

Disquiet Lisbon: literary representation as an experience of an invisible city in *Livro do Desassossego*

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Received: 12/06/2017

Accepted: 16/07/2018

ABSTRACT

Fernando Pessoa's literary work can be read as a fantastic response to the situation of experiential impoverishment (Benjamin) and indolence of the soul (Simmel) that urban environments subject individuals to. *Livro do Desassossego* offers an incomparable description of the possibilities and conditions of an urban representation that omits the monumental dimension of the city to give meaning to the banal situations, mediocrity of life, and routines of the social mechanisms that bring this space to life. Soares develops an aesthetic theory based on indifference, which he calls "erudition of sensitivity" and the imaginative work operating in the "inner modality of the outside". An aesthetic theory that causes rifts to open in art in the least favourable places. Faced with the processes of disintegration suffered by the protagonist and the impossibility of completely experiencing the city, writing becomes the space of mediation that gives meaning to a wrecked individual and a blurred city, insofar as they communicate with each other. This allows a personal Lisbon to emerge, one which is allegorised and turned into literature.

Keywords: Fernando Pessoa, tourist guide, sensationalism, heteronomy and the city, Simmel, Chicago School.

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Suggested citation: Padró Nieto, B. (2018). Una Lisboa desasossegada. La representación literaria como experiencia de una ciudad invisible en el *Livro do Desassossego*. *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society*, 3, 203-213. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2018-17>

*Este livro é um só estado de alma, analisado
de todos os lados, percorrido em todas as direcções.*

[This book is a single state of soul, analysed
from all sides, investigated in all directions.]

Exame de consciência, [Self-Examination]

BERNARDO SOARES

The city is, rather, a state of mind.

ROBERT E. PARK

I

Sofronia, one of the invisible cities imagined by Italo Calvino, comprises two parts. One is made of stone and marble and of solemn monuments. The other, of rope, fabric, and the machinery of fairground attractions. One of them is provisional and each year is dismantled so that it can go on tour through different cities. Contrary to common sense, the fixed half of the city is not the one of imposing buildings, but that of the fairgrounds. These are the palaces, ministries, and monuments that are taken down annually. Using this allegory of the city, Calvino led us to a key point: what defines urban life is not so much its cold urban design but rather, the pulse of life brought by the constant dynamism and ephemeral status of the interactions that take place in it. We could add another volatile element: the multiple melancholic memories the city's inhabitants have of the place they once knew and which the very dynamics of change have rendered unrecognisable. This provisional dimension constituting 'urban' is recorded by Álvaro de Campos, Fernando Pessoa's heteronym, in a poem that celebrates the cosmopolitanism of the modern city and begins thus: [Ah, the first few minutes in the cafes of new cities!], and where after mentioning the vehicles and the bustle of the crowd he says: [And through all this, as something that floods and never overflows, / The movement,

the movement, / A fast colourful and human thing that passes and remains].¹ This movement in the great European cities can also be exalted in the one situated furthest to the west:

[The awakening of Lisbon city, later than the others,

The awakening of Rua do Ouro,

The awakening of Rossio, at the café doors

[...].

For me, nothing is as beautiful as the movement and the feelings.

Life is a big fair and everything is tents and acrobats.

I think of this, I am warmed, but I am not calmed.]²

1 "Ah, os primeiros minutos nos cafés de novas cidades! [...] / E através disto tudo, como uma coisa que inunda e nunca transborda, / O movimento, o movimento / Rápida coisa colorida e humana que passa e fica..." (Campos, 2002, p. 104). Translated into English by the article's editorial translator.

2 "Acordar da cidade de Lisboa, mais tarde do que as outras, / Acordar da rua do Ouro, / Acordar do Rossio, às portas dos cafés, [...]. / Nada para mim é tão belo como o movimento e as sensações. / A vida é uma grande feira e tudo são barracas e saltimbancos. / Penso nisto, enterneço-me, mas não sossego nunca" (Campos, 2002, p. 97). Translated into English by the article's editorial translator.

There are many poems by Álvaro de Campos that lyrically represent the city, whether it be the futuristic celebration of technology as a new space for a modern epic as a ‘triumphant ode’; or be it the elegiac recreation of a Lisbon linked to desire and lost forever amid the mists of the past, as in the two ‘Lisbon revisited’ poems, one from 1923 and the other from 1926. Between these two dates, Fernando Pessoa wrote a text that was radically different from those in his usual espólio [body of work]. The book *Lisboa: o que o turista deve ver* (*Lisbon: What the tourist should see*, 1925) is a tourist guide aimed at visitors—presumably British ones—arriving in the Portuguese capital by sea, whom the narrator accompanies by car through the most aesthetically and historically representative places in the city. The 42-page long manuscript, typed out in English and complete and ready to publish, was found by Teresa Rita Lopes’ team in 1988. This text may have been part of a cultural policy project designed by Pessoa in scattered notes and motivated by what he called the ‘European decategorisation’ of Portugal (Pessoa, 1993, p. 308). According to Pessoa, the systematic absence of Portugal in foreign texts had to be combated. His program proposed the creation of a general agency called Cosmópolis [Cosmopolis], a publishing company called Grémio Cultural Português [the Portuguese Cultural Guild], and even a Portuguese commercial club. The concerted action of these three institutions would aim to publish propaganda-like books and studies about the country, as well as a book entitled *All about Portugal*, and would create a newspaper in London called Portugal (Lopes, 1997, pp. 15–17). Among the promotional material would be guides for tourists, including the one he personally wrote which was eventually published posthumously.

The Lisbon offered in this guide is an objectified city described with an institutional framing. Along the way, there are buildings, squares, monuments, panoramic views from urban viewpoints, and administrative headquarters and other institutions are pointed out. We are constantly given the measurements of the buildings and monuments

and he details the work found in several different museums and libraries, even including the entrance fees and opening hours of some of them. Everything presented is accompanied by a historical account and these stories are as monumental as the Lisbon he describes. It is a pragmatic book that uncritically accepts the conjectures of modern life, such as, for example, the virtue of technology or industrial tourism based on the identification and recognition of an imaginary already accepted before the visit—radically opposite postulates to those found in the *Livro do Desassossego* (*The book of disquiet*), where we read: [If I were to travel, I’d find a poor copy of what I’ve already seen without taking one step] (Pessoa 2001, p. 138)³. The assertion of modern life, the references to British-inspired social clubs, and the use of the automobile as the preferred means of transportation has meant that some scholars see a similarity between the author of this tourist guide and Álvaro de Campos’ early work, which celebrated, with exasperation, the triumph of cosmopolitan technological progress. Yet, as we have already seen, during those years, Campos wrote melancholic poetry about a city revisited but not completely rediscovered. In any case, *Lisboa: o que o turista deve ver* is a book with an instrumental vocation and, therefore, is not poetic. If it had not been written by this great Portuguese genius, we would not be discussing it here. However, it does give us the opportunity to compare two possible representations of Lisbon. The one of the official Lisbon, comprising marble and statues, and the other Lisbon of *Livro do Desassossego*, consisting of reflections and impressions captured by an individual trying to make himself, and his particular interactions with the urban environment, intelligible. As in the case of Sofronia, the first Lisbon is incidental; the second, essential.

3 “Se viajasse, encontraria a cópia débil do que já vira sem viajar”. We used the edition of *Livro do Desassossego* translated into English and edited by Richard Zenith (Penguin, 2001). Fragments (fr.) are cited by their numbering according to this edition and with the corresponding title when dealing with the ‘large texts’.

II

The now universal literary Lisbon is not a precise paraphrase of its official self. It is the fantastical Lisbon that some verses of the Pessoa *ortónimo* [his orthonym, rather than a heteronym] and Álvaro de Campos ambiguously show, but, above all, it is the one that emerges precisely and concisely in many of the fragments of *Livro do Desassossego* (Pessoa, 2001). The objective correspondence between the city that undulates in dialectic of calmness and one of restlessness can be found in the Baixa Pombalina and its surroundings, a geometrically-designed neighbourhood with parallel and perpendicular streets and architecture built with light-coloured stone. But he registers only meagre references to it: the Rua dos Douradores; Praça do Comércio—mentioned using its common name, Terreiro do Paço—Rua d’Alfândega and Rua do Arsenal as meridional coordinates, and on both sides, the hill of the São Jorge castle as a landscape that rises to the east; the Santa Justa lift, which leads up to Bairro Alto and, further away, the São Pedro de Alcântara viewpoint, as north-western references; and the estuary of the Tejo, with its mythical dimension, as a surface upon which the sky is reflected. Occasionally he mentions the Benfica neighbourhood, as a distant, remote destination within the capital; or the city of Cascais, which is perhaps less remote because, via the railway which one can catch in Cais de Sodré in the southwest corner of the Pombal neighbourhood, it is an extension of the Baixa. The centre of everything is the Rua dos Douradores, a secondary street off the Baixa that starts from the Praça da Figueira and finishes in the Rua da Conceição, where tram number 28 passes by and then goes up to Graça. But the Praça da Figueira and the Graça neighbourhood are mentioned only once, and the Rua da Conceição is never referred to. Only the metallic din of the tram or its bell sometimes appear. Therefore, the Rua dos Douradores works as an indeterminate border location where all literature and life are concentrated, hence its augmented dimension: the poetic voice of the book—let us say, that of Bernardo Soares so as not make matters too

complicated⁴—lives on the fourth floor of one the regular buildings there and works in an office as an assistant accountant.

Apart from these locations, which are barely mentioned, the city is omnipresent but remains blurred: numerous streets, squares, and gardens without names are referred to, as well as trams without numbers, which become just as anonymous as the multitude of passers-by, clerks and labourers who appear, protruding, in the various fragments that make up the work. The Lisbon represented in the *Livro do Desassossego* is not the positive city described from a mental map like the one I provided above, but rather, is a city configured in the consciousness of one who lives in it yet has not fully experienced it. It is interesting that the Baixa—according to *Livro do Desassossego*, a privileged urban space—is almost completely ignored in *Lisboa: o que o turista deve ver*, where he limits himself to stating: [From the Praça do Comercio we can go on to the centre of city by any of the three streets which go North from there—Rua do Ouro on the left, Rua Augusta

4 The *Livro do Desassossego* project was born at least a year before the creation of its heteronymic author, with the appearance of the text 'Na Floresta do Alheamento', the first creative prose published by Pessoa, in the magazine *A Águia* in August 1913. After the creation of [several] heteronyms in 1914, the project would go through several stages before being allocated the specific name, *Livro do Desassossego*. Letters mentioning the project from the years immediately following suggest that the author considered the work to be orthonymic. Between 1915 and 1930, he doubted whether to attribute it to Vicente Guedes or Barão de Teive and, it seems, Pessoa worked on a first collection of fragments. Some of them even carry the following annotation: "A. de C. ou L. do D." which may mean "Álvaro de Campos ou Livro do Desassossego" [Álvaro de Campos or Livro do Desassossego]; in 1930 he again attributed a fragment work to the name "ortónimo", but from 1932, he decided that the work should be signed by Bernardo Soares and even wrote the cover text "Do Livro do Desassossego, / composto por Bernardo / Soares, ajudante de guarda-livros na cidade de Lisboa / por / Fernando Pessoa" [The Book of Disquiet, / written by Bernardo / Soares, assistant bookkeeper in the city of Lisbon / by Fernando Pessoa]. Despite this, the cover text, as well as the letter to José Gaspar Simões from 28 June 1932, in which he says that "Bernardo Soares no es un heterónimo, sino una personalidad literaria" [Bernardo Soares is not a heteronym, but a literary personality] shows that [Soares] is in fact a fictitious author. It would not be until 13 January 1935, in a letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, that he would assign Soares the status of being 'semi-heteronymous' (Crespo, 1984, pp. 187–193).

(the one with the arch) in the middle, and Rua da Prata on the right. Let us choose Rua do Ouro, which, owing to its commercial importance is the main street of the city] (Pessoa, 1993, p. 37).⁵ The constructive principle of the guide is orientation within the spatial arrangement of the city. There is always a point of reference that allows one to link each view of the city with the next. Regarding the description of Praça do Comércio in the guide, he tells us:

We now reach the largest of Lisbon (*sic*) squares, the Praça do Comercio, formerly Terreiro do Paço, as it is still commonly known; this is the square which is known to Englishmen as Black Horse Square and is one of the largest in the world. It is a vast space, perfectly square, lined on three sides by buildings of a uniform type, with high stone arches. All the chief public offices are installed here [...]. The fourth, or South, side of the square is formed by the Tagus itself, very wide in this part and always full of shipping. In the centre of the square stands the bronze equestrian statue of King José I, a splendid sculpture by Joaquim Machado de Castro, cast in Portugal, in a single piece, in 1774. It is 14 metres high. The pedestal is adorned with magnificent figures depicting the rebuilding of Lisbon after the great earthquake in 1755.⁶

This is very dissimilar to the presence of this space in *Livro do Desassossego*, where it only becomes relevant insofar as it affects the book's subject, who writes:

Sometimes I spend hours at the Terreiro do Paço, next to the river, meditating in vain. My impatience keeps trying to tear me away from that peace, and my inertia keeps holding me there. And in this state of bodily torpor that

suggests sensuality only in the way the wind's whispering recalls voices, I meditate on the eternal insatiability of my vague desires, on the permanent fickleness of my impossible yearnings. I suffer mainly from the malady of being able to suffer. I'm missing something I don't really want, and I suffer because this isn't true suffering.⁷

The size of the square, “uma das maiores do mundo” [one of the largest in the world] says the guide, the width of the Tejo estuary— “muito largo neste sítio” [very wide at this part], and the solemnity of the statue at its centre, are irrelevant in *Livro do Desassossego*. What Soares mostly records are moods:

Yes, it's the sunset. Slowly and distractedly I reach the end of the Rua da Alfândega and see, beyond the Terreiro do Paço, a clear view of the sunless western sky. It's a blue sky tinged green and tending towards light grey, and on the left, over the hills of the opposite bank, there's a cowering mass of brownish to lifeless pink fog. An immense peace that I don't have is coldly present in the abstract fall air. Not having it, I experience the feeble pleasure of imagining it exists.⁸

It seems as if the Lisbon described were the one that emerges from the street when the narrator looks up over the houses and the hills; or over the roofs from the window of the fourth floor where

5 “Da Praça do Comércio podemos avançar para o centro da cidade por qualquer das três ruas que dali seguem para Norte —Rua do Ouro à esquerda, Rua Augusta (a do arco) ao meio, e Rua da Prata à direita. Escolhamos a Rua do Ouro, que, devido à sua importância comercial, é a principal rua da cidade”.

6 The translation English translation of Lisboa: o que o turista deve ver was published by Shearsman Books (2008).

7 “Passo horas, às vezes, no Terreiro do Paço, à beira do rio, meditando em vão. A minha impaciência constantemente me quer arrancar desse sossego, e a minha inércia constantemente me detém nele. Medito, então, num a modorra de físico, que se parece com a volúpia apenas como o sussurro de vento lembra vozes, na eterna insaciabilidade dos meus desejos vagos, na perene instabilidade das minhas ânsias impossíveis. Sofro, principalmente, do mal de poder sofrer. Falta-me qualquer coisa que não desejo e sofro por isso não ser propriamente sofrer” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 107).

8 “Sim, é o poente. Chego à foz da Rua da Alfândega, vagaroso e disperso, e, ao clarear-me o Terreiro do Paço, vejo, nítido, o sem sol do céu ocidental. Esse céu é de um azul esverdeado para cinzento branco, onde, do lado esquerdo, sobre os montes da outra margem, se agacha, amontoada, uma névoa acastanhada de cor-de-rosa morto. Há uma grande paz que não tenho dispersa fria-mente no ar outonal abstrato. Sofro de não ter o prazer vago de supor que ela existe” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 225).

he passes sleepless nights; or through the window next to his office desk. As if the urban complex of the capital were the die from which the most indescribable and intangible parts of Lisbon are cast: its atmospheric vicissitudes. In fact, more than a fifth of the 520 fragments comprising the first edition of the book—which is grouped thematically—are totally or partially dedicated to these phenomena (Crespo, 1984, p. 213). These are moments—linked to reflection—which occur in writing when the author becomes self-aware and thematises the cognitive processes that make the urban experience a relevant event.

III

In the same years Benjamin was working on his reflections on the impoverishment of experience in urban environments and [analysing] how this process was artistically recorded in the literature of Baudelaire, Proust, Kafka, and the Surrealists, Fernando Pessoa was also testing ways to open pathways for art amidst the banality of his surroundings and of his life as a clerk. According to the German thinker, [Walter Benjamin], the urbanisation, demographic massification, and expansion of technology in everyday life in big cities, permanently modified the conditions of perception and limits our ability to understand its citizens. In turn, the mechanisation of [people's] social lives and routine repetition deprives their activities of living of [true] content (Benjamin, 1972; 2012). Pessoa's work, like that of the authors Benjamin studied, enigmatically encodes the complex tensions that individuals preserve—both between each other and with their surroundings—when they are subject to the impoverishment of experience. The sensationalist program and the creation of heteronyms are artistic responses to an existence subjected to the tyrannies of the protocols of urban life. 'Feeling everything in every way' is a reiterative motto in the poetry of Álvaro de Campos. [He was] confronted with the homogenisation of experiences resulting from the unification of the modern world; diversification of modalities of feeling; with the process of urban depersonalisation; dispersion

into multiple personalities. The poem that begins [After all, the best way to travel is to feel] highlights his response:

The more I feel, the more I feel like many people,
The more personalities I have,
The more intense, the shriller they are,
The more simultaneously I feel them all,
The more unitedly diverse, more diffusely attentive,
Being, feeling, living, going
More I will possess the total existence of the
[universe].⁹

At the same time, the depersonalisation caused by urban environments was also being theorised by the sociologists of the Chicago School. In 1938, Louis Wirth affirmed: "Wherever large numbers of differently constituted individuals congregate, the process of depersonalization also enters. This levelling tendency inheres in part in the economic basis of the city" (Wirth, 1938, p. 17). For his part, Robert E. Park had stated in 1925 that:

The processes of segregation establish moral distances which make the city a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate. This makes it possible for individuals to pass quickly and easily from one moral milieu to another, and encourages the fascinating but dangerous experiment of living at the same time in several different contiguous, but otherwise widely separated, worlds (Park, 1925, pp. 40–41).

So, it is not bold to say that the poetic project of the *drama em gente* [drama in people] was borne from the need to overcome the dead end in which modern urban life situated individuals, isolating and splintering their experiences into pieces that were difficult to reconcile. Fernando Pessoa's poetic

⁹ "*Quanto mais eu sinto, quanto mais eu sinto como várias pessoas, / Quanto mais personalidades eu tiver, / Quanto mais intensamente, estridentemente as tiver, / Quanto mais simultaneamente sentir com todas elas, / Quanto mais unificadamente diverso, dispersadamente atento, / Estiver, sentir, viver, for, / Mais possuirei a existência total do universo*" (Campos, 2002, p. 251). Translated into English by the article's editorial translator.

response arose from the artistic exacerbation of depersonalisation and disintegration. What gives such a fragmented work as *Livro do Desassossego* a certain unity is this same attitude towards urban life: what in 1903 the German sociologist Georg Simmel called *Blasiertheit* [a blasé attitude], indolence, or in the terms Bernardo Soares preferred: indifference and, above all, tedium. According to Simmel, individuals who inhabit large cities long to preserve their autonomy from the homogenising forces of society, historical heritage, and the world of technology, and they resist being levelled and exploited by social and technical mechanisms. In psychological terms it is characterised as ‘the intensification of a nervous life’ (Simmel, 2001, p. 375) because of the excess of impressions that [individuals] constantly receive and that their conscience is unable to fully assume— [I’m an ultrasensitive photographic plate]¹⁰, affirms Bernardo Soares. According to Simmel, the individual in the big city reacts to this accumulation of impressions not with feelings but with logic and exaltation of the consciousness, and [in this way the reaction to new phenomena is transferred to the less sensitive psychic organ]. The rational character of urbanites works in this way, as [the shield of subjective life against the violence of the big city] (Simmel, 2001, pp. 377–378). Years later, in 1920, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 2004) Sigmund Freud added that the methods of defence that an individual develops against the impressions they receive from the outside, and which allow them to select, discard, or incorporate them, are precisely those which constitute that person’s psyche. Consciousness, according to Freud, appears as a defensive mechanism. Finding it is near impossible to extract the urbanite from this situation, Pessoa derived a whole aesthetic theory, whose synthesis may be the famous verse in the poem ‘*Ela canta, pobre ceifeira*’. [She sings, poor reaper], which appeared in December 1924 in the magazine *Athena*, and which says: [I feel with my

thoughts].¹¹ Furthermore, we find many variants of this saying in *Livro do Desassossego*:

The cause of my profound sense of incompatibility with others is, I believe, that most people think with their feelings, whereas I feel with my thoughts.

For the ordinary man, to feel is to live, and to think is to know how to live. For me, to think is to live, and to feel is merely food for thought.¹²

The aesthetic elaboration of this indolence when opposed with the [aforementioned] external stimuli is key to understanding the representation of Lisbon. The street sounds, the noises of cars and trams, snatches of conversation, an image of a garden, or of a square or a street, reach the writer already dulled and exhausted, as if from a distance: [Through the filter of my inattention, I hear fluid, scattered sounds which rise like intermittently flowing waves from outside, as if they came from another world].¹³ What is distant is, precisely, the city; a city in which one is not really present because one lives within [the context of] an inflated and dramatic self-awareness caused by the intellectualisation of sensitivity. The habitat of the poetic voice of these fragments is the one of urban recreation, based on a process in which this voice itself, in another fragment, is called ‘knowledge of sensibility’. It is, as we have already said, an intellectualisation of sensibility: [There’s an erudition of acquired knowledge, which is erudition in the narrowest sense, and there’s an erudition of understanding, which we call culture. But there’s also an erudition of the sensibility]. It is this mechanism

11 “e eu sinto com o pensamento” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 71).

12 “Aquilo que, creio, produz em mim o sentimento profundo, em que vivo, de incongruência com os outros, é que a maioria pensa com a sensibilidade, e eu sinto com o pensamento. Para o homem vulgar, sentir é viver e pensar é saber viver. Para mim, pensar é viver e sentir não é mais que o alimento de pensar” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 71).

13 “Oíço, coados pela minha desatenção, os ruídos que sobem, fluidos e dispersos, como ondas interfluentes ao acaso e de fora como se viessem de outro mundo” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 393).

10 “Sou uma placa fotográfica prolixamente impressionável”, (Pessoa, 2012, ‘Milímetros’ [‘Millimetres’]).

that widens the poetic distance, allowing the fragments of the city that reach the imagination to complete with it:

Erudition of the sensibility has nothing to do with the experience of life. The experience of life teaches nothing, just as history teaches nothing. True experience comes from restricting our contact with reality while increasing our analysis of that contact. In this way our sensibility becomes broader and deeper, because everything is in us – all we need to do is look for it and know how to look.¹⁴

But Pessoa–Soares not only focusses on the development of these poetic processes, he also provokes them and generates their experimental conditions; this requires a certain sophistication in the mechanisms of sensitivity and consciousness. *Livro do Desassossego* is full of examples of and reflections upon this process, such as the large fragments entitled ‘*Educação sentimental* [Sentimental education], ‘*Milímetros* (sensaciones de cosas mínimas)’ [Millimetres (the sensation of slight things)] or ‘*O sensacionista*’ [The sensationist].¹⁵ In these he insists that we must pay attention to minimal, trivial elements, because an insignificant life can only leave behind a work if it is capable of giving meaning to what is mediocre. Or, as fragment 388 states: [Let’s make the receptivity of our senses purely literary, and let’s convert our emotions, when they stoop to becoming apparent, into visible matter that can be sculpted into statues with fluid, glowing words].¹⁶

14 “*Há uma erudição do conhecimento, que é propriamente o que se chama erudição, e há uma erudição do entendimento, que é o que se chama cultura. Mas há também uma erudição da sensibilidade. A erudição da sensibilidade nada tem a ver com a experiência da vida. A experiência da vida nada ensina, como a história nada informa. A verdadeira experiência consiste em restringir o contacto com a realidade e aumentar a análise desse contacto. Assim a sensibilidade se alarga e aprofunda, porque em nós está tudo; basta que o procuremos e o saibamos procurar*” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 138).

15 For a detailed study of Pessoa’s reflections on feelings as a founding basis of literature, see Gil (1987).

16 “*Tornar puramente literária a recetividade dos sentidos, e as emoções, quando acaso inferiorizem, convertê-las em matéria aparecida para com elas estátuas se esculpirem de palavras fluidas e lambentes* (sic)” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 388).

Pessoa thus makes a virtue of necessity: the isolation and anonymity which urban life brings him helps him to abolish every disturbing interaction, while indolence is used to favour a state of drowsiness, semi-consciousness, fatigue, or tedium, thus allowing impressions to transcend this state, making them available for amplification by the imagination. In the fragment ‘*O sensacionista*’, Soares affirms that life is interesting insofar as it is convertible into dreams, and speaks of an exercise of “*decorativismo interior*” [interior decoration] as “*o modo superior e esclarecido de dar um destino à nossa vida*” [the superior and enlightened way of giving a destiny to our life].¹⁷ Soares even elaborates an [Aesthetics of indifference]: [The ability to spontaneously abstract whatever is ‘dreamable’ from each object or event, leaving all of its reality as dead matter in the Exterior World – that is what the wise man should strive for]¹⁸. Following this method, the city often awakens as an inner landscape.

IV

The landscape arises to the extent that a set of visual phenomena are extracted from the continuum in which it is presented; these are endowed with a unity of meaning that does not coincide with the visual field of those who contemplate it. But the Lisbon landscapes that are described in *Livro do Desassossego* are not the result of the nationalisation of the city, but rather, constitute a strange unity with Soares’ feelings and thoughts. For example, when he mentions contemplating the city from the São Pedro de Alcântara viewpoint, what Lisbon offers are not landscapes but reflections: [a state of emotion is a landscape [...]. These incidental words were dictated to me by the

17 “*Um decorativismo interior acentua-se-me como o modo superior e esclarecido de dar um destino à nossa vida*” (‘*O sensacionista*’ [The sensationist], Pessoa, 2012).

18 “*Saber, com um imediato instinto, abstrair de cada objecto ou acontecimento o que ele pode ter de sonhável, deixando morto no Mundo Exterior tudo quanto ele tem de real — eis o que o sábio deve procurar realizar em si próprio*” (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 428).

panorama of the city as seen from the look-out of São Pedro de Alcântara].¹⁹ The writer's drowsy state means that the impressions of the city he receives are fragmented, thus, inevitably, the city landscape cannot be contemplated without the help of the poetic imagination:

With mental detachment I look at the arrested street full of hurrying people, and I make out the details: the crates piled up on a cart, the sacks at the door of the other warehouse, and, in the farthest window of the grocery on the corner, the glint of those bottles of Portwine that I imagine no one can afford to buy. My spirit abandons the material dimension. I investigate with my imagination. The people passing by on the street are always the same ones who passed by a while ago, always a group of floating figures, patches of motion, uncertain voices, things that pass by and never quite happen.²⁰

One of the results investigation by using one's imagination is what Ángel Crespo calls "*el efecto de palimpsesto*" [the palimpsest effect] (Crespo, 1984, p. 218). On one occasion (fragment 72), Soares notes that the Tejo has been transformed into a blue lake, and the hills of the far shore, a flattened Switzerland; in another, that the Ganges passes by the Rua dos Douradores (fragment 420). But the ultimate triumph of this procedure, according to Soares himself, was on one occasion when, looking at the Cais do Sodré, he clearly saw, [a Chinese pagoda with odd bells

hanging like absurd hats]²¹ The effect of a palimpsest is not the superposition of an exterior reality onto an imagined interior one; rather, it is the result of what he calls an 'inner version of the outer world': [That's why I constantly strive to alter what I see, thereby making it indisputably mine—by altering the beautiful moment, by lying, [...]—In this way I create, thanks to my experience and my habit of spontaneously seeing when I look, an inner version of the outer world.]²²

Soares' view weaves unprecedented relationships between urban elements which reaffirm the city's importance. If the author of *Lisboa: o que o turista deve ver* dedicated himself to describing the allegories that appear on the pedestals of the equestrian statue in Praça do Comércio or which adorn the arch of the entrance to Rua Augusta representing Generosity, Glory, Genius, and Courage, then Soares emblemises the city's more trivial elements. [Compared with real, ordinary men who walk down the streets], those in its cafés, [cut a figure that can be described only by comparing them to certain elves from dreams] (fragment 360); an old man becomes the symbol of nobody and of nothing (fragment 356). Nonetheless, the symbolic story that determines Soares' understanding of the meaning of his own existence, and of his book, can be read in Rua dos Douradores:

Ah, I understand! Vasques my boss is Life – monotonous and necessary, imperious and inscrutable Life. This banal man represents the banality of Life. For me he is everything, externally speaking, because for me Life is whatever is external.

19 "Um estado da alma é uma paisagem [...]. Estas palavras casuais foram-me ditas pela grande extensão da cidade, vista à luz universal do sol, desde o alto de São Pedro de Alcântara" (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 72).

20 "Os pormenores da rua parada onde muitos andam destacam-se-me com um afastamento mental: os caixotes apinhados na carroça, os sacos à porta do armazém do outro, e, na montra mais afastada da mercearia da esquina, o vislumbre das garrafas daquele vinho do Porto que sonho que ninguém pode comprar. Isola-se-me o espírito de metade da matéria. Investigo com a imaginação. A gente que passa na rua é sempre a mesma que passou há pouco, é sempre o aspecto flutuante de alguém, nódoas de movimento, vozes de incerteza, coisas que passam e não chegam a acontecer" (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 143).

21 "O meu triunfo máximo no género foi quando, a certa hora ambígua de aspecto e luz, olhando para o Cais do Sodré nitidamente o vi um pagode chinês com estranhos guizos nas pontas dos telhados como chapéus absurdos" (Pessoa, 'A divina inveja' [Divine envy], 2012).

22 "Esforço-me por isso para alterar sempre o que vejo de modo a torná-lo irrefragavelmente meu —de alterar, mentindo-o momento belo [...]— e assim crio, de educado que estou, e com o próprio gesto de olhar com que espontaneamente vejo, um modo interior do exterior" (Pessoa, 'A divina inveja' [Divine envy], 2012).

And if the office on the Rua dos Douradores represents life for me, the fourth-floor room where I live, on this same Rua dos Douradores, represents Art for me. Yes, Art, residing on the very same street as Life, but in a different place. Art, which gives me relief from life without relieving me of living, being as monotonous as life itself, only in a different place. Yes, for me the Rua dos Douradores contains the meaning of everything and the answer to all riddles, except for the riddle of why riddles exist, which can never be answered.²³

V

Numerous passages in the book affirm the non-existence of the exterior city, but even more of them insist on the author's inconsistency. Fragment 262 is an exception. A moment of lucidity allows Soares to note the absence of the city: [In that flash, what I'd supposed was a city proved to be a barren plain]; and where there should be a person, there is a void: [I am the centre that exists only in the geometry of the abyss: I'm the nothing around which everything spins].²⁴ It is understood that this movement is the writing, which rises up within a meditative space so as to give meaning to a self in ruins and a non-existent city—insofar as they mutually question each other. This reinforcement through literature as the only way to bring reality to the phantasmagorical city finds a precedent in Cesário Verde, a poet from the city of Lisbon—and author of a book which, like *Livro do Desassossego*, was

published posthumously in 1887—who Soares said he felt was his contemporary (fragment 3). According to Soares, in the *Livro do Desassossego*, Verde functions as a [correction coefficient for {his} vision of the world] (fragment 130). In a passage in which he describes the sentimental landscapes suggested by the smells of the streets, none of them satisfy him, not even those of the landscapes of a remote rural life or of his childhood. Until a smell of boxes causes the poet to recollect: [my dear Cesário! You appear before me and at last I'm happy, for I've returned by way of memory to the only truth, which is literature].²⁵ Therefore, we reach literature, the only reality for Pessoa–Soares. Elsewhere he states that [All literature is an attempt to make life real. [...] the country, the city and our ideas are all absolutely fictitious things, the offspring of our complex sensation of our own selves. Impressions are incommunicable unless we make them literary].²⁶ Thus, in the *Livro do Desassossego* we have sketches of a theory and an implementation of the literary representation of the city. Through the poetic processes tested by Soares (based on exposure to the conditions of poverty, in turn acquainting him with the experiences of urban life), an invisible Lisbon emerges, made as literature—and therefore as memorable—and elaborated from the banal situations which occur in everyday places in the city; all registered by an author with a mediocre life, but one with a huge and secret literary talent. If any book has contributed to putting Lisbon on the global map, if any work has been more successful in combating the 'European decategorisation' of Portugal, it is not Pessoa's tourist guide—even though it is the best-seller among tourists at Casa Fernando Pessoa. If any Lisbon has become an unforgettable and universal landscape, it is not the Lisbon of solemn monuments and white stone buildings, but that of the Baixa side streets and of Soares' aimless walks. A Lisbon you cannot fully experience if you have not read *Livro do Desassossego*.

23 ««O patrão Vasques é a Vida. A Vida, monótona e necessária, mandante e desconhecida. Este homem banal representa a banalidade da Vida. Ele é tudo para mim, por fora, porque a Vida é tudo para mim por fora. E, se o escritório da Rua dos Douradores representa para mim a vida, este meu segundo andar, onde moro, na mesma Rua dos Douradores, representa para mim a Arte. Sim, a Arte, que mora na mesma rua que a Vida, porém num lugar diferente, a Arte que alivia da vida sem aliviar de viver, que é tão monótona como a mesma vida, mas só em lugar diferente. Sim, esta Rua dos Douradores compreende para mim todo o sentido das coisas, a solução de todos os enigmas, salvo o existirem enigmas, que é o que não pode ter solução» (Pessoa 2001: fr. 9).» (Pessoa 2001: fr. 9).

24 "Quando brilhou o relâmpago, aquilo onde supus uma cidade era um plauto deserto [...]. Sou o centro que não há nisto senão por uma geometria do abismo; sou o nada em torno do qual este movimento gira" (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 262).

25 "Ó meu Cesário, apareces-me e eu sou enfim feliz porque regressei, pela recordação, à única verdade, que é a literatura" (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 268).

26 "Toda a literatura consiste num esforço para tornar a vida real. [...] Os campos, as cidades, as ideias, são coisas absolutamente fictícias, filhas da nossa complexa sensação de nós mesmos. São intransmissíveis todas as impressões salvo se as tornarmos literárias" (Pessoa, 2012, fr. 117).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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