

Pessoa and personification: The early stories in English

[Pessoa e personificação:
As primeiras histórias em inglês]

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Keywords

Fantastic, Fernando Pessoa, Metafiction, Personification, Short story.

Abstract

This essay focuses on four short stories written in English by Fernando Pessoa in a two-year period (1906-1907), between his definite return to Portugal from South Africa and his reacquisition of Portuguese as a language of literary writing. It argues that personification, or prosopopeia, is the central figure of Pessoa's lesser-known fantastic fiction, whereby he explores the metaphorical possibilities of prose while also developing his signature metafictional register. By analyzing the four stories and offering a meditation on their specificities and their different versions of personification, a final hypothesis is formulated as to the relevance of this figure of rhetoric for the creation of characters, or *personae*, and for Pessoa's formation as a 'failed' or perhaps a successful fiction-writer.

Palavras-chave

Fantástico, Fernando Pessoa, Metaficção, Personificação, Conto.

Resumo

Este artigo incide sobre quatro contos escritos em inglês por Fernando Pessoa num espaço de dois anos (1906-1907), entre o seu regresso definitivo a Portugal, da África do Sul, e a sua reaquisição do português como uma língua de escrita literária. Defende-se que a personificação, ou prosopopeia, é a figura central da ainda pouco conhecida ficção fantástica de Pessoa, por meio da qual ele explora as possibilidades metafóricas da prosa ao mesmo tempo que desenvolve o seu característico registo metafictional. A partir da análise das quatro histórias e de uma reflexão em torno das suas especificidades e das suas diferentes versões da personificação, formula-se uma hipótese final relativamente à importância desta figura de retórica para a criação de personagens, ou *personae*, e para a formação de Pessoa enquanto ficcionista 'falhado', ou, porventura, bem-sucedido.

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Fernando Pessoa, the short-story writer?

The question in the title of this introduction has been formulated before with different meanings and from multiple angles of inquiry.¹ But it always signals a degree of surprise with the possibility that, apart from “his true vocation” as a poet, Pessoa may have been a “ficcionista” (QUADROS, 1981: 127), or a short-story writer worthy of the epithet. It was Fernando Luso Soares who first introduced Pessoa to the world as an author of genre fiction, with the publication in 1953—in the May, June, and July issues of *Investigação*, a monthly periodical on “science and crime literature”—of a mixture of deftly woven fragments and excerpts from Pessoa’s detective stories, along with notes, comments and interpretations, “revelando uma nova faceta literária do poeta” (SOARES, 1953: 59) [*uncovering a new literary side to the poet*].²



Fig. 1. *Investigação: Revista Mensal de Ciência e Literatura Policial* (Issue 1, May 1953).

Opinions on this new facet, however, were never unanimous. António Quadros’ belief that poetry was the “true vocation” of Pessoa is echoed in Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa’s groundbreaking study, *Fernando Pessoa e a Literatura de Ficção*, where SOUSA—despite her dedication to the field—claims that Pessoa “failed as a

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² All translations from sources in a language other than English are my own.

short-story writer”, producing only “psychological texts” (1978: 10). Contrastingly, ten years later, Massaud MOISÉS would defend that the intellectual “apparatus” of Pessoa’s stories is precisely what places him “alongside, or even above, the great masters of the genre” (1988: 123). More recently, in his review of two collections of stories edited by Ana Maria Freitas, Jorge Uribe reminds us that the unfinished and scattered nature of Pessoa’s fiction is not so different from that of other areas of his oeuvre, which, nevertheless, have been more promptly recognized, published, and studied. The relative neglect may have to do, the reviewer suggests, not so much with the compositional situation of these texts, but with the “lack of discussion around the limits of ‘short story’ and ‘fiction’ as categories applied to Pessoa’s writing” (URIBE, 2016: 564).

In any case, the first collection of stories by Pessoa to appear in book form was *O Banqueiro Anarquista e Outros Contos de Raciocínio*, in 1964, with a preface by Luso Soares, giving “O Banqueiro Anarquista” an iconic status and making it the paradigm for Pessoa’s prose fiction. This enduring perception of “O Banqueiro Anarquista” as a landmark text also stems from the author’s ambitious plans and expectations with regard to this story—the only published during his lifetime, in a 1922 issue of *Contemporânea*—, as mentioned in the two January 1935 letters to Adolfo Casais Monteiro (cf. PESSOA, 1980; 1986).

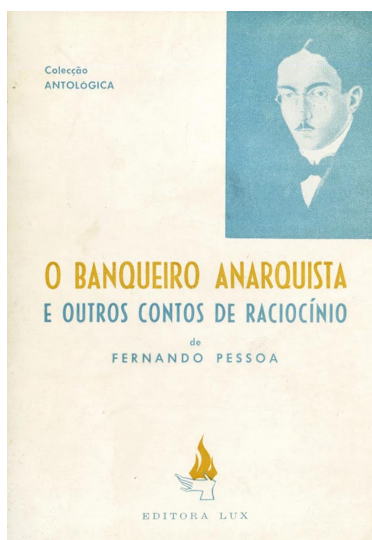


Fig. 2. *O Banqueiro Anarquista e Outros Contos de Raciocínio*, edited by Fernando Luso Soares (Lisboa: Lux, 1964).

Moreover, in his collection Luso Soares seems to follow the division proposed by António QUADROS in *Fernando Pessoa: A Obra e o Homem*, originally from 1960, between “contos de terror” [horror stories] and “contos de raciocínio” [stories of logic] (1981: 127-133). Luso Soares’ book brings together six works pertaining to the second category, which comprises both detective stories within the realm of crime fiction and deductive stories in a more general sense.

It was again well over a decade later that a new complete story, “A Very Original Dinner” (signed Alexander Search), would be published in fac-simile and translated into Portuguese in the context of Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa’s *Fernando Pessoa e a Literatura de Ficção*. This story, written “in the vein of Gothic fiction” (QUADROS, 1981: 127), was republished in 1988 and accompanied by a second text that Sousa attempted to decipher and puzzle together, and which she also attributes to the *alter ego* Alexander Search: “The Door”, in *Um Jantar Muito Original Seguido de A Porta* (Relógio D’Água). A significant portion of the fragments that make up the known autograph of “The Door” was transcribed and collected once again in 2006, opening the second tome of Jerónimo Pizarro’s critical edition of *Escritos sobre Génio e Loucura* (Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda). By revealing the text in its original language, as well as pointing out significant overlaps between one of the fragments and some of Pessoa’s critical writings about genius, madness, and degeneration, Pizarro’s edition invites its readers to make a “nova apreciação desta história” (cf. PESSOA, 2006: 475) [*new assessment of this story*].

But it was only in 2017, in the final volume of Pessoa’s prose fiction curated by Ana Maria Freitas, *A Porta e Outras Ficções* (Assírio & Alvim), following a new effort to decipher and piece together the text, that “The Door” finally reached the public in its longest (and purportedly more complete) version to date, which also happens to be bilingual, enabling a side-by-side comparison between translated and original text. Furthermore, by collecting this story chronologically with three other texts from the same period, the volume edited by Freitas underscores the place held by “The Door” in Pessoa’s oeuvre as the inaugural short story and his earliest narrative work in English, aside from the detective stories meant for the project of “Tales of a Reasoner”, whose writing started a bit earlier and continued at around the same time.³

Looking into these two groups of stories—related yet slightly contrasting in what comes to matters of genre—brings into evidence the paradoxical quality in the spirit of young Pessoa as a fiction writer torn between his simultaneously “lógica e especulativa” [*logical and speculative*] nature, and “absorvido nas penumbras metafísicas e nas cabalísticas nebulosidades do mundo oculto” (Soares, in PESSOA, 1964: 10) [*absorbed in the metaphysical darkness and kabbalistic shadows of the occult world*]. While a lot more critical attention tends to be paid to the author’s detective fiction, this essay will focus instead on the lesser-known group of fantastic horror stories.⁴

³ Pessoa’s project of “Tales of a Reasoner” materialized partially in the bilingual volume of *Histórias de um Raciocinador* (Assírio & Alvim, 2008). Details about the origins, dates and development of these early crime stories are provided in the introduction by Ana Maria Freitas.

⁴ Apart from the studies cited in this reflection, there are at least four critical references in the field: Gianluca MIRAGLIA’s “F. Pessoa, *The Case of the Science Master*” (1988) and “*Essay on Detective Literature e The Detective Story: dois ensaios de Fernando Pessoa sobre a ficção policial*” (2018); Maria de Lurdes

The early stories in English

Unexplored and very rarely analyzed—and, to the best of my knowledge, never tackled before as a cohesive corpus—, Pessoa's early stories in English were written between early 1906 and late 1907 (according to Ana Maria Freitas, with information sourced from the manuscripts and the author's diaries). As such, their chronology places them at a turning point in Pessoa's own life: between his definite return to Lisbon in 1905, alone, from the city of Durban, in South Africa (where he had spent the previous decade and become, as it were, Anglicized), and the reacquisition of his native Portuguese as a language of creative writing. As Patricio FERRARI and Jerónimo PIZARRO duly remind us, "What Pessoa gained in literary terms during those years was invaluable" (2015: 1). In this context, the consequences of this cosmopolitan experience for him as an author, and for his early fantastic stories, whereby he maintained a private use of English when he was already back in Portugal for as long as two years, cannot be overstated.

And even though two of the narratives have remained largely unfinished, the two longer ("The Door" and "A Very Original Dinner") and the two shorter texts ("Czaresko" and "The Eyes or *Le Théâtre Ximéra*") are clearly successful in covering a wide range of topics and literary tropes from a two-century tradition of supernatural and Gothic literature that includes but also goes beyond Anglo-American fiction. In these highly experimental stories, Pessoa was able to capture the speculative dimension of the eighteenth-century German and French fantastic *nouvelle*, the "tales of ratiocination" explored by Poe some decades later (cf. POE, 1984: 573), and the "optique clinique" (MARQUER, 2014: 33) [*clinical perspective*] of *fin-de-siècle* fantastic stories, largely based on "nosographie" (34) [*nosography*].

The historical-aesthetic progression of the genre synthesized in Pessoa's stories—from speculation to rationalization, to speculative psychology—is connected to what Massaud MOISÉS calls the "enigma of thought", in an analogy with the "enigma of crime" and the process of narrative investigation conducted in the author's detective stories (cf. 1988: 121). And while, owing also to historical limitations, Massaud MOISÉS is referring to that particular corpus, and not to the stories considered here—the chapter "Fernando Pessoa contista" dates from a 1988 book, picking up material from 1975—, his words could apply as well to Pessoa's horror stories, as narrative texts that seem more akin to "essays of philosophical interrogation", based on exchanges between characters that are less focused on "events" than they are on "concepts" (1988: 84).

SAMPAIO's essay "The Disquiet of Archaeology: Fernando Pessoa's Detective Writings" (2008); and the book by Ana Maria FREITAS, *O Fio e o Labirinto: A Ficção Policial na Obra de Fernando Pessoa* (2016).

However, I would like to argue that, despite their general ‘interrogative mode’⁵, Pessoa’s early horror stories in English do not need to dissolve into the vast ocean of the author’s writings on the question of ‘genius and madness’, to which, nevertheless, they clearly belong as well. Rather, these texts can be more deeply understood when they are not so easily integrated into Pessoa’s ‘philosophical’, trans-generic style. In fact, this essay stands on the premise that the integration of the early fantastic stories into the epistemological strand of the author’s oeuvre must itself be the object of further questioning.

The specifically generic qualities of these stories, explored in the following pages, allow them to resist such homogenization, if ever we are tempted to carry it out to the end, and invite us to look at them more attentively. From the oneiric quote from Jacques Cazotte’s *Le Diable amoureux* that opens “The Door” to the deadly gaze that closes “The eyes”, these four stories place their reader within a particular fictional universe. By itself, this is certainly not enough to make them examples of “orthodox fiction”, with “a story, a place, and characters, etc.” (MOISÉS, 1988: 123). But to some measure their unexplored attributes prevent these stories from disappearing as mere, and mostly incomplete, variations on Pessoa’s general theory of knowledge.

In other words, a close reading of these short stories, which so far have been regarded mainly from a historical, editorial, or purely theoretical viewpoint (with the exception of “A Very Original Dinner”), will hopefully contribute to the discussion that Jorge Uribe finds to be lacking on the specifically “Pessoan short story”. But in broader terms it will also respond to FERRARI and PIZARRO’s claim for the pertinence of studying Pessoa’s “English literary production” (2015: 3). On the one hand, as with the study of the English poetry, it will help to push the discussion forward, beyond the question of literary quality, inviting us instead to ask “what these poems [or these stories] are trying to do, what they express and how they express it, and the ways they foreshadow, in part, what would subsequently take place in Portuguese” (FERRARI; PIZARRO, 2015: 4). On the other hand, analyzing these texts, as opposed to judging them either as failures or triumphs of prose fiction, may reveal new inner echoes and external contrasts, as well as literary elements that make them a field ripe for discovery. One of the most important of those elements is doubtless the figure of personification, here associated crucially with horror and the fantastic.

Supernatural personifications

Personification is obviously endowed with an extraordinary potential to convey the supernatural, or, to use a more illustrative term, the more-than-natural. In fact,

⁵ I develop the notion of ‘interrogative mode’ in prose fiction apropos of Guy de Maupassant’s first-person “madmen narratives”, in *Short Stories, Knowledge and the Supernatural* (REIS, 2022: 149-218).

theoretical as well as critical descriptions of the term tend to underline, even indirectly, the non-mimetic dimension of what was probably “the earliest form of metaphor [...], including anthropomorphization of animals and natural objects, reflecting an animistic worldview” (KENNEDY, 2006: 151). Picking up on Pierre Fontanier’s early view of prosopopoeia as a figure “staging absent, dead, supernatural or even inanimate beings” (RIFFATERRE, 1985: 107), Michael Riffaterre sums it up in thought-provoking terms as the “mimesis of a natural impossibility” and “a figure of figurality itself” (1985: 110). Now, personification and prosopopoeia are generally equated and sometimes distinguished. For Fontanier (and seemingly Riffaterre) they must not be confused. On the contrary, for J. Hillis MILLER there are cases in which a “personification is more properly called a prosopopoeia”, a word that means “etymologically, ‘to give a name, a face, or a voice to something that has none of these’” (2016: 107).

Considering also that the similarities and differences pointed out are often a matter of degree rather than essence—as the two concepts remain intimately related—, a philological and theoretical discussion on personification and/or prosopopoeia is outside the scope of this essay. From these introductory remarks, I would like above all to: (i) retain the notion that personification is an inherently fantastic and a doubly *fictive* mechanism, and (ii) propose that personification, or prosopopoeia, within a family of tropes that include anthropomorphism and animation, is the central figure of Pessoa’s entryway into fiction with his horror stories in English. The following subchapters explore the stories in question by focusing on the changing aspects of personification within them, to arrive at a final argument about the relevance of this figure for Pessoa and the critical conclusions we may derive from Pessoa’s exploration of it as a decisive step in his early (self-)fashioning as a literary author.

Door

Having already described the historical circumstances in which “The Door” came into print, I turn now to the text to try to clarify how its structure and content are deeply correlated. From here on, and regarding the four stories, I always refer to Ana Maria Freitas’ 2017 edition. In it, “The Door” is visibly separated into its two sections: a seemingly impersonal prologue offering a meditation on the topic of madness, its definition and true nature as a superior form of knowledge and truth, as well as on the (in)distinction between a “madman” and a “normal man” (22); and a much longer first-person account, itself divided into several parts, of the relationship between the narrator-protagonist and an “unremarkable” door, in an unremarkable room, in an unremarkable corridor in his Castle (32). Briefly, the story and its source of terror revolve around the incontrollable desire of the protagonist to “give that door a kick with [his] right foot” (34) every time he walked by it. His

narrative covers the different stages of this irresistible kicking impulse, from infancy to boyhood and adult life.

The few existing reflections on this story, sometimes included in very brief paratext (e. g., by Sousa, in PESSOA, 1988: 59-60) are unanimous in pointing out two central aspects: the influence of Edgar Allan Poe and the psychopathological motif, especially important for PIZARRO in *Fernando Pessoa: Entre Génio e Loucura* (cf. 2007: 39-43). In this respect, Maria de Lurdes SAMPAIO observes that both in the setting (the Castle) and in the spatiotemporal indeterminacy of “The Door”, among other textual features, Pessoa is indebted to Poe’s “diegetic universe and fictional repertoire” (2012: 227). In an unpublished dissertation with which Sampaio’s study often communicates, Francisco Miguel Saraiva FINO connects the overarching theme of madness with the literary model of Poe—with textual examples—, framing “The Door” as a contribution to the “progressiva descoberta da contingência tanto do conhecimento positivo como da identidade enquanto valor, e da necessidade de um entendimento dúplice do papel da loucura como superfície que acolhe a alegoria paradoxal de um nível de conhecimento que, pateticamente, não pode ser entendido pelos outros senão por si mesmo” (2009: 165) [*gradual uncovering of the contingency both of positive knowledge and of identity as a value, and of the need for a dual understanding of madness as a surface that welcomes the paradoxical allegory of a degree of knowledge that, pathetically, can only be understood by the self, and not by others*].

While I agree with the general claims made by Sampaio and Fino, I would like to introduce my own reading by relativizing the weight of Poe’s influence on this story. To put it more accurately, I believe we can learn something more or something else about “The Door” if we follow the clue left by Massaud MOISÉS and the crucial difference he captured in his suggestion that “Os seus contos, embora da linhagem dos de Poe, e centrados em casos de polícia, visam mais ao clima poético do raciocínio sofisticado que à elaboração de um pensamento positivo” (1988: 127) [*Pessoa’s short stories, although in the lineage of Poe’s and centered on police cases, aim more at the poetic climate of sophisticated reasoning than at the elaboration of a positive thinking*].

Although Moisés could not have read the reconstituted text of “The Door” by the time he wrote his chapter on Pessoa’s short fiction, the subtle distinction he establishes having other texts in mind emerges in this story from the narrator’s own words, which brings me back to personification and my line of reading:

My powers of mind suffered; my memory and my attention were severely weakened. I regarded deep and unreasonably in me the door as a person, I □
[...] You may have heard or read of the faculty of the human mind which Poe calls “perverseness” and which he asserts to be as surely a human characteristic as any one of the motives or of the intellectual faculties. Poe was both mistaken and not mistaken; but he neglected to analyse this faculty with persistency and with care. I asked myself several questions: What was the soul of the door? What was the door? How was it mysterious?

(PESSOA, 2017: 44-45)

It is not exactly clear why Pessoa believes that Poe was “both mistaken and not mistaken” in his theory of “perverseness” as an inherent human trait. Perhaps his madman narrator-protagonist means that for him, unlike for Poe, any object or being may become perverse, which makes his door, regarded “as a person” and gifted with a “soul”, an apt candidate. Or perhaps the reason is supposed to remain an enigma. In any case, the explicit mention of Poe includes adherence and divergence, and while critics tend to emphasize the first, they mostly ignore the second, which in fact reemerges in “A Very Original Dinner” (87) as a perhaps compensatory desire to correct Poe, or to outperform him, to innovate from his own ideas.

Apart from asserting Pessoa’s contrast with Poe and his preference for “persistency and care” in the exploration of psychological faculties, the quoted passage brings us to the heart of the matter concerning the personified object. Previous critics have overlooked the fact that there is more to the Door than its “antropomorfização gradual” [*gradual anthropomorphization*] and its “identidade perversa” (FINO, 2009: 165) [*perverse identity*]. As the Door grows in the text as a (perverse) subject, it is more and more identified with the nameless protagonist—or perhaps he identifies with it—in ways that are both manifest and adumbrated in the story.

I will refrain from an exaggerated *interprétation du texte*. But it seems at least worth noting how foot and door share a central double O, as monosyllables engaged in a concussive relationship. This ‘oo’ may be a form of iconographic doubling between the two main entities, the textual author and the object; or a depiction of the enigmas, “the Unknown, the Unconceivable, the Abstract, the Thing” (60), that they circle, and make us circle, around; or even, with a touch of dark humor, a figuration of two pairs of eyes, locked in a mutual stare.

In any case, the impact of foot and door coordinates the beating heart of the story, creating a mirror effect between the two participants—“a conciliatory kick” (50)—that evolves from the prosopopeic language initially used by the fictional writer to refer to the Door, equated with “a person whose attraction is in his *face*” (44, emphasis in the original), into the sharing of (enigmatic) attributes and the development of a masochistic drive by which the narrator-protagonist sees himself as the object of aggression, as the Door: “there was a motive obscure and unperceivable in me. [...] I longed to move, to run, to tire myself, to kick myself, to martyrize my body, to inflict pain upon myself” (56).

Ultimately, there are obvious parallels between the narrator’s search for “the hidden nature of a door” and his mission to “tell what manner of man I am” (62). But it is when the story becomes the most allegorical that it also becomes the most psychological, with the opening of the door giving access to the narrator’s psyche, at the same time as its collapse signals also the collapse of his mind, from dreamed-up grief, in a frenzy of personification(s) and dematerialization:

The door opening disclosed my wife sleeping on the bed with my child.

[...] You cannot imagine the diabolic grin of the lightening, the stealthy voicelike, unvoicelike nullness of the rumble. There was something more than a gapper of a wall in that flash; in that thunder there was more than sound—there was in there—I felt it in a paroxysm—the spirit of the door, the incarnate door—the essence of the door, the noumenon, the door in itself. [...] The walls, I tell you, fell in. It fell indeed. They fell on the bed and broke it down. Part crushed to nothing the fair body of my wife; part (curse, smashed □) crushed the body of my child to nothing, to pulp, to rottenable suff, to not living dirt, to dust, to matter, matter, matter. (PESSOA, 2017: 60-62)

The protagonist's mind acquires an architectural outline that, accepting echoes from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, characterizes a family of narratives by madmen whose minds are equated with closed-off, invaded or ruined houses. We have only to think of Guy de Maupassant's "Le Horla" (1887) or Henry James's "The Jolly Corner" (1908). But the collapse of the Door and the walls around it, like a pre-modernist, fragmentary mental edifice that does not seem to have a ceiling or to represent the Castle at the diegetic level, does not end the story. Instead, it gives way to a third section (thematically speaking) in which the family drama staged immediately before is seemingly nonexistent, and in which the fictional writer offers several pages of self-analysis, until he can formulate the concluding statement: "This is the manner of man I am" (74).

From the personification of the Door to the objectification of the writer-narrator who the personified Door conflates with, "The Door" seems to hinge on an irresolvable reciprocity between subject as self (the narrative "I") and subject as subject matter (the Door which the story is about). As we will see, this is also a fundamental feature of "A Very Original Dinner".

Dinner

Despite being the most well-known of Pessoa's stories from the 1906-1907 period, "A Very Original Dinner" seems to keep critics wrapped up in questions around its 'originality' and clinging on to the most salient aspects of the text, plucked up either from plot or theme, to try to make sense of it, such as the "influência decisiva de Poe" (SAMPAIO, 1994: 249) [*decisive influence of Poe*] or the psycho-anthropological topic of primitive cannibalism (JACKSON, 2010). But, in the manner of Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw", the story seems to twist on itself and resist a fixed interpretation, thus acting out, at the textual level, the same labyrinthine mystery lying at its core, and in pursuit of which the character of Herr Prosit sends the narrator and the other members of the Gastronomical Society over which he presides. For the reader, as well as for his cognate in the story, Meyer, the narrator and 'reasoner' who must interpret the clues at his disposal, this is a guessing game.

It seems safe to say, though, that apart from its indebtedness to a literary tradition harking back to Shakespeare (cf. SAMPAIO, 1994: 249) and Greek literature,

cannibalism is here inextricably linked to the ‘mental’ topic and the reflections on madness that run through all four of Pessoa’s horror stories. In fact, “psychological aberration” and, again, the clear resonance of Poe seem to be what makes Maria Leonor Machado de SOUSA argue that “The Door” and “A Very Original Dinner” “should be considered together” (1978: 59-60). With this in mind, I suggest focusing on a different point that not only relates these two texts but also helps us understand a story that, as extraordinary as it is, Maria de Lurdes SAMPAIO believes should not be regarded as “fantastic” (1994: 248).

Perhaps the most fundamental reason to consider “A Very Original Dinner” together with “The Door” is a properly textual one which has not been mentioned before. I refer to the fact that both stories revolve, rather obsessively, around the constitution of one figure or character: in one case, the nameless writer-narrator whose own story is intended at portraying or telling “the manner of man” he is; in the other, the strange and paradoxical host, Herr Wilhelm Prosit, who vows to offer the “very original dinner” of the title to a Society that includes the “observant” narrator (PESSOA, 2017: 82), mostly occupied with digressions *about* Prosit.

While it has been noted that the narrator is engaged in an “*caracterização exaustiva de Prosit*” [*exhaustive characterization of Prosit*] and that Prosit is surrounded by “*uma aura de mistério*” (SAMPAIO, 1994: 255) [*an aura of mystery*], the possibility of him being the true mystery in the story seems to have escaped the critical eye. Instead, the focus is insistently placed on the missing “*chave para o enigma de Prosit (a originalidade do jantar)*” (SAMPAIO, 1994: 262-263) [*key to Prosit’s enigma (the originality of the dinner)*], and on the possible twists and turns of the “hidden ‘originality’ of Prosit’s devilish dinner scheme” (JACKSON, 2010: 34). But Prosit’s enigma is Prosit himself. At the very least, he is a concurring enigma—one more powerful and enduring—to the mystery of his dinner, which is simply cleared up and is a mystery no longer. The important distinction between Prosit’s mysterious scheme and his enigmatic self also helps us realize that the “exhaustive characterization” of Prosit is in more than one sense an act of personification.

Before elaborating on this point, I would like to suggest that if for Poe the modernizing (and anti-folkloristic) rationalization of the unnatural element entails a decipherment of the enigma, and often a moral conclusion, for Pessoa the proto-modernist process of reasoning and internal focalization is intrinsically amoral and supernatural. As we have learned from “The Door”, his form of subjectivized narration may be confessedly limited, but it is not hindered by the same limitations that constrain the natural world, it reflects the structure of the subjectivized story(telling), which reflects it back, textually speaking, instead of trying to contain it, and the enigmas that it wonders around tend to become only more convoluted. Pessoa’s stories of fantastic horror are incompatible with the explanatory denouement of some of Poe’s oft-cited works.

Penetration into the secret is emphatically not the aim of Pessoa's horror stories, a fact which turns their intellectual structure, fantastically, on its head. This materializes as an anti-conventional, and in that sense quite 'original', preference for mysterious exteriority. In "A Very Original Dinner", the "external view of the President's character"—the "tendencies" of whom "disappeared by excessive obviousness, passed gradually into the domain of the unconscious; became unperceived, ended imperceptible" (PESSOA, 2017: 90)—has its fictional antecedent in the pure faciality of the Door: "Could I, you inquire, go into the room? No, the inner side of the door did not interest me; it was the outer side—the one to the passage—which was wrecking my mind and my spirit. The inner side interested me but as the back light of a person whose attraction is in his *face*" (44, emphasis in the original).

This makes it all the more significant that in the only story of the four analyzed here in which there is an explanation (the contents of the dinner and the human origin of the meat served therein), the narrator explicitly distances himself and his rendering of the events from Poe, whom he accuses of a tendency for generalization: "Poe gave to the complex sentiments that inspire them [cases like Prosit's], thinking they were but one, the general name of perverseness. But this case I chronicle, and no more" (PESSOA, 2017: 84-86). In other words, Poe's concept is insufficient to account for the entire complexity of cases, and the case chronicled in this story is only this one, and no other.

Pessoa is 'original' with regard to the American master because he projects the enigma well beyond the level of plot and intrigue—where it may be banalized so as to become a formula, a literary stereotype, a recipe repeated and copied out in successive meals—, while still energizing it as a narrative catalyst, and keeping it within the realm of art and literary creation. This interpretation partly elaborates on K. David JACKSON's understanding that the gastronomical tedium of the Society and Prosit's challenge to it may contain an aesthetic commentary, "a veiled definition of what avant-garde originality meant for Pessoa" (2010: 31). Indeed, Pessoa places the dark kernel of "sophistical reasoning" (Moisés)—textualized as inconclusive and consequently 'mad' narration—not on the distant metaphysical sphere, but on the metafictional sphere. His fictional creatures are what is truly 'original', unique, and irreproducible about these stories: the first-person narrator of "The Door" and the unintelligible character of Herr Prosit.

The more profound mystery in "A Very Original Dinner", and the main questions for the story's narrator, Meyer, and its fictional author, Alexander Search, may very well be: who/what is Prosit as a character, and how can he 'be' at all?

Maria de Lurdes SAMPAIO argues that within "um código de representação realista (por oposição a fantástico)" [*a code of realist representation (as opposed to fantastic)*] the narrator cannot become demiurgic so as to "penetrar a interioridade das suas personagens" (1994: 256-257) [*penetrate the interiority of his characters*], further elaborating that from the subsequent process of watching and interpreting

in the story “só pode resultar a incerteza e a ambiguidade, abrangendo quer o objecto (des)focado (Prosit) quer o sujeito que o foca (o narrador)” (SAMPAIO, 1994: 257) [*can only result uncertainty and ambiguity, affecting the (un)focused object (Prosit) as much as the focal subject (the narrator)*]. While I agree with Sampaio that—in contrast with the dreamlike surrealism, as it were, of “The Door”—this story plays with notions of verisimilitude, keeping within the limits of the “possible” (262), I think this hardly turns it into a realist text. In fact, its entire epistemological framework may be considered a generic trait that, to use Jacques NEEFS’ words on Maupassant’s “Le Horla”, abides by “L’affirmation de réalité qui caractérise le fantastique du xix^e siècle (avec le protocole de l’authentification, de l’expérimental, de l’interrogation savante et informée)” (1980: 232) [*the affirmation of reality that characterizes the nineteenth century fantastic (with the protocol of authentication, of experimentation, of wise and informed questioning)*].

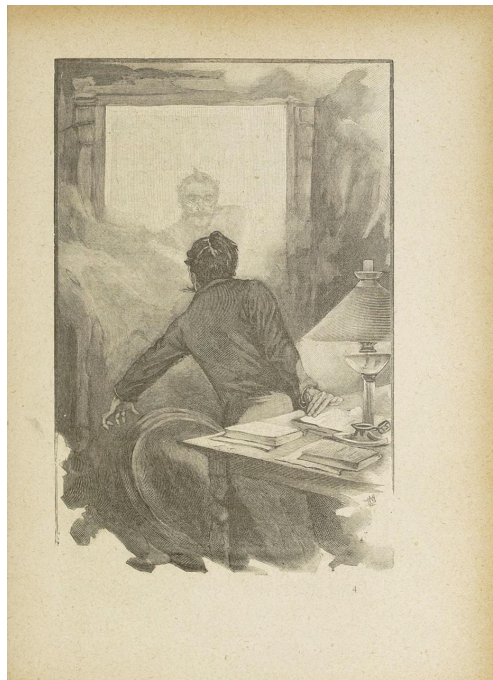


Fig. 3. *Le Horla* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1908). Illustration drawings by William Julian-Damazy, engravings by Georges Lemoine. Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Self-questioning and non-omniscient narrators, who cannot see all and tell all, as well as ‘uncertainty’ and ‘ambiguity’, are often essential features of the fantastic, in opposition to the “realist vision, claiming the conquest of sight and the visual image in realms where they could not hitherto penetrate” (BROOKS, 2005: 227). This is especially pertinent, from a critical standpoint, since Tzvetan Todorov’s landmark theorization in the 1970s. In the context of this reflection, it means that the fantastic in Pessoa must not be conceptualized in terms of a supernatural world *per se*, but as a narrative strategy that nuances the ‘codes’ of the text and allows it to become supernatural, even if the world represented in it is not.

Prosit is an impossible character in a possible story world. This is, in my view, the crux of the matter. For, apart from a sign of ponderation aimed at earning the reader's trust, the contradictions in the narrator's description of Prosit are the result of painstaking attempts to portray a character who is contradictory in every aspect, a real chimaera, on par with the "Ximéra" of the final story. Prosit is more than a simply complicated character with a quasi-realist background "in the Colonies—in Africa, or in India, or elsewhere" (PESSOA, 2017: 106), possibly hinting at Pessoa's own South African experience at the same time as blurring its exact coordinates. His defining traits are so unstable and mutually exclusive that he becomes impossible to characterize, that is, he can never become a full-fledged and acceptable character, in a clear indication of Pessoa's parodic and self-reflexive approach to fiction.

Prosit was "thoughtful", "he was silent", "he was serious", and he was also "all joy and all laughter" (PESSOA, 2017: 80). Prosit "was ardent, impulsive, at bottom coarse and rude", but "[n]o man could put him into a rage" (88). He was "coarse, brutal, of impulse, yet never behaving brutally in the showing of rage and of aggressiveness, never impulse in ire" (88). "He carried others along with him by the violence of his energy", but he was "always ready to please, to be pleasant" (88-89). The examples could go on, but these passages substantiate at least two assumptions: (i) the narrator's descriptive caution and his "protocol of authentication" are an outright farce, because he can see through Prosit and well beyond the limits of visible evidence; (ii) Prosit is an immense joke as a character, a nonsensical and uncontainable construct that, in the end, must be expelled from the text—through defenestration—because of what he personifies.

I am not exactly referring to what Prosit 'incarnates' as a character, like, for example, repressed and explosive violence; though we can certainly reverse the narrator's rhetoric and, instead of seeing the storm as an apt "simile" (80) for Prosit's character, see Prosit himself as the quiet embodiment of tempestuous anger, a form of primitive ritualism, or autocratic, self-regulated savagery (which would perhaps be in line with K. David Jackson's psychoanalytical reading). What I mean is the way in which Prosit becomes a "figure of figurality" (Riffaterre) in this text. As an impossible character, fantastic for being ambiguous in the truest sense of the word, Prosit ironically personifies the (im)possibilities of fictional characterization. In doing so, he also reminds us that personification is not simply a decorative tool at the writer's disposal, but the basis for character-making. Personification stages the drama of "being" in fiction, thus prefiguring in these stories the "drama em gente" of Pessoa's "Tábua Bibliográfica" (PESSOA, 2007: 127).

If Massaud MOISÉS already asserted that some of Pessoa's narratives "should be considered more exactly essays of philosophical inquiry, in line with Platonic dialogues" (1988: 117), a reading of "A Very Original Dinner" focused on Prosit's metafictional character can reveal yet another layer—personification as figurality—in the nexus between philosophy and theatricality, or thinking and acting. In *The Poetics*

of *Personification*, James J. PAXSON invites us to “note that the general notion of prosopopeia as a method of character invention has an allied source in Greek drama and the philosophical dialogue. At the openings of Plato’s dialogues or of the plays of Euripides, we often find a rubric called *prosopa* (‘faces’ or ‘masks’), meaning *dramatis personae*” (1994: 12-13).

In this respect, even Prosit’s name—itsself a small enigma for which solutions have been proposed (cf., e. g., JACKSON, 2010: 29-30)—may point to his nature as *dramatis persona*. A new possibility, coherent with my interpretation, is to see the name Prosit as the contracted form of either of two longer designations, one that he already carries as an epithet and one that must be spelled out by the reader: President, his function in the intrigue, and Protagonist, his function in the story.

Odd names for characters that personify characterization are responsible for linking the nameless narrator of the first story to his ‘invented’ character and antagonist, called ‘the Door’, as well as possibly revealing Prosit as a character-function in the text: an ungraspable signifier that can only elicit an “excessive” but “defective” analysis (PESSOA, 2017: 90) leading to its/his own nullification. But odd names are also a characteristic of the other two, unfinished, stories, both bearing their characters’ names in the title.

Death

“Czaresko” and “The Eyes or *Le Théâtre Ximéra*” may also be regarded as a special pair within the quartet of Pessoa’s stories in English by their common association with death and the macabre. This is not to say that they introduce the macabre into Pessoa’s fantastic writing, but that they are mainly centered on an aspect already discernible, for instance, in the (hallucinatory?) crushing of the bodies of the narrator’s wife and child in “The Door”; or, to add to the more obvious examples of Prosit’s ‘original’ dinner and his subsequent homicide, the ghoulish expression in his chimeric face, in what may be read as a direct antecedent of Ximéra’s deadly glance (and a consummation of the ‘facial’ trope inaugurated in “The Door”): “That laughing face lacked animation. Its perpetual smile seemed the grotesque grin of those on whose faces the sun is striking, the natural contraction there of the muscles before a strong light; here, as a perpetual expression, most unnatural and most grotesque” (PESSOA, 2017: 82).

The pathway into morbidity is different in each of these texts, while tying both of them to an earlier tradition based on key interrelated literary motifs that they also capture: (i) psychic phenomena, hypnosis, spirit communication, and automatic writing; (ii) life after death, the world of the beyond, and revivification, with faint echoes of Mary Shelley’s iconic story of galvanism.

Another point in common is the fact that writing becomes a prominent metafictional problem in both texts. That is, by developing a trait subtly present in

the larger stories, these narratives deal with the circumstances of their own writing and telling as a main narrative theme. In this respect, we should note that albeit incomplete “Czaresko” is a fully functional frame story in the fantastic vein, deploying a narrative device of ‘authentication’, that is, the story within the frame is a first-person account and a ‘real’ testimony simply transmitted by the frame-narrator. This generic setup is doubtless evocative of Maupassant’s ‘madmen’ narratives as well as James’s quintessential frame story relating the protagonist’s firsthand account, “The Turn of the Screw”; both of which I have mentioned before, the latter having also been included by K. David JACKSON in a list of stories possibly ‘available’ to Pessoa, and which combine “qualities of the gothic novel—madness, the supernatural, and decay—with those of mystery and detective fiction, particularly the use of intuition and astute logic” (2010: 29).

More specifically, the frame narrative of “Czaresko”, told by an external witness to Professor Tremoulet’s mostly fraught experiences of metempsychosis on Mlle. Schultz, a young medium and the Professor’s lover, gives way to a reproduction of the manuscript automatically written by Mlle. Schultz while in a state of “spiritual inspiration” (PESSOA, 2017: 146), possessed by Czaresko. So, the real author of the text conveyed in the story is not on the side of the living, a fact which he emphasizes in his opening statement: “I am dead” (PESSOA, 2017: 146).

Once again, by reanimating the dead writer and allowing him to ‘act’ through the body of Mlle. Schultz, Pessoa relies on the power of personification as more than a rhetorical trick for the embellishment of literary language, and as the central tool of fictionality, the ability to “*prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face” (MAN, 1984: 76). What is more, even the communicative chain of the *séance* mimics Paul de MAN’S definition of prosopopoeia as “the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech” (1984: 76).

It should also be noted how this story confirms Pessoa’s understanding and use of personification as a figure of fiction that is also a figure of the fantastic, or, to put it in terms that better illustrate the fictional proposition of “Czaresko”: a figure of fiction-writing as an intrinsically fantastic action or deed. Therefore, Tremoulet, the hypnotist and scientist in the story, is not driven by belief in the miraculous, but instead by “imagination” (PESSOA, 2017: 142). As much as he tries to communicate with the dead, we are told that Tremoulet “never believed it possible to get information as to the problem of existence” (144). Consequently, what a less attentive reader may interpret as an epistemological quest is really a smokescreen for the Professor’s interest in great characters and his wish, as a “shivering”, as suggested in his name, *fictionista*, that he “might prevail on the souls of Caesar, or of Alexander, or of St. Augustine or of Pope Gregory the seventh” (144).

Taken individually, neither the frame narrative nor Czaresko’s and Mlle. Schultz collaborative document are in themselves fantastical. The fantastic is born

from the interval between the two, a metafictional bridge between frame story and framed manuscript that allows dead Czaresko the gift of eloquence, necessary for the text to appear on the side of reality. Writing is thus presented itself as a supernatural or unrealistic activity, even if a skeptical reader finds the story nothing more than a hoax and a *coup de théâtre*, or an involuntary fabrication from Mlle. Schultz under hypnosis.

We cannot simply try to rationalize Pessoa's story because the natural vs. supernatural ambiguity that characterizes Todorovian versions of the fantastic is not a main concern here. In the modern(ist) framework of the 'clinical fantastic' such as explored by Pessoa, with a focus on psychopathology, the hesitation "ne peut plus être formulée en termes d'opposition axiologique (la raison/le rêve ou la folie; le réel/le surnaturel)" (MARQUER, 2014: 26) [*can no longer be formulated in terms of an axiological opposition (rationality/dreams or madness; the real/the supernatural)*]. Unlike Poe and Auguste Dupin, who believe "in the ability of the human mind to explain an incomprehensible universe" (MARCH-RUSSELL, 2009: 16), Pessoa and Tremoulet do not. Although they pose questions, they are not interested in the philosophy of (in)comprehension as much as in the philosophy of figuration, the process that enables fictive things, like Czaresko's proposopoic voice and his manuscript, to be, to emerge in the world.⁶

As we have seen with the two stories previously analyzed, it would also be fruitless to ask for an explanation for Pessoa's enigmas. In fact, these texts are founded on the inexplicability and spectacular opaqueness of their characters as figures of fiction. Like Prosit and the first-person narrator of "The Door"—along with the Door itself—, Czaresko's character is manifest, yet also untraceable and disidentified in his own words:

My name on earth was Czaresko, but it matters not from what country I was, nor where I lived nor in which nation. I came of an ancient and very proud family long impoverished and broken up ere I was born, the descendants of it scattered all over the earth and forced to earn their bread. My own father died a month after the day of my birth.

(PESSOA, 2017: 146)

⁶ The seldom, if ever, noted contrast I am trying to reinforce here, perhaps reflective of a broader shift from nineteenth-century culture to a modernist perspective that is closer to Pessoa's own world, is based on Poe's approach to rationality within fiction, incompatible with—even if seemingly related to—what we find in Pessoa and, if not so much in his crime fiction, in his early fantastic stories. MARCH-RUSSELL synthesizes this, precisely, in his analysis of Poe's explorations of the literary hoax: "Despite Poe's dissolute reputation, including his fascination with the violent, the perverse and the uncanny, he was ultimately a rationalist. As Poe shows in the stories featuring his detective hero, Auguste Dupin, he believed in the ability of the human mind to explain an incomprehensible universe" (2009: 16).

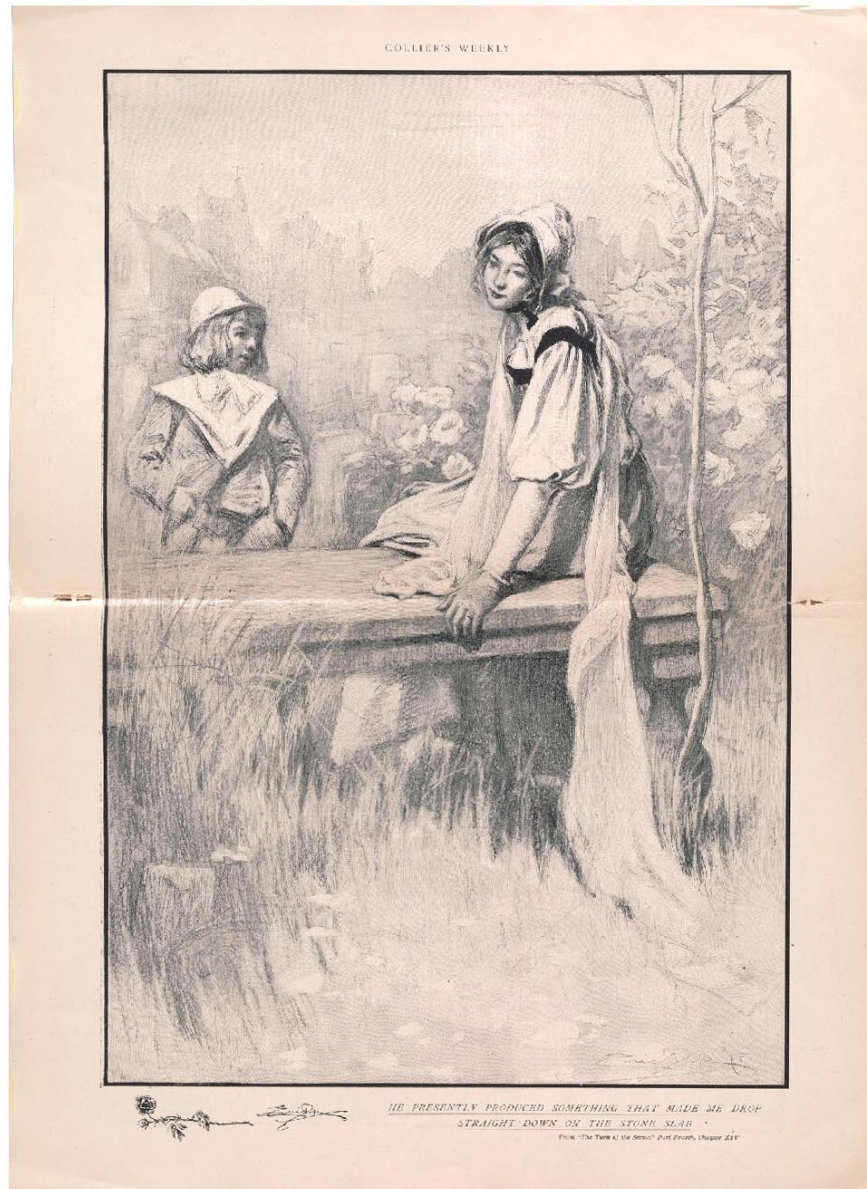


Fig. 4. *The Turn of the Screw*, *Collier's Weekly* illustration by Eric Pape, 18 March 1898. Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The theatrical or spectacular dimension of Pessoa's fantastic writing had an unfinished apotheosis in "The Eyes or *Le Théâtre Ximéra*". However, before delving into the last story, it is perhaps worth noting that apart from a general and possibly indirect influence, James's ghost story "The Turn of the Screw" may have left a more visible impression on "Czaresko". Interestingly, the connection has less to do with fantastic ambivalence, or the device of frame narration, or the ghostly trope, than with characterization and the nature of perversity. The topic of 'perverseness' in Pessoa is insistently traced back to Poe, in accordance with Pessoa's explicit references. But this story invites us to consider an alternative or a complementary source for the "evil beyond expression" (148) in James's short story and in the character of young Miles, with whom Czaresko shares more than a few traits.

Not only, like Miles, does Czaresko have a sister, “two years older”, as he also forms with her an enchanting duo, her liveliness pairing beautifully with his timidity: “My sister grew up a feisty, unquiet, beautiful child, myself a quiet, obedient and pleasing boy, not less beautiful as a boy than my sister was a girl. She charmed all strangers by her vivacity, I pleased them by my quiet ways” (148). But Pessoa’s parodic take on the Jamesian topic becomes more suggestive when Czaresko describes the setting of his corrupted innocence, at twelve, as a boarding-school, the same kind of “great and famous establishment” (148) from which, in James’s text, Miles is expelled, returning to Bly imperceptibly changed in the wake of unsayable deeds, which may in fact have been the consequence of a preparatory corruption at home, a home where “the imagination of all evil *had* been opened up to him” (JAMES, 1999: 63, emphasis in the original):

But when I entered that school, how great a change was wrought in me; yet myself was conscious of no change. All this I felt, had been in me, it had only come forth, it had not risen new. From a good, quiet obedient boy, I became a coarse, scoundrelly blackguard, yet I was but a boy. It is needless, [needless] to say what was done at that school: is [it] not done at all schools; are not in our days the very cradles of infancy beds and places of filth, were there not vices allwhere more horrible than ought can tell.

(PESSOA, 2017: 150)

As with the two protagonists analyzed before, Czaresko’s indescribably vicious nature—like that of Miles—, although ‘extended’ as much as his supernatural text, vicariously authored by Mlle. Schultz, remains by and large an enigma, while his character and his written testimony coil upon themselves in an image of the ultimately deep and silent ungraspable: “as pearls, listless in profoundest ocean” (PESSOA, 2017: 150).

Although Ximéra does not take part in his own story as an otherworldly author, the text of “The Eyes or *Le Théâtre Ximéra*” is wrought with narratorial commentary, and writing is construed in the story in association with the drama of that same name. The chiasmic name serves at the same time the two entities connected and disjointed in the title: the man and his ‘eyes’ (Ximéra) and the ‘theatre’ place (*Ximéra*).

In other words—returning to the theoretical premises of personification—, the character is a theatre, and the theatre is a character. Pessoa’s final fantastic story in English stages the drama of fiction-making by equating character with *persona*. Perhaps no longer surprisingly in the context of this comparative reading with the other stories, those two notions converge to transform the protagonist into the true enigma in the text:

No one knew, I have not succeeded in knowing to what family Ximéra belonged, where he had been born, ay, even the easier circumstance of his age. Some say he seemed 40, others that he looked thirty; some seem to believe that he was 20 and prematurely aged, others that

he was 50 and unnaturally youthful (in appearance). Does not that already speak something for the impression caused by the man? This indecision as to age, this uncertainty?

(PESSOA, 2017: 158)

As the story of Ximéra's impossible *prosopon*, "The Eyes or *Le Théâtre Ximéra*" deals also with "the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration" (MAN, 1984: 76, emphasis in the original). As such, Ximéra's fantastic appearing act in the world of the story takes place as if he had been, as in fact he was, simply made up: "he appeared suddenly and mysteriously on a certain 5th of August" (PESSOA, 2017: 158). Additionally, the experienced reader may even discern in this passage a faint, early glimmer of Pessoa's later use of dating as a key fictional tool for the creation of his most well-known characters, the three heteronyms 'born' in 1887, 1889 and 1890 (cf. PESSOA, 1986: 199). But in the context of this story Ximéra's face, and not his biography, is what becomes the object of all (figural) inquiries:

"Figure him to your imagination, to your mind's view", I said.

"I can't. I can only figure his face. I remember no more."

"Then you cannot figure him to yourself. Figure him coming here only, from the end of the street."

"I do. I figure the aspect of his face. And by God, I had never thought before on anything so strange. Good God, how strange it is and I had not thought of it. Strange! I try to recall but I can only see his face."

How then was Ximéra's face? No one seems particularly to remember his hair, but it is believed it was black. His countenance was white, deadly white, with a bluish tinge that does not belong to life. He was hairless. No one remembers the shape of his nose. His mouth... ay, here another horror sets in. [...] Ximéra had *no lips*, in the absolute, not metaphorically speaking.

(PESSOA, 2017: 162, emphasis in the original)

If these passages are suggestive of the "diabolic grin" of "The Door" (60) as well as of Prosit's inanimate and "grotesque" grin (82), the correlation between Ximéra and the protagonist of "A Very Original Dinner" becomes certain with the killing of the "five actors of the *Théâtre Ximéra*" (166)—the same number of Prosit's victims as well as of his colonial servants—, as a consequence of their desire to break the secret of Ximéra's dead body, to "open his eyes and see their expression" (166). Of course, violating the character's closed-off "mask", in an act of forced interpretation, does not solve the enigma. It only brings death upon the other characters by unleashing Ximéra's "unspeakable horrible glance", "intelligible with *INFINITY*" (166, emphasis in the original).

When intelligibility finally arrives to the text, it is married to the infinite, that is, the never experienced nor witnessed, the unfamiliar, that which is impossible to know or understand. Pessoa's concluding statement on the fantastic, in the context of his early stories in English, seems profoundly ironic and intended at leaving his readers as awe-stricken as the five actors of the *Théâtre Ximéra*, the silent witnesses

to a practical impossibility. The narrator's dictate to "Figure him [Ximéra] to your imagination, to your mind's view" (160) is perhaps the invitation to see the impossible that must be addressed, willingly and knowingly, to any reader of fiction.

Self-portrait (as a storyteller)

The overview of Pessoa's horror stories in English presented in the three previous sections allows me to start concluding this reflection with three closing statements. Going back to my initial remarks, I hope that these points of arrival—which are also points of departure for future studies—are a substantial contribution to mitigate what Jorge URIBE finds to be a general "lack of discussion" (2016: 564) about Pessoa's short fiction. They can help us understand what fiction and the short story meant for Pessoa and mean for us when tackling this lesser-known corpus in the context of his vast oeuvre, not by submitting it to a typology of forms or any strict short-fiction theory, but by responding to the challenge to discern what is specific about Pessoa's short fiction and what we may learn from that about him as a writer (in this case, looking closely into his initial stories of the fantastic).

Firstly, we must recognize that despite the unequivocal influence of Poe there are also profound differences between Pessoa and the American author. Moreover, judging by Pessoa's own discussion of the topic of 'imitation' in one of his undated critical writings on Poe, these differences are not only clear for Pessoa, but they are also intentional, allowing him to practice an "imitation of style" while avoiding an "imitation of matter", which he deemed "held to be reprovable" (PESSOA, 2013: 216). Such proximity in terms of style entailing a distinction in terms of matter is perhaps mostly reflected in the stark contrast between Poe's concluding rationalization and Pessoa's inconclusive reasoning, as well as between Poe's narrative enigma, a plot device, and Pessoa's ontological enigma, a metafictional device, that is intrinsic to the genesis of characters as *personae*, or "figures of figurality".

By recognizing this tension, we may better understand, on the one hand, Pessoa's modern(ist) narrative *ars poetica*, and, on the other hand, what he was looking for in fiction at the beginning of his search—heteronymic pun intended—as a literary author. This does not invalidate, by any means, the importance of Poe for Pessoa as a fiction-writer and the relevance of previous studies that have examined that topic. In fact, even Pessoa's claims to disagreement, ventriloquized in his narrators, may be regarded as a rhetorical decoy attesting to his beginner's debt to former models. However, considering this aspect helps us contemplate the true richness of Pessoa's fictional universe and the possibility of other unexplored intertexts, such as James's "The Turn of the Screw", which is not included—as no other work by James is—in Pessoa's known library possessions, although he did show some knowledge, at least, of James's critical writings on Nathaniel Hawthorne (PESSOA, 2013: 132).

Secondly, personification is the central figure of these inaugural stories. It is not only a general feature of Pessoa's metaphorical discourse, enabling him to give human qualities to non-human objects (as well as to objectify human subjects), but, above all, it is a process by which characterization is seen at once as the primordial 'act' of fiction and as an allegory of it. What is more, personification associates with the well-known philosophical and theatrical dimensions of Pessoa's prose for the staging of his fictional drama, or drama of fiction, where characters intervene as actors or *dramatis personae*. More than related to detective fiction, the investigation carried out within the dramatic space of the short story, marked by brevity—or even fragmentation and incompleteness—is authorial and metafictional. As seen in the close readings of the texts, they revolve around writing, around narrative processes, around their incredible possibilities and supposedly credible limitations, and around "character invention" (Paxson) and invented voices and faces that point to the fictionality of fiction, to its fantastic nature such as envisioned by Pessoa.

Lastly, the four main characters in these stories may all be interpreted as variations on a veiled self-portrait of the author as a storyteller. Having explored at length the connection of these characters with textual questions, by way of their intervention as first-person narrators, or figures of fiction that hide behind the text, or interdimensional writers, or, finally, as the elusive 'faces' that command our imagination, I return to "The Door", the first story, to develop this hypothesis in more detail.

At a crucial point in the text, the narrator confesses: "My writings were not one of them finished. [...] I cannot prevent my thought's hatred of finish; [...] My character of mind is that I hate the beginnings and the ends of things, for they are definite points". (PESSOA, 2017: 64). In addition to directly contesting Poe's famous 'unity of effect' as a principle of (short) fiction, this passage reads as a surprisingly accurate prophecy related to the work of Pessoa himself, who had great difficulty in finishing a significant portion of his works (some of them, like the iconic *Book of Disquiet*, being premised on a sort of constitutive incompleteness). It is certainly the "self-analysis" (PIZARRO, 2007: 43) of a dispersive mind, but also the effort of a writer trying to describe, perhaps mostly for himself, his own methods, aspirations, and struggles, based on his hatred of beginnings and endings.

As a metafictional claim, this passage is an interpretive key to "The Door" as a text in which Pessoa tried to know and forge himself as a creator. By the apogee of the story, the narrator tells us that he is "nearly twenty years of age" (44), just like Pessoa, who was between eighteen and nineteen at the time of writing. In an attempt to escape his malaise, the narrator also moves from the "old Castle"—a non-descript symbol of Gothic and possibly Victorian culture—to London, a toponym that sounds quite close to Lisbon, the urban capital where Pessoa had moved back to the previous year. If prosopopoeia is "the trope of autobiography", as Paul de MAN (1984: 76) believes it is, perhaps Pessoa was also using it as a form of blurred

autofiction, to show and to hide himself, to form a fictional face and to cover it with an artistic mask.

These four narratives suggest that from early on, before, and aside from, the main heteronyms and the discussion about his fantastic stories in English belonging to the “semi-heterónimo” [*semi-heteronym*] Alexander Search (Sousa in PESSOA, 1988: 59) or to the “personalidade pré-heteronímica” [*pre-heteronymic personality*] Charles Robert Anon (FINO, 2009: 130), Pessoa investigated the characters of his own creation, or the actors of his literary drama, in search of the most complex enigma: the divided individual, the chimaera, himself and not himself.

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