

# The Soul and the Self: The Internal Struggle of the Heteronyms in Fernando Pessoa

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## Abstract:

Fernando Pessoa wrote his poetry under various identities known as Heteronyms and the prominent heteronyms of Pessoa, Alvaro de Campos, Alberto Caeiro and Bernardo Soares have represented in their writings a sense of longing and a feeling of entrapment and a sense of incompleteness. They all lack something and that lack becomes the inherent theme in their poetry. The differences between the Soul and the Self become very prominent in the sphere of heteronym, where the self becomes possessed by a variety of souls with their longing and expectations out of life. Such representations of Heteronymic writings in literature are rare and have never happened on such a vast scale as it has happened in Pessoa. The various interpretations given to the soul in both philosophical and psychological dimensions are read into to give an insight into the heteronyms and their clash with the Self. The writings of heteronyms are not just fancy or imaginations of the self but also the representations of their collective consciousness. This paper proposes to look into the crisis felt by the heteronymous author by analyzing works of various heteronyms and of Pessoa.

**Keywords:** Fernando Pessoa, Alvaro de Campos, Bernardo Soares, Self, Persona, Soul, and Heteronyms.

## INTRODUCTION

Fernando Pessoa wrote his works under various heteronyms. He was the foremost representative of Modernist movement in Portugal. Along with Mario de Sa Carnerio, José de Almada Negreiros, and his heteronyms he introduced 'isms' influenced by the European modernist movements like Cubism and Futurism. The 'isms' brought forward by Pessoa like Paulism, Intersectionism and Sensationism helped in developing a poetic expression unique to Portugal. The major voice of the movement was Orpheu, the literary magazine developed by Pessoa and Sa Carnerio. Pessoa gave his heteronyms an important role in these movements helping to express his multiplicity of ideas. In his edition of The Book of Disquiet, Richard Zenith writes;

Pessoa referred to the many names under which he wrote prose and poetry as 'heteronyms' rather than pseudonyms, since they were not merely false names but belonged to invented others, to fictional writers with points

of view and literary styles that were different from his own.(519)

These creations or the fragments of Pessoa's self-reflected their observations and outlooks on life through their writing. He made them an instrument of his vocation when he became a frontrunner of the Modernist movement in Portugal. His heteronyms like Alberto Caeiro, Alvaro de Campos, and Ricardo Reis were instrumental in carrying out various movements that he started under Portuguese Modernism.

In the Triumphal Ode Alvaro de Campos expresses his want to express himself as an Individual. He uses the analogy of how a machine is complete as the latest model of an automobile familiarizing with the artificial and mechanical. Like an apparition of Fernando Pessoa, Alvaro expresses the need for a corporeal body, since the self is often associated with the body. This unattainable longing reflects through his poetic oeuvre, becoming a poignant theme throughout. He sees everything that surrounds him, but he is unable to feel the sensations, the smell, the lust, and the angst for he is an apparition facing an identity crisis. In the Triumphal Ode, Alvaro writes;

And all the simply elegant people who parade down the Street

And who also, after all, have a soul! (155)

The question that Heteronym poses is the question of Identity, what makes a person who they are. In a heteronymous author, this identity or soul becomes fragmented or pieces of a whole. Expressing the various characters within, the ones who never came to existence. These trapped souls are given a representative voice through authors like Pessoa. Pessoa and his heteronyms constant this struggle between the soul and the self.

According to Carl Jung the development of the self is formulated by the identification of the ego consciousness within the self. In his collection of lectures, Concerning Rebirth, Jung posits;

...for the great psychic danger which is always connected with individuation, or the development of the self, lies in the identification of ego-consciousness with the self. This produces an inflation which threatens consciousness with dissolution. All the more primitive or older cultures show a fine sense for the "perils of the soul" and for the dangerousness and general unreliability of the gods. That is, they have not yet lost their psychic instinct for the

barely perceptible and yet vital processes going on in the background, which can hardly be said of our modern culture. (94)

In Pessoa, the idea of individualization remains always a question since he has so many versions of the self within. 'The Perils of the Soul' that Jung talks about, could be in Pessoa the state of his country during the time, or the trauma of losses he faced in his life, his upbringing in the house of his grandmother, the loss of his dear friend or compatriot, Mario de Sa Carneiro, or even the loneliness of his life. For Pessoa, these were not issues as for him his life itself would have been an experiment that he conducted on literature. The freedom he gave to his heteronyms to thrive, to express them through him was a culmination of his life's work.

The soul according to various descriptions from dictionary to Bible and other religious scriptures represents it as the spiritual part of a person giving him life. In *On the Soul*, Aristotle quotes Democritus explaining the relationship between Soul and Mind; soul (which for him is the same as mind) is one of the primary and indivisible bodies, productive of motion because of the smallness and shape of its particles; he says the spherical is the most mobile of figures, and that mind and fire are of such shape. (10,31)

The idea of being soulless represents an absence of empathy towards things. When you read the works of Pessoa what you find in excesses the sense of empathy being represented in writing. In Pessoa's writings, there is an empathy he feels towards his heteronyms and vice versa.

But the existence of Pessoa and his heteronyms contradicts this idea, differentiating with soul and mind(self). The soul or rather souls in Pessoa become a possession of the self when he writes on their behalf. Pessoa becomes like the perfect machine, a motor expressing his thoughts in writing. But the entrapment is real and the soul as it experiences the human thoughts and feelings wants to feel the world, not as a tenant in someone's body but to exist as a self and to be able to experience things and have an experience beyond in writing. This impossibility becomes the longing faced by the heteronyms which become a prominent theme in Campos' poem, *Tobacconist*. Campos begins his poem *Tobacconist* by coming to terms with his entrapment. He says;

I am nothing.  
Never shall be anything.  
Cannot will to be anything.  
This apart, I have in me all the dreams of the world.  
Windows of my room,  
Room of one of the millions in the world about whom  
nobody knows who he is

(And if they knew who he is, what would they know?) ... (92)

If Alvaro feels entrapped in *Tobacconist*, in the poem, In the *Terrible Night* he writes on the feeling of death and the feeling of waking up and finding yourself to be a corpse.

I remember, awake in tossing drowsiness,  
I remember what I've done and what I might have done in life.

I remember, and an anguish  
Spreads all through me like a physical chill or a fear,  
The irreparable of my past – this is the real corpse.  
All the dead may be alive somewhere else,  
All my own past moments may be existing somewhere  
In the illusion of space and time,  
In the falsity of elapsing. (98)

He is locked up and he looks outside the windows of the room to the world outside, without stepping out into that world. And by this impossibility, the room becomes his world and results in a world within the world. Within this world, he can achieve the impossible as he is the master of this world. In the *Book of Disquiet* Soares says:

There's 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 erudition of the sensibility. 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.

What's travel and what good is it? Any sunset is the sunset; one doesn't have to go to Constantinople to see it. The sensation of freedom that travel brings? I can have it by going from Lisbon to Benfica,\* and have it more intensely than one who goes from Lisbon to China, because if the freedom isn't in me, then I won't have it no matter where I go. 'Any road,' said Carlyle,\* 'this simple Entepfuhl road, will lead you to the end of the World.' But the Entepfuhl road, if it is followed all the way to the end, returns to Entepfuhl; so that Entepfuhl, where we already were, is the same end of the world we set out to find.

...

Whoever has crossed all the seas has only crossed the monotony of him. I've crossed more seas than anyone. I've seen more mountains than are on Earth. I've passed through more cities than exist, and the great rivers of non-worlds have flown sovereignty under my watching eyes. If I travelled, I'd find a poor copy of what I've already seen without taking one step.

In the countries that others go to, they go as anonymous foreigners. In the countries I've visited, I've been not only the secret pleasure of the unknown traveller, but also the majesty of the reigning king, the indigenous people and their culture, and the entire history of the nation and its neighbours. I saw every landscape and every house because they were me, made in God from the substance of my imagination.

Renunciation is liberation. Not wanting is power.

...

Travel is for those who cannot feel. That's why travel books are always so unsatisfying as books of experience. They're worth only as much as the imagination of the one who writes them, and if the writer has imagination, he can as easily enchant us with the detailed, photographic description – down to each tiny pennant – of scenes he imagined as he can with the necessarily less detailed description of the scenes he thought he saw. All of us are near-sighted, except on the inside. Only our dreaming sees with clear vision.

...

Eternal tourists of ourselves, there is no landscape but what we are. We possess nothing, for we don't even possess ourselves. We have nothing because we are nothing. What hand will I reach out, and to what universe? The universe isn't mine: it's me. (124-126)

In TS. Eliot's *Little Gidding* he shares a similar idea as he talks about exploration which resonates with the 'Entefuhl Road':

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time. (208)

But when the latter praises the act of exploration which talks about the growth of a being and how the experiences of life change the person, Pessoa, says that it is about the restriction of our interaction with reality and focusing more on the interaction than our sensibility becomes broader and deeper. This passage from *The Book of Disquiet* expresses the creed of heteronyms, who share experiences varied from the real self, i.e., Pessoa. As he lived his life pretty much in Lisbon, his heteronyms explored the world, had sensations different from what he experienced in terms of profession and travel. While Alvaro de Campos explored the world as a naval engineer, Alberto Caeiro herded sheep and Ricardo Reis lived as a doctor. The secret pleasure of the unknown traveller is the sensations of Pessoa who has experienced these within him.

In the Introduction to *The Book of Disquiet* Richard Zenith observes;

The problem with Cogito, ergo sum, for Pessoa, wasn't in the philosophical principle but in the grammatical subject. 'Be what I think? But I think of being

so many things!' cried heteronym Álvaro de Campos in 'The Tobacco Shop', and those myriad thoughts and potential selves suggested anything but a unified I. Much more than a literary ploy, heteronymy was how Pessoa – in the absence of a stable and centred ego – could exist. 'We think, therefore we are' is what, in effect, he says. And even this form of self-affirmation is chancy, for in his moments of greatest doubt and detachment, Pessoa looks within and whispers, with horror: 'They think, therefore they are.' (ix-x)

This angst felt by Pessoa expresses the toll the heteronyms take on him. A sense of fear that envelops someone of being possessed by themselves within. Pessoa elaborates the Descartean notion of self-awareness as it rarely applies to him who has a multitude of selves within. He relates to them and finds them as one among them when he associates them with the collective term, 'We'. It becomes concerning when he realizes that he is different from them, it is that sense of losing oneself or the fear of it that is seen when he separates himself from his heteronyms as he uses 'They'.

#### CONCLUSION:

In the Preface to the *Book of Disquiet*, Pessoa wrote the moment he saw Bernardo Soares for the first time. Similar narratives are seen in the introductions of characters in various novels and stories, but in the case of *Book of Disquiet*, Pessoa becomes a man who steps outside and sees his character coming to life, interacting with him and sending him later his collection of stories to edit. These interruptions and transmigrations of the soul transplanting the self in intervals are what represent this clash between soul and self. This projection of Soares does not belong to fancy or imagination as cited by Coleridge, since he is not merely a character in the story but an author who doesn't have a corporeal identity. This sense of loss separates him from the author but acquires a world of his own in the text. Through this process, Pessoa seals his various identities within and gives them a world of their own to exist. The attempts of giving them a date of birth, horoscope, personal lives, and date of death are all attempts to make them more real. To feel more in tune with the real world by placing them permanently in a world constructed individually for them. The people present in that world are simulations of their creation, through the observations of Pessoa. The whole act of writing in the case of Pessoa becomes a process of sealing his identities within writings. A world of their creation where they are both the Gods and slaves, a world tuned for their interests. The *Book of Disquiet* exemplifies this idea of sealing an author within. It is to experience the reflections of the real world and its experiences that Soares collects in *The Book of Disquiet*. He says;

It's a rule of life that we can, and should, learn from everyone. There are solemn and serious things we can learn from quacks and crooks, there are philosophies

taught us by fools, there are lessons in faithfulness and justice brought to us by chance and by those we chance to meet. Everything is in everything.

In certain particularly lucid moments of contemplation, like those of early afternoon when I observantly wander through the streets, each person brings me a novelty, each building teaches me something new, each placard has a message for me.

My silent stroll is a continual conversation, and all of us – men, buildings, stones, placards and sky – are a huge friendly crowd, elbowing each other with words in the great procession of Destiny. (300)

In Pessoa's take on Dr. Faustus, Faust(Pessoa) does a deep introspection. Dr. Faustus is an image of a man who has been stranded too far. His thirst for knowledge is what condemns him to hell. To this long line falls Pessoa's Faust. In his version of Faust, it's the dive into the deep abyss of self by Pessoa that reflects. In Faust he writes;

...  
I step up to the brink of myself and look down...  
An abyss... In that abyss the Universe  
With its time and Space is a star, and there are  
Other universes in the abyss, other  
forms of being with other Times and Spaces,  
And other lives different from this life... (401)

These other universes that the Pessoa in Faust sees are the universes within him. The universes that go beyond time and space of his own, living 'lives different from this life'. This becomes the tragedy in Pessoa as in Faust. As Faust becomes the epitome of the thirst for Knowledge, Pessoa becomes the explorer of universes within. It is the terror of finding so many within that seep into the works credited to Pessoa. The world he has constructed for his heteronyms clashes down upon his own leaving him into the existential terror of realization of faces within, which makes him look at the rest with a sense of horror, "They think, therefore they are."

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