

# The Website of Disquiet: the first online critical edition of Fernando Pessoa

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PORTELA, Manuel; SILVA, António Rito [orgs.] (2017). [LdoD Archive / Arquivo LdoD / Arquivo LdoD](#) [collaborative digital archive of the *Book of Disquiet* by Fernando Pessoa.] Centre for Portuguese Literature at the University of Coimbra (CLP), 723 encoded fragments <<https://ldod.uc.pt/> | accessed on 16 November 2017>.

With no demerit to the various critical editions of Fernando Pessoa published this year, we may say that 2017 was the year of the *Book of Disquiet*. In the second half of the year, almost simultaneously, the prose masterpiece of Pessoa ventured into two very different territories, with wide implications for Pessoa's reach as an author: a new English translation by Margaret Jull Costa exquisitely published by New Directions, one of the world's leading literature publishing houses; and the [LdoD Archive](#) (*LdoD* as short for *Livro do Desassossego*), a digital collaborative and comparative edition that is nothing short of revolutionary for Pessoa studies. This first online critical edition of Fernando Pessoa, developed and hosted by the University of Coimbra, Portugal, is the focus of this review.

*LdoD* is a multifaceted object: it is a new edition, in digital form, of Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*; it is a portal in which all previous editions of this book may be compared in a variety of ways; it is an archive of high-resolution facsimiles of all original documents pertaining to the project, for the first time accessible to the public; it is a virtual platform through which a user may create her own anthology of Pessoa's book; and, lastly, it is a transparent initiative that shares not only its main product, but also vast documentation of its process (an invaluable by-product for anyone interested in Digital Humanities).

The field of Digital Humanities is perhaps the fastest growing area of interest in the Humanities, covering online courses and journals, as well as digital archives and editions. Since the pioneering publication in 1999 of [Radical Scatters](#), an electronic archive of Emily Dickinson's envelope poems and other late fragments, a new horizon has opened for critical editions: to develop platforms that recreate online the experience of navigating complex oeuvres, such as the ones Dickinson and Pessoa left us. Being nonlinear by nature, the emblematic works of those two authors lend themselves well to a digital reading experience, in which the path is as important as the product. As the editors of *Radical Scatters* put it,

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borrowing a keyword from Paul Virilio (1997: 24),<sup>a</sup> “The hypertext archive offers a new site for an exploration of *trajectivity*,” a concept proposed to play with and transcend the dialectics between objectivity and subjectivity.

Any description of the navigation experience of *LdoD*—or at least one that intends to be coherent with the way the project conceives itself—inevitably pays heed to two features made prominent in the website: mutability and immersion. By the former we refer to the site’s ongoing recreation of a sense of uniqueness and infinitude, that is, of the impression that no two navigation experiences will ever be the same. This is evident right from the start: the homepage (composed of a brief description of the project followed by links to the site’s five main sections: “Reading,” “Documents,” “Editions,” “Search,” and “Virtual”) is introduced by a random quote, from the *Book of Disquiet*, that changes every time the site is refreshed or re-entered (Fig. 1). This rotating quote not only makes room for literary interpretation, as a common epigraph would, but also is accompanied by a link to the entire fragment where it is originally found. This means that the first and most visible link users encounter is one which immediately takes them to the gist of the site: any random fragment that inevitably blurs the notion of a starting point. Thus, by entering the site, users are only one click away from finding themselves amongst the labyrinthine abundance of the *Book of Disquiet*.



Fig. 1. *LdoD* homepage, detail with random quote.

By definition, paper editions fail to reproduce this exact sense of mutability and instant immersion provided by the online nature of *LdoD*. These features also suggest that a sequential description of the navigation would not do justice to the spirit behind this website. Although the homepage header does allow for a more linear navigation, our description will instead try to reproduce how the layout pushes readers into a rather sinuous experience.

Users that were to click on the initial quote would end up amidst the deliberate disquiet of the “Reading” section, whose layout reinforces the idea of

<sup>a</sup> VIRILIO, Paul (1997). *Open Sky*, translated by Julie Rose. London: Verso.

each fragment's mutable ordering. A single shot for each of the book's 723 fragments shows their location within each of the four paper editions. For instance, the layout allows users to read the entire text titled "Nunca deixo saber às minhas sensações" while realizing that it is 296<sup>th</sup> according to the sequence proposed in Jacinto do Prado Coelho's edition, 138<sup>th</sup> in Teresa Sobral Cunha's, 370<sup>th</sup> in Richard Zenith's, and 46<sup>th</sup> in the one edited by Jerónimo Pizarro (Fig. 2). Moreover, going from one fragment to the next is an exercise on exponential possibilities. Following our previous example: a reader may choose to stay in the sequence established by Prado Coelho and read his next or previous fragment, or change the course entirely by reading the next or previous fragment in any of the other three editions. Rarely will any of these choices lead to the same piece. Thus, any attempt to follow a sequential order (intending to read, for instance, any edition's texts 1, 2, 3...) will inevitably be accompanied by at least six alternatives to deviate the course of reading. The possibility of going back and forth between alternative sequences conveys an immediate sense of the difficulties behind the *Book of Disquiet's* editorial process, while replacing a diachronic hierarchy with a horizontal dialogue among all editions.

JACINTO DO PRADO COELHO	TERESA SOBRAL CUNHA	RICHARD ZENITH	JERÓNIMO PIZARRO		RECOMMENDATION
<b>296</b> ← →	<b>138</b> ← →	<b>370</b> ← →	<b>46</b> ← →	<b>NUNCA DEIXO SABER ÀS MINHAS SENSACÕES</b>	JP <b>46</b>
<b>297</b> ← →			<b>480</b> ← →	<i>L do D</i>	JP <b>47</b> ←
				Nunca deixo saber às minhas sensações o que lhes vou fazer sentir... Brinco com as minhas sensações como uma princesa cheia de tédio com os seus grandes gatos prompts e crueis...	JP <b>60</b> →
				Fecho subitamente portas dentro de mim, por onde certas sensações iam passar para se realizarem. Retiro bruscamente do seu caminho os objectos espirituales que lhes vão vincar certos gestos.	

Fig. 2. *LdoD* Reading of Fragment #46 in Pizarro's ed.

The site also offers the possibility of an individual analysis of each edition. In the section "Editions," users encounter a list of titles that correspond to the fragments in each editor's sequence. Yet, once again, this apparently linear section lures the reader into ever-changing ways of navigating the archive. Each item in the list provides two reading options: the title itself is a link to the corresponding text as laid out in the "Reading" section (previously described), and a second link takes readers to the same text as displayed in a third section: "Documents." This last alternative displays fragments along with all genetic transcriptions of autographs and published material (Fig. 3). Unlike the "Reading" section, which favors sequential differences among editions, the "Documents" section highlights textual variations and offers the possibility of overlapping transcriptions in a single

shot, so we may compare all versions—original documents and publications by Pessoa, as well as posthumous editions.



Fig. 3. *LdoD* Document BNP/E3, 4-84r.

By providing enough freedom to design their own reading experience, *LdoD* wills users to become virtual editors. Reader autonomy is reinforced both by the “Search” section (supporting simple or advanced queries based on editions, dates, or keywords, among other criteria), and by the “Virtual” function. The latter stands as one of the most advantageous features of online platforms and perhaps the ultimate contribution of this project: openness to user response (Fig. 4). Through “Virtual,” users are able to create their own editions of the *Book of Disquiet*, by curating fragments based on any criteria and from any of the prior editions featured. Thus, the platform's openness to users mirrors the way it invites us to read the paper editions, and by doing so, *LdoD* is highly coherent: it abides to the same standard of mutability that governs its arrangement of previous editions. Ultimately, the website dismantles our “anxiety for unity,” a term conceived by Jerónimo Pizarro, who has advocated for representing the multiplicity and fragmentation of the creative process (PIZARRO, 2016: 288)<sup>b</sup>. As *LdoD* manages to prove, the acknowledgment of the author as only one of the entities responsible for the text *does* facilitate a fruitful reading experience.



Fig. 4. *LdoD* “Virtual” option: create your own edition.

<sup>b</sup> PIZARRO, Jerónimo (2016). “[A ansiedade da unidade: uma teoria da edição.](#)” *LEA—Lingue e letterature d’Oriente e d’Occidente*, n.º 5, 284-311.

Behind all these innovative features—and making them possible through a language that both humans *and* machines may understand—*LdoD* makes use of TEI (Text Encoding and Interchange). Developed since 1988 by the [Text Encoding Initiative Consortium](#), the TEI guidelines are definitions of elements and attributes in XML (Extensible Markup Language). One may say that TEI constitutes the semantics, while XML, the syntax of the language used by *LdoD*.

Besides the aforementioned *Radical Scatters*, other projects have made productive use of TEI to represent archives, including digital editions of works by [Whitman](#) (1995-2017), [Beckett](#) (2011-2016), [Austen](#) (2012), [Thoreau](#) (2013); [Shelley & Godwin](#) (2014-2015), [Zerklaere](#) (2015-2016), and [Goethe](#) (2016-2017).<sup>c</sup> Now, Pessoa's *LdoD* (2017), while influenced by those previous works, has decisive TEI innovations, particularly in its meticulous parallel representation of editions. As the *LdoD* editors explain:

our TEI encoding schema involved the parallel segmentation method and the definition of a critical apparatus which treats all transcriptions as textual variations. [...] all variations (whether they occur in the autographs or in the editions) are processed at the same level. This encoding decision expresses the theoretical principle that underlies the *LdoD Archive*: that of showing the *Book of Disquiet* as both authorial project and editorial project, making it possible to observe the transformation of the archive into editions as a dynamic process of generation of textual variations.

(PORTELA *et al.*, 2017: *LdoD* "Encoding" page)

This clarity of purpose was developed through a series of papers, in which Manuel Portela and António Rito Silva (respectively credited as editor and software architect of *LdoD*) honed key concepts with a view to making the most of TEI. Besides the initial formulation of the project in "Nenhum problema tem solução,"<sup>d</sup> three articles should be highlighted: "A model for a virtual *LdoD*,"<sup>e</sup> "TEI4*LdoD*,"<sup>f</sup> and "Encoding, Visualizing, and Generating Variation in Fernando Pessoa's *Livro do Desassossego*."<sup>g</sup> Taken into consideration with an [XML](#) file annotated by the project team, these essays create a body of knowledge with

<sup>c</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of digital editions using TEI.

<sup>d</sup> PORTELA, Manuel (2013). "['Nenhum problema tem solução': um arquivo digital do Livro do Desassossego](#)." *Matlit: Revista do Programa de Doutoramento em Materialidades da Literatura*, vol. 1, n.º 1.

<sup>e</sup> PORTELA, Manuel; SILVA, António Rito (2014). "[A model for a virtual LdoD](#)." *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, vol. 30, issue 3.

<sup>f</sup> SILVA, António Rito; PORTELA, Manuel (2015). "[TEI4LdoD: Textual Encoding and Social Editing in Web 2.0 Environments](#)." *Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative*, issue 8.

<sup>g</sup> PORTELA, Manuel; SILVA, António Rito (2016). "[Encoding, Visualizing, and Generating Variation in Fernando Pessoa's Livro do Desassossego](#)." *Variants*, 12-13.

implications for all future editions of Pessoa, whose manuscripts pose every possible encoding challenge. They contribute towards a conversion table between TEI and the symbols used in print critical editions. To illustrate this point, we may juxtapose some TEI elements with critical symbols common in print:

Descriptions	Critical Symbols	TEI Elements & Attributes
Deletion	<deleted text>	<code>&lt;del rendition="overstrike"&gt;deleted text&lt;/del&gt;</code>  * Another possible value used: "overtyped".
Additions (supralinear and sublinear, in these examples)	word [↑ addition] word word [↓ addition] word	word <code>&lt;add place="above"&gt;addition&lt;/add&gt;</code> word word <code>&lt;add place="below"&gt;addition&lt;/add&gt;</code> word  *Other possible values used: "inline"   "top"   "bottom"   "margin".
Substitution (by deletion + supralinear addition in this example)	<deleted> [↑ added]	<code>&lt;subst&gt;</code> <code>&lt;del rendition="overstrike"&gt;deleted&lt;/del&gt;</code> <code>&lt;add place="above"&gt;added&lt;/add&gt;</code> <code>&lt;/subst&gt;</code>
Variations (across transcriptions)	*Normally, given as a table of divergent previous readings (separate from the critical genetic apparatus).	<code>&lt;app type="substantive"&gt;</code> <code>&lt;rdg wit="#Fr1.ED.X"&gt;one way to read&lt;/rdg&gt;</code> <code>&lt;rdg wit="#Fr1.ED.Y"&gt;another way&lt;/rdg&gt;</code> <code>&lt;rdg wit="#Fr1.ED.Z"&gt;and yet another one&lt;/rdg&gt;</code> <code>&lt;/app&gt;</code>
Open Variants (created by the author in a single document)	var. inline [↑ var. above]	<code>&lt;app type="substantive"&gt;</code> <code>&lt;rdg varSeq="1" wit="#FP"&gt;var. inline&lt;/rdg&gt;</code> <code>&lt;rdg varSeq="2" wit="#FP"&gt;&lt;add place="above"&gt;var. above &lt;/add&gt;&lt;/rdg&gt;</code> <code>&lt;/app&gt;</code>

Perhaps the most evident TEI contribution by *LdoD* is the elegant encoding of variations, which turns the differences of transcriptions (normally a monotonous table hidden in books) into an illuminating experience: to navigate a text in all its complexity and interact with its editorial history. The variations, often flagged as *errors* in heated debates among editors, suddenly become a treasure, offering insights into the original documents, as well as into different editorial philosophies. In short, *LdoD* elevates the critical apparatus from annex to fulcrum.

In inviting us to rethink the traditional critical apparatus, *LdoD* also contributes to the development of TEI itself, notably in the question of how to code *open variants*. Here we must clarify that *open variants* are alternative segments left undecided by an author in a single manuscript, as the words "rancor" (typed inline) and "torpor" (sublinear handwritten addition) in the following example:

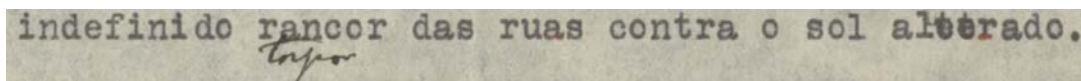


Fig. 5. BNP/E3, 1-50r, detail.

These *variants* are different from the aforementioned *variations*, which in turn are editorial and do not necessarily spring from authorial variants (for example, editors may employ idiosyncratic orthographic conventions or transcribe the same semi-legible word differently, resulting in variations independent from variants). In an article already mentioned, the editors explain the matter further:

Authorial and editorial textual versions are treated as variants and variations for encoding purposes. The <rdg> TEI element stands for reading and is used to represent both authorial and editorial micro variations. The editions and authorial sources are referred through the “wit” attribute.

(PORTELA and SILVA, 2016)<sup>h</sup>

In TEI, variations are normally the matter of the <app> element (short for apparatus) and specified by <rdg> sub-elements (short for readings), while open variants constitute, truly, an open question, with as many solutions as there are digital editions. However, there are still not many digital editions in which variants pose a crucial question. If online editions such as the ones of Beckett and Goethe rely on texts published during the lifetime of their authors to hierarchize variants, in the case of Pessoa we are dealing mainly with works published posthumously (or even still unpublished); thus, we do not have the luxury of knowing, among open variants, which ones the poet would have eventually chosen (to complicate matters, sometimes Pessoa would amend texts published during his lifetime, creating another set of variants). The editors of *LdoD* discuss the example presented in Fig. 5:

The marking up of variants is rendered through the simultaneous presence of the alternatives in a different color from the rest of the text. Besides, when you mouse over each variant, the associated probability value appears. This value results from the division of the unit by the number of textual variants. In the first paragraph of BNP/E3 1-50r, for example, the interface shows the variants “rancor” and “torpor” with a probability of being excluded of 0.5 each (“excl 0.5”). When there are three variants, the distribution is usually a combination of 0.3, 0.3 and 0.4.

(PORTELA *et al.*, 2017: *LdoD* “encoding” page)

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<sup>h</sup> *Idem.*

In the case of the variants "rancor" and "torpor" (from Fig. 5), we would argue for different values (0.49 and 0.51 respectively), as the mere existence of a second variant implicates some hesitation of the poet regarding the first (thus, the certainty over the second option would be arguably higher). Regardless of how one measures certainty here, though, the question posed by *LdoD* is important, and its contribution, invaluable.

It is hard to find things to criticize in a critique of *LdoD*, as we are still trying to grasp the new editorial horizon it reveals. Even the website aesthetics is thoughtful and groundbreaking, drawing inspiration from typefaces used during Pessoa's lifetime—as becomes clear if one juxtaposes a fragment of the *Book of Disquiet* published in 1932 and the fonts used in *LdoD*'s homepage: note how the capital "R" and "D" from the publication reappear in the website.



Figs. 6 to 8. Fragment published in *Revolução* (n.º 74.1) and homepage of *LdoD* (details).

*LdoD* is, overall, a watershed in the editorial fortune of Pessoa, and its legacy is clear: no future edition will be able to avoid its shadow, nor should it, as there are many lessons to learn from the new home of the *Book of Disquiet*.