

Engaging with Pessoa

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Álvaro de Campos, “A vida é para os inconscientes”, Robert Schumann, heteronyms, *Book of Disquiet*, *The Anarchist Banker*, Asperger.

Abstract

A group of six otherwise disparate items presenting personal critical perceptions, ideas or speculations concerning Pessoa and his work involving the composer Schumann; his particular use of heteronyms; his discovery of the notion of “man thinking” as the basis for his “drama em gente”; *Livro do Desassossego*; and evidence to suggest that it is useful to consider him as belonging on the autism spectrum.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Álvaro de Campos, “A vida é para os inconscientes”, Robert Schumann, heterónimos, *Livro do Desassossego*, *O Banqueiro Anarquista*, Asperger.

Resumo

Um conjunto de seis questões aparentemente desconexas permitem apresentar algumas percepções críticas, ideias ou especulações implicando Pessoa e a sua obra, e envolvendo o compositor Schumann, o recurso particular aos heterónimos, a descoberta da noção de “pensamento humano” como esteio do “drama em gente”, o *Livro do Desassossego* e, por último, a sugestão de que poderá ser útil ter em conta a possibilidade de considerar Pessoa dentro do âmbito do autismo.

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The first Pessoa book I bought was a second edition of Maria Aliete Galhoz's pioneering collection of the poetry, issued by Aguilar in Rio de Janeiro. I bought it in 1969, from Sr. Jaime, the bookseller who sold books to students and faculty in the so-called "Galinheiros" on the Cidade Universitária campus of the Universidade of São Paulo. I hardly expected what was in store for me.

I knew little about Pessoa, a bit based on a reading of only two or three poems. Since then I have read widely in Pessoa, reread his work, and published something of what I have learned: in English, *The Man who Never Was: Essays on Fernando Pessoa* (1982); *The Presence of Pessoa: English, American, and Southern African Literary Responses* (1998); *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature* (2000); *From Lisbon to the World: Fernando Pessoa's Enduring Literary Presence* (2018); in Portuguese, *As Paixões de Pessoa* (2013); and some poems, from 1980-2016, under the title: *The Pessoa Chronicles* (2016). But Pessoa is like a great wheel containing many other, smaller wheels, with each of those wheels—large and small—with its own complement of spokes. My books about Pessoa have dealt with many of those spokes. But those books have not included all that I felt compelled to say about Pessoa. Thus, I present six pieces on spokes contained in the Wheel-world that is Fernando Pessoa.

"A vida é para os inconscientes"

In the Álvaro de Campos volume in the Série Maior of the multi-volume textual edition of Pessoa, Cleonice Berardinelli includes the poem beginning "A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Célimene, Daisy)," though placing it among a group of poems that are unattributed and undated. She does not argue the case for including it among Campos's poems, assuming, I presume, that the reference to "Daisy" locates it in Campos's world, though the reference to "Lydia," it might be argued, suggests that the poem (though otherwise atypical of his verse) might be seen as one of Ricardo Reis's.

Unpublished during Pessoa's lifetime and left in manuscript among his papers, the poem has had an interesting textual career since it was first published in 1990, virtually simultaneously, in collections edited by, respectively, Teresa Rita Lopes and Cleonice Berardinelli. The Berardinelli volume that contains the poem bears the date of September 1990, and the date of the inscription on my copy of Teresa Rita Lopes's *Vida e Obras do Engenheiro* is that of Campos's 100th birthday, 15 October 1990, which I take to be the book's date of publication. In all, between them Berardinelli and Lopes have now published this poem a total of six or more times in various compilations of Campos's or Pessoa's poetry.

In Berardinelli's *Poemas de Álvaro de Campos* (1990) the poem appears:

A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Celimène, Daisy)
E o consciente é para os outros — o consciente sem a vida.

Fumo o cigarro que cheira bem á margem dos outros,
 E sou ridiculo para elles porque os observo e me observam.
 Mas não me importo.
 Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em tecnico,
 – Technico de machinas, technico de gente, technico de mos/*o/s...¹
 E do que descubro em meu torno não sou /*responsavel/ nem em verso
 O estandarte rôto, cosido a seda, dos imperios de /*Maple/ –
 Mettam-o na gaveta das cousas posthumas e basta...

(PESSOA, 1990a: 347; BNP/E3, 71-20^c)

(In a footnote, Berardinelli explains her “Conjecturas”: “6 e 7: tecnico] *no testemunho só estão bem legíveis as quarto primeiras letras, tech, que autorizam duas leituras: tecnico, que me pareceu a melhor; mas também technica, que não seria absurda.*”)

In Lopes’s *Vida e Obras do Engenheiro* (1990) the poem appears:

A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Célimene, Daisy)
 E o convento [?] é para os mortos – o convento [?] sem a Vida...²
 Fumo o cigarro que cheira bem á magua dos outros,
 E sou ridiculo para elles porque os observo e me observam.
 Mas não me importo.
 Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em technica,
 – Technica da machina, technica da gente, technica da moda –
 E do que descubro em meu torno não sou responsavel nem em verso.
 O estandarte rôto, cosido a seda, dos imperios de Maple –
 Milton – o meu jantar. As cousas posthumas e basta...³

(PESSOA, 1990b: 58)

In *Pessoa por Conhecer*, volume II, *Textos para um Novo Mapa*, Lopes (1990) presents the poem:

A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Celimène, Daisy)
 E o [...] é para os mortos – o [...] sem a Vida...
 Fumo o cigarro que cheira bem á magua dos outros,
 E sou ridiculo para elles porque os observo e me observam.
 Mas não me importo.
 Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em technica,
 – Technica da machina, technica da gente, technica da moda –
 E do que descubro em meu torno não sou responsavel nem em verso.
 O estandarte rôto, cosido a seda, dos imperios de Maple.
 Milton – o meu jantar. As cousas posthumas e basta...

(LOPES, 1990: II, 304)

¹ The * indicates “conjecture.”

² In the second edition: “E o casamento é para os outros – o cemiterio sem a Vida...” (PESSOA, 1992b: 58).

³ In the second edition: “Mettam-o na gaveta das cousas posthumas e basta...” (PESSOA, 1992b: 58).

In Berardinelli's *Poemas de Álvaro de Campos* (1992) the poem reads:

A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Celimène, Daisy)
 E o consciente é para os outros — o consciente sem a Vida.
 Fumo o cigarro que cheira bem à margem dos outros,
 E sou ridículo para eles porque os observo e me observam.
 Mas não me importo.
 Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em técnico,
 Técnico de máquinas, técnico de gente, técnico de modas...
 E do que descubro em meu torno não sou responsável nem em verso
 O estandarte roto, cosido a seda, dos impérios de Maple —
 Metam-o na gaveta das coisas póstumas e basta...

(PESSOA, 1992a: 295)

In turn, Campos's *Livro de Versos* (1993), edited by Lopes, gives the poem:

A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Celimène, Daisy)
 E o consciente é para os mortos — o consciente sem a Vida...
 Fumo o cigarro que cheira bem á magua dos outros,
 E sou ridículo para elles porque os observo e me observam.
 Mas não me importo.
 Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em technico,
 — Technico de machinas, technico de gente, technico da moda —
 E do que descubro em meu torno não sou responsável nem em verso
 O estandarte rôto, cosido a seda, dos imperios de Maple —
 Mettam-o na gaveta das cousas posthumas e basta...

(PESSOA, 1993: 288)

Finally – without mentioning this century editions (2002, 2013, and 2014, by Assírio & Alvim and Tinta-da-china), in Berardinelli's Brazilian edition of *Poemas de Álvaro de Campos* (1999) the poem is given:

A vida é para os inconscientes (ó Lydia, Celimène, Daisy)
 E o consciente é para os mortos — o consciente sem a Vida.
 Fumo o cigarro que cheira bem à margem dos outros,
 E sou ridículo para eles porque os observo e me observam.
 Mas não me importo.
 Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em técnico,
 — Técnico de máquinas, técnico de gente, técnico de modas...
 E do que descubro em meu torno não sou responsável nem em verso.
 O estandarte roto, cosido a seda, dos impérios de Maple —
 Metam-o na gaveta das coisas póstumas e basta...

(PESSOA, 1999: 343)

There are differences here that suggest that in most cases, in reprinting the poem, an editor has adopted some of his fellow-editor's readings. Put aside the changes that indicate that spellings have been modernized and that the signs that some readings are conjectural have disappeared, and we can concentrate on the changes that are more meaningful. After its first appearance in the last line of Lopes's first and second printings of the poem, "Milton" disappears from the poem and is replaced by "Metam-no." "Maple" at the end of the penultimate line, though presented as conjectural by Berardinelli in her first printing of the text, becomes the settled reading in all subsequent texts. However, before I saw the manuscript, I ventured that Pessoa wrote "Naplon" or something like it—an abbreviation of sorts for "Napoleão." If indeed this was a reference to Napoleon Bonaparte and what Pessoa elsewhere called his "imperialismo errado" (PESSOA, 1980: 212; BNP/E3, 55-43^r), then what Pessoa said about him in *Erostratus* may help to explain the reference: "There is in genius an obscure element—that obscure element, real but difficult to define, which is called mediumnity when it assumes certain aspects. A case like that of Napoleon makes this clear. Napoleon was the medium of a vast number of tendencies of his age and time; if he had not been such a medium he would not have got hold of that age. He was sent out by it to come in to it, and commanded because it told him to command it" (PESSOA, 1967: 198-199; PESSOA, 2000: 187-188; BNP/E3, 19-53^r).

More interesting, however, is the movement from "tecnica" to "tecnico" — apart from the word's various spellings—which is a substantial change. If "tecnico," then, by so describing Campos (a description of himself if the poem is attributed to Campos), he establishes a parallel between two "tecnico" and "Caeiro" that differs if the sequence is "Caeiro" and "tecnica." Even more interesting still is the possibility that if this is a poem by Campos, then in the line "Desdobro-me em Caeiro e em técnico" Campos seems to be saying that he has "unfolded himself" in the guises of "Caeiro" and a "technician," suggesting that Campos, as well as Pessoa, is the author of both "Alberto Caeiro" and a Campos who is a "tecnico." In short, he is the engenderer of Caeiro and of himself—much, I suppose, as Fernando Pessoa is the engenderer of "Fernando Pessoa," still another of Pessoa's heteronyms, as Jorge de Sena and others have argued. Or did Pessoa simply make a mistake here, one that he would have had the chance to correct had he returned to the poem, something he seems never to have done?

Schumann, Pessoa, and Heteronymy

Robert Schumann's "Florestan and Eusebius were far more than Romantic doubles. They appeared to him as real as his student friends," Jeremy Denk quotes from Judith Chernaik's *Schumann: The Faces and the Masks* (2018). Denk continues: "Chernaik gets the incredible essence of this: how he [Schumann] offloaded his

difficult emotional world onto an imaginary band of alternative identities” (DENK, 2018). A case of heteronymity *avant la lettre*? Did Pessoa know this about Schumann (1810-1856)? Was Schumann’s solution his inspiration? Not incidental, I think, was the fact that Fernando’s father was a music critic.

Late thoughts on Pessoa’s use of his heteronyms

Fernando Pessoa hardly invented the notion of the heteronym, but he was the first one I know to have rationalized the notion, thereby giving it a nominative reality previously unknown (or, at least, undefined). It is not without interest or significance, I think, that we often say of a poem by Fernando Pessoa himself (*ele-mesmo*) that it sounds like the work of Álvaro de Campos or Alberto Caeiro or Ricardo Reis. Yet is there anyone who says that a given poem by any of the heteronyms sounds like the Pessoa whose poems he attributed to himself, that is, to *ele-mesmo*? In fact, poems not explicitly assigned to any of the heteronyms by Pessoa have, on occasion, been assigned to a specific heteronym because in theme or style the poem could well be in the voice of a given heteronym or expressive, if you will, of that heteronym’s “mind.” Conversely, it is seldom, if ever, that a poem by one of the heteronyms sounds like the work of Pessoa (which, of course, common sense tells us it undeniably is) and should be included among the poet’s poems that he assigns to himself.⁴ (I am begging the question as to whether or not “Fernando Pessoa” constitutes a fourth major heteronym, as Jorge de Sena and others contend.)

Odd, is it not, that the heteronyms contend with their creator for credit in the creation of their poems? The existence of this near-paradox can be seen, of course, as indicative of Pessoa’s unique success in creating his “coterie of non-existent beings.” Moreover, their existence in the psychic reality of an imagined space even impinges forcefully on the perceived facts of the quotidian poet’s own life, not to mention the details and lines of his posthumous reputation. Critics and other readers choose sides and play favorites, preferring Caeiro or Campos or Reis, *ele-mesmo* being just one more possible choice in this game of hearts. The monument erected over Pessoa’s remains in Jerónimos contains quotations on the three sides visible to visitors, from Reis, Campos, and Caeiro, but none—imagine— from *ele-mesmo*—unless such a quotation appears on the side that is not visible to the visitor. But then, if it does exist there, it is kept secret from the visitor.

Pessoa even allowed the heteronym game into his own outward daily life as a native of Lisbon. One of his friends, we are told, thought he had met Caeiro

⁴ Of course, one may well accept the traditional basis for the idea that there exists something one might call a self, an identification necessary for the establishing of identifiable and discrete heteronyms—no matter what dissolving or deconstruction of that self they may or may not engage in.

during his own visit to Vigo, the place where Caeiro is said to have granted his one and only interview. Pessoa's young friend Ofélia scolded him gently but firmly never again to allow Campos to speak for him, either in person or by correspondence. Pessoa's young friends from Coimbra were certain that it was Campos who had kept their appointment not the poet who made agreed to the meeting. The young José Saramago's thought that Ricardo Reis was a genuine flesh-and-blood figure ultimately led him, long after he realized that he had been innocently misled, into imagining an entire novel in which Reis returns to Portugal in the year following Pessoa's own death in 1935. And if we believe in Pessoa's inconsistency and inconstancy, we believe even more determinedly in Caeiro's natural sincerity, Campos' volatility and sentimentality, Reis's dour resignation. And although, almost surprisingly, if absurdly, we do not have any photographs of the three major heteronyms, we are fortunate to have Almada Negreiros' engraved conceptions of their shape, looks, and overall mien as they exist—including, additionally, one of a domesticated, apparently non-military, "menino da sua mãe"—gracing the façade of the Faculdade de Letras of the Universidade de Lisboa. The whole thing—this multiplication of selves rather than a division of the self—is calculated to make one regret that photographs taken from life have not survived.

Livro do Desassossego

My notion is that *Livro do Desassossego* was conceived and executed (at least in its earliest years) as a place to drain off Pessoa's depression. Having mastered the ways and manners of feeling, he was somehow able to convert his depression into writing; hence the bleakness and pain of so much that goes into *Livro do Desassossego*. But having created an evolving book, along with a semi-heteronymic author for it, the project took on a life of its own (that is, it became something increasingly different from and more than merely a place for "recording" moments and thoughts of the depressed being that Pessoa so often was), and as such it became a receptacle or repository (much like the *arcas* itself) for thoughts, *aperçus*, observations from reading, etc. set down in the course of his dreary quotidian "mutilated" life (that "mutilation" of Pessoa's character and personality that Pessoa says is Bernardo Soares). Behind *Livro do Desassossego* is the experienced, felt life, including but hardly limited to, the felt pain of depression—Fernando Pessoa's own—released into a set of remembered emotions that have undergone a sea change (through "rotting," as Pessoa puts it elsewhere) and thus have become available to poetry and, especially, the prose of *Livro do Desassossego*. In this sense, Pessoa's Bernardo Soares is akin to Shakespeare's Hamlet—a Pessoa favorite.

Pessoa, man thinking

Here's a Pessoa paradox or, if you will, a puzzling case of infinite regression. Is Pessoa's writing an example of "man thinking" (as Ralph Waldo Emerson notably put it)? Does Pessoa's writing as a whole express his ideas and his viewpoints? Yes and No. Isn't it his great discovery that he could "fake" the "man thinking" bit but that the fakery itself was the ipso facto product (and record) of his own "thinkingness" as he was writing it down? To be specific, how does the story "O Banqueiro Anarquista" illustrate this? To what extent (if at all) are we to take the narrator's (the banker's) statement of his ideas directly? Does he personally believe in them or is he "faking" that he believes them? Is it, perhaps, a combination of the two? Is it "yes" and "no" again? Moving from the fictional banker to the author of the story, how are we to discover Pessoa's own ideas here? Are they expressed directly in the tale? Assume that they are, then what? Are we to infer them from what the banker says? And if we can do that, can we know to what extent that "knowledge" is (still again) a question of "yes" and "no"? The personage of the banker aside, is the story itself the product of a person "thinking" as he will "fake" it? Put matters another way. Is "O Banqueiro" a vehicle for Pessoa's own ideas on the relationship of "capitalism" to "anarchism" or to something else? In fact, are we not better off to forget about Pessoa's ideas and focus on what the story as fiction (standing by itself) "tells" us? To this question I answer "no." For it is always Pessoa the man standing behind the story (or, if you will, hovering over it) that is our ultimate interest. Only in that way can we see the "seriousness" of the tale, that it is not just a piece of satire, for example, aimed at those beings who will sell out their own ideas but (rationalizing them) insist on their own integrity, their successful resistance to compromise, even as they accumulate the fruits of what they pretend to abhor? Is the quarry here Pessoa himself pulling the strings of a puppet narrator? Small wonder Bernard Soares disliked seeing himself in a mirror. (See, for instance, in the *LdoD Archive*—a collaborative digital archive of the *Book of Disquiet*—fragment [92](#): "O creador do espelho envenenou a alma humana".)

Pessoa speaks in the following poem taken from my book, *The Pessoa Chronicles: Poems, 1980-2016*.

Math

That was my game, the division of cells
 in two, over and again. Every thought
 parsed into parts, and those parts parsed
 again. Any wonder that with so much
 division in the offing that I, too, would
 divide into selves. Too bad my every
 self didn't divide itself as well so that
 we could let go, glyphs in the clouds.

(MONTEIRO, 2016: 206; dated Oct. 12, 2012)

Pessoa and Asperger's

On October 17, 2017, during a guest appearance in a course on Fernando Pessoa at Brown University—a seminar under the direction of Onésimo Almeida—I turned at the end to a suggestion that it may be useful to consider the possibility that Pessoa was a high-functioning autistic being, some who fits many of the criteria for locating him on the spectrum for Asperger's syndrome. I expected some push-back from the students and other visitors in the seminar but was surprised when there wasn't a single demurer. On the contrary, my suggestion that someone or other might take up the suggestion to investigate the matter further was accepted with not only obvious approval but enthusiasm.

To make my case, I began with this table ("The Gillberg diagnostic criteria for Asperger's syndrome") reproduced in Tony Attwood's *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* (ATTWOOD, 2008: 37).

As I went along, I referenced the six categories listed on this chart, making brief comments on how one might view certain aspects of and events and incidents in Pessoa's life and work in their context. Singly and cumulately, I suggested, they indicate that Fernando Pessoa has his place on the Asperger spectrum.

Category 1. "Social impairment (extreme egocentricity)," e.g. "socially and emotionally inappropriate behaviors"—Pessoa's plans to meet with people (e.g. two of the editors of *Presença* but sending Álvaro de Campos in his stead or agreeing to a meeting with the Brazilian poet Cecília Meireles and her husband but failing to show up at the appointed time or place.

Category 2. "Narrow interest," e.g. Pessoa broke off his affair with Ofélia Queiroz the second time by stating that his entire attention must go to his "work;" "repetitive adherence," e.g. constantly making lists that he did not follow through on; saving every scrap of paper in his *arcas*.

Category 3. "Compulsive need for introducing routines and interests;" nature of job required him to visit his various employers in order every working day as well as his habitual bars.

Category 4. "Speech and language peculiarities," e.g. "formal pedantic language" and "odd prosody"—Pessoa's use of out-of-date language and concocted syntax in, say, *35 Sonnets* and other early English-language poems.

Category 5. "Non-verbal communication problems," e.g. repeatedly imitating the ibis, standing on one leg and crossing the other in public, "clumsy / gauche body language" and "limited facial expression," "peculiar, stiff gaze;" awkward stance, never smiling in photographs.

To theses may be added his proclivity for "social imitation," living out aspects of his life by imitating others (who lived in the past), e.g. Poe's drunkenness as a way out of commitments, his love for and marriage to his 13-year old cousin, Ernest Dowson's infatuation for the 13-year-old waitress-daughter of

an indifferent restaurant-owner who served bad food and the 31-year-old Pessoa (playing it safe) with a 19-year-old clerk and the baby-talk he affected in letters to her. His Hamlet complex and his casting away his Ophelia. Pessoa's use of masks (heteronyms). His interest in mechanical devices (e.g. trains and trying to invent a translation typewriter). His weakness for paradoxes, riddles (*charadas*), horoscopes and interest in the arcane overall, as well as his defense of secret societies. Consider, too, his tendency to perseverate, particularly in frequently repetitious poems of self-investigation, even in short poems like—to choose two of many—“Domingo irei para as hortas” or “Não: devagar.”

There's more to indicate that Pessoa was more than casually Aspergerish, but this account of a compilation put together off the top of my head for the purposes of an academic discussion, will give the reader some sense of my thinking that led to the conclusion that Fernando Pessoa belongs on the spectrum for Asperger's syndrome.

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