? Is it because no two versions of Pessoa himself could ever be the same? As Carmela Ciuraru, author of *Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms*, said, “You will never get to the bottom of Fernando Pessoa. There are too many of him” (CIURARU, 2012: 120). Pessoa’s maxim was, “To pretend is to know oneself” (PESSOA, 1927: 263) [*Fingir é conhecer-se*] (PESSOA, 2014b: 448). As he explained, “I’ve always belonged to what isn’t where I am and to what I could never be” (Pessoa, 2017: 88) [*Pertenci sempre ao que não está onde estou e ao que nunca pude ser*] (PESSOA, 2014a: 137).

I’m also thinking of Pessoa and his multiplicity in the context of what Annaliese Hatton calls “the Janus-faced nature of portugalidade” (HATTON, 2014: 1) as well as Ricardo Vieira’s theory of “cultural transfusion” among Portuguese immigrants (although the author is speaking about post-colonial immigrants to Portugal, I see parallels to Portuguese emigrants to America in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century) (VIEIRA *et al.*, 2008: 36).

In the first, there is the concept of “Sebastianismo,” with its roots in the death of King Sebastian in 1578. In the wake of Sebastian’s death in Morocco, many of his Portuguese subjects believed he would return, messiah-like, to vanquish Spain and free Portugal from Spanish rule. Of course, this never happened, but perhaps the belief was so strong that it created a kind of syndrome in the Portuguese psyche: a simultaneous sense of hope and fate. Hope that something desired will come about, but also a resignation that their fate is such that it will not likely occur. (In my mind, this is tied to *saudade* as well, with its heady mix of longing, nostalgia, and melancholia.) Indeed, as Hatton argues, “the Portuguese are divided between looking back at a supposedly glorious colonial past and towards an ever more uncertain future” (HATTON, 2014: 2). A difficult position to be in.

In the second, Vieira proposes that, among Portuguese immigrants (and again, I would argue, among Portuguese emigrants as well) there were “two tendencies in personal identity”: one that integrated the culture of origin into their emerging identity; and the other, which rejected cultural origins and idealized the target culture (VIEIRA *et al.*, 2008: 36).

My maternal grandfather, Ed Perry, was firmly in the second camp. He clearly idealized American culture. Michael Bamberger, writing in his column, “This Golfing Life,” said of my grandfather, he “began every Rhode Island Golf Association event by gathering the players on the first tee and playing the national anthem on a portable record player, holding his heart with his right hand and a ‘see-through drink’... with his left, half-managing to croak out the high note in land of the free” (BAMBERGER, 2017: 112). Ed Perry was as American as apple pie. He grew up in a time when the prevailing attitude in the country was to move towards Americanization, prompting groups such as the Portuguese-American Civic Society to advocate: “If you want to be a good Portuguese, become an American.”

Pessoa, born in Lisbon in 1888, was a contemporary of my Azorean great-grandparents, Ed Perry’s parents, José and Anna Rodrigues Casquilho of São Miguel, born in 1887 and 1892, respectively. Pessoa’s father, the music critic Joaquim de Seabra Pessôa, died of tuberculosis when the young poet was five. Pessoa’s brother died six months later, and his paternal grandmother was in and out of mental hospitals the last twelve years of her life. His mother, Maria Magdalena Pinheiro Nogueira Pessoa, remarried and moved the family to South Africa, where his stepfather, João Miguel dos Santos Rosa, was the Portuguese consul of Durban.

As a youth, Pessoa was educated in Durban, at St. Joseph Convent School, where he was taught by French and Irish nuns. Later, he attended the English-led Durban High School, and subsequently wrote much of his early poetry in English. He returned to Portugal in 1905, to attend the University of Lisbon, only to drop out after two years.

The poet Édouard Roditi speculated that “Pessoa’s bilingualism may indeed be the cause of his extraordinary and almost psychopathic diversity as a Portuguese poet” (RODITI, 1955: 40). This “psychopathic diversity” to which Roditi referred is tied to Pessoa’s use of heteronyms, which are unlike pseudonyms for, as Ciuraru points out, “he insisted that they were separate from him,” and he created for them elaborate biographies, backgrounds, and even their own astrological charts (CIURARU, 2012: 124).

Pessoa’s heteronyms, for which there were by some estimates as many as 136, each formed a separate identity for the poet. The practice may have arisen, as Roditi argued, because the poet was “always forced to choose whether to express himself in English or Portuguese” (RODITI, 1955: 40). Using heteronyms, Pessoa “made a virtue of the self-alienation imposed upon him by his having to hesitate between either of two languages that remained, through this very choice, both equally familiar and foreign to him” (RODITI, 1955: 40).

More recent critics have called into question the nature of these heteronyms and Pessoa’s relationship to them. Darlene Sadlier observes that the tendency is “to project a kind of metapersonality into his diverse manuscripts, thereby turning him into a godlike figure who controlled a sort of puppet show of various personalities and styles” (SADLIER, 1988: 118). In contrast, Kem Gemes of Birkbeck College at the University of London, considers Pessoa “a genuine forerunner of post-modernism,” claiming that even “Pessoa is not Pessoa,” by that he means to suggest that Pessoa is not a person at all. (GEMES, 2014: 2). Gemes cites poet John Hollander who, speaking of Pessoa’s influence on Jorge Luis Borges, said that “if Pessoa had never existed Borges would have had to invent him” (HOLLANDER, quoted in LISBOA, 1995: 298).

Of his more well-known heteronyms there is Alberto Caeiro, an uneducated shepherd, who was also a master poet, and recognized as such by two of his disciples, the doctor and classicist Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos, a dandy and traveler. “In each of us there is a differingness and a manyness and a profusion of ourselves” (PESSOA, 1988: ii) [*Cada um de nós é varios, é muitos, é uma prolixidade de si mesmos.*] (PESSOA, 2014a: 482), Pessoa wrote in *The Book of Disquiet*, which in fact speaks to the Portuguese condition, that very *portugalidade* to which I refer above.

I first became aware of the poetry of Fernando Pessoa in 1994, when I was in the early stages of uncovering my Azorean Portuguese heritage, trying to learn the language, and beginning an inquiry into its impact on my own identity. I had read Camões’ *Lusiads* in translation, but Pessoa was my first exposure to a 20<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese poet—and he was multiple poets in one!

That December, I attended a reading at Poets House in New York by the translator Richard Zenith and the contemporary Portuguese poets Nuno Júdice and Pedro Tamen. Pessoa was the topic of much discussion that evening. I then read everything I could get my hands on, made my own feeble attempt at translating a



few of Pessoa's poems, and dipped into Margaret Jull Costa's 1991 translation of *Livro do Desassossego*, *The Book of Disquiet*. It was a whole new world opening to me—a world I hadn't really known existed and certainly hadn't considered it to be a part of me. (Not yet.)

(As an aside, Pessoa's sense of mythmaking pervaded my own early, artistic life, specifically several stages where I adopted personas as an artist and writer. Not to the extent of Pessoa, obviously; I didn't create birthdates and back-stories for my pseudonymous personas. My personas included: Dash Beatcomber, the lead singer and bass player for the post-punk band Active Driveway; Harpo Rimbaud, an existential surrealist, founder of the 'zine *Existence* and author of a couple of obscure cut-up style, self-published novels; and even Duarte Pereira, a fictional Portuguese ancestor who served as the diaristic chronicler of Miguel Corte Real's final voyage in search of his brother—this last an abandoned section of my as yet unfinished hybrid-literature project, *Providence: A Poem of Discovery*.)

Some twenty-four years later, I finally made it to Lisbon, after spending a few weeks as a Disquiet International resident on my great-grandparents' island of São Miguel in the Azores. My wife snapped a humorous photograph of me sitting and chatting with the statue of Pessoa in front of the famed Café Brasileira in Lisbon. To me, however, an even more poignant photograph is the one she took through a frosted-glass door in the Casa Fernando Pessoa. A clear silhouette of the poet appears in the center of the glass, allowing the viewer to peek through into the room.

In the photograph, I am standing on the other side of the glass, peering through Pessoa's clear silhouette. It is as if all "the others in me" (PESSOA, 2002: 175)—Pessoa's "os outros em mim" (PESSOA, 2014a: 130) from *Livro do Desassossego*—are peering through the glass, echoing another line of Pessoa's from the same book: "What we see isn't what we see but what we are" (PESSOA, 2002: 148) [*O que vemos, não é o que vemos, senão o que somos*] (PESSOA, 2014a: 444). All the others in me—my Portuguese ancestors who settled on the Azores in the mid-1400s and those from the Alentejo before them, looking through the glass at the viewer, are my Pessoa—or, rather, *a minha pessoa*—myself.

Which brings me to my own reckoning with my Portuguese—or, more precisely, my Azorean Portuguese identity, which was denied to me in my youth through my maternal grandfather's own identity creation as an American and denial of his heritage, and my father's denigration of my Portuguese ancestry through his Scots-Irish bigotry. For many years, this contributed to my own traumatic memory—a pervasive sense of shame and consequent denial and concealment that I carried into my early adulthood—until, through discovering the work of Pessoa and returning to the island of my ancestors in the middle of the Atlantic, I have finally embraced my heritage and begun to reconcile my own *portugalidade*, my own *açorianidade*.



Fig. 1. All “the others in me” peering through the glass.

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2167/laic266.0>

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