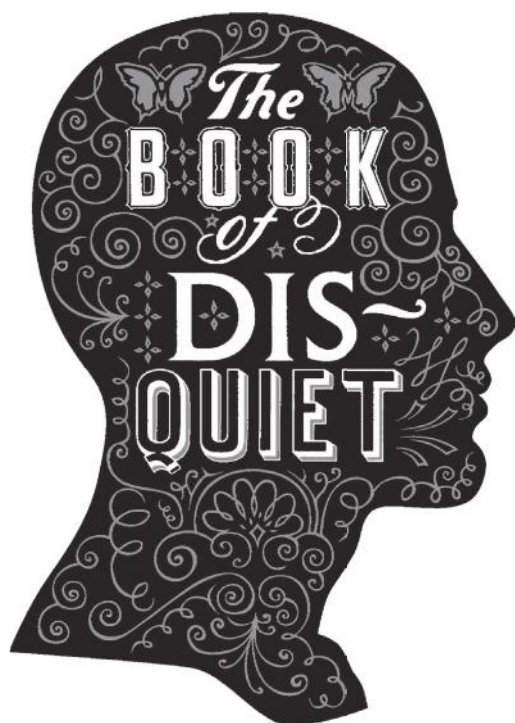


**Fernando Pessoa** was born in Lisbon in 1888. He spent most of his life there but, after his father's death, he lived in South Africa for nine years when his mother married the Portuguese consul in Durban. In those years he became fluent in English and developed a love for English writers such as Shakespeare and Milton. This influenced him to write his first collections of poems and journals in English, while his first book in Portuguese was published just two years before his death.

On leaving South Africa he returned to Lisbon, where he became involved in the modernist group 'Orpheu' and had a major role in the development of modernism in Portugal. During his life he was virtually unknown, avoiding society and the literary world, and although he wrote a vast amount, most of it was published posthumously. After his death in Lisbon in 1935, a trunk was found containing over 25,000 items – among them were collections of poems, letters and journals, from which *The Book of Disquiet* is a selection.



# *Fernando Pessoa*

*Edited by Maria José de Lancastre*

*Translated by Margaret Jull Costa*

*Introduction by William Boyd*



# *Introduction*

---

*Bernardo Soares*

Installed on the upper floors of certain respectable taverns in Lisbon can be found a small number of restaurants or eating places, which have the stolid, homely look of those restaurants you see in towns that lack even a train station. Amongst the clientele of such places, which are rarely busy except on Sundays, one is as likely to encounter the eccentric as the nondescript, to find people who are but a series of parentheses in the book of life.

There was a period in my life when a combination of economic necessity and a desire for peace and quiet led me to frequent just such a restaurant. I would dine at around seven each night and, as chance would have it, I was almost always there at the same time as one particular man. At first I took little notice of him but as time passed he came to interest me.

He was a man in his thirties, thin, fairly tall, very hunched when sitting though less so when standing, and dressed with a not entirely unselfconscious negligence. Not even the suffering apparent in his pale, unremarkable features added any interest to them nor was it easy to pinpoint the origin of that suffering. It could have been any number of things: hardship, grief or simply the suffering born of the indifference that comes from having suffered too much.

He always ate sparingly and afterwards would smoke a cigarette rolled from cheap tobacco. He would watch the other customers, not suspiciously, but as if genuinely interested in them. He did not scrutinize them as though wanting to fix their faces or any outward evidence of their personalities in his memory, rather he was simply intrigued by them. And it was this odd trait of his that

first aroused my curiosity.

I began to observe him more closely. I noticed that a certain hesitant intelligence illuminated his features, but his face was so often clouded by exhaustion, by the inertia of cold fear, that it was usually hard to see beyond this.

I learned from a waiter at the restaurant that he worked as a clerk in a company that had its office nearby.

One day there was a scuffle in the street immediately outside the restaurant – a fight between two men. The customers all rushed to the windows, as did I and the man I've been describing. I made some banal comment to him and he replied in kind. His voice was dull and tremulous, the voice of one who hopes for nothing because all hope is vain. But perhaps it was foolish of me to attribute so much to my evening companion at the restaurant.

I don't quite know why but after that we always used to greet each other. And then one day; prompted perhaps by the foolish coincidence of us both turning up for supper later than usual, at half past nine, we struck up a casual conversation. At one point he asked me if I was a writer. I said I was. I mentioned the magazine *Orpheu*<sup>\*</sup>, which had recently come out. To my surprise he praised it, indeed praised it highly. When I voiced my surprise, saying that the art of those who wrote for *Orpheu* tended to appeal only to a small minority, he replied that maybe he was one of that minority. Anyway, he added, he was not entirely unfamiliar with that art for, he remarked timidly, since he had nowhere to go and nothing to do, no friends to visit and no interest in reading books, after supper he usually returned to his rented room and passed the night writing.

*Fernanda Pessoa*

---

\* The literary magazine *Orpheu* was formed in 1915 by Fernando Pessoa, Mário Sá de Carneiro and Luis de Montalvor. Although only two issues were produced the magazine had a considerable impact on the evolution of modern Portuguese literature.

1 [90]

Sometimes I think I will never leave Rua dos Douradores. Once written down, that seems to me like eternity.

2 [124]

*The journey in my head*

In the plausible intimacy of approaching evening, as I stand waiting for the stars to begin at the window of this fourth floor room that looks out on the infinite, my dreams move to the rhythm required by long journeys to countries as yet unknown, or to countries that are simply hypothetical or impossible.

3 [81]

Today, during one of those periods of daydreaming which, though devoid of either purpose or dignity, still constitute the greater part of the spiritual substance of my life, I imagined myself free forever of Rua dos Douradores, of my boss Vasques, of Morcira the book-keeper, of all the other employees, the errand boy, the post boy, even the cat. In dreams, that freedom felt to me as if the South Seas had proffered up a gift of marvellous islands as yet undiscovered. Freedom would mean rest, artistic achievement, the intellectual fulfilment of my being.

But suddenly, even as I imagined this (during the brief holiday afforded by my lunch break), a feeling of displeasure erupted into the dream: I would be sad. Yes, I say it quite seriously: I would be

sad. For my boss Vasques, Morcira the book-keeper, Borges the cashier, all the lads, the cheery boy who takes the letters to the post office, the errand boy, the friendly cat – they have all become part of my life. I could never leave all that behind without weeping, without realizing, however displeasing the thought, that part of me would remain with them and that losing them would be akin to death.

Moreover, if I left them all tomorrow and discarded this Rua dos Douradores suit of clothes I wear, what else would I do? Because I would have to do something. And what suit would I wear? Because I would have to wear another suit.

We all have a Senhor Vasques; sometimes he's a tangible human being, sometimes not. In my case he really is called Vasques and he's a pleasant, healthy chap, a bit brusque at times but he's no doubledealer. He's selfish but basically fair, much fairer than many of the great geniuses and many of the human marvels of civilization on both left and right. For many people Vasques takes the form of vanity, a desire for greater wealth, for glory or immortality . . . Personally I prefer to have Vasques as my real life boss since, in times of difficulty, he's easier to deal with than any abstraction the world has to offer.

The other day a friend, who's a partner in a prosperous company that does business throughout the country and who considers my salary to be distinctly on the low side, said to me: 'You're being exploited, Soares.' This made me realize that indeed I am; but since it's the fate of everyone in this life to be exploited, my question would be: is it any worse being exploited by Senhor Vasques and his textile company than by vanity, glory, resentment, envy or the impossible?

Some, the prophets and saints who walk this vacuous world, are exploited by God himself.

And I return to an other's house, to the spacious office in the Rua dos Douradores, the way some return to their homes. I approach my desk as if it were a bulwark against life. I feel such an overwhelming sense of tenderness that my eyes fill with tears for my books that are in reality the books of other people whose

accounts I keep, for the inkwell I use, for Sergio's stooped shoulders as, not far from me, he sits writing out bills of lading. I feel love for all this, perhaps because I have nothing else to love or perhaps too, because even though nothing truly merits the love of any soul, if, out of sentiment, we must give it, I might just as well lavish it on the smallness of an inkwell as on the grand indifference of the stars.

4 [114]

With the soul's equivalent of a wry smile, I calmly confront the prospect that my life will consist of nothing more than being shut up for ever in Rua dos Douradores, in this office, surrounded by these people. I have enough money to buy food and drink, I have somewhere to live and enough free time in which to dream, write – and sleep – what more can I ask of the gods or hope for from Fate?

I had great ambitions and extravagant dreams, but so did the errand boy and the seamstress, for everyone has dreams; the only difference is whether or not we have the strength to fulfil them or a destiny that will fulfil them through us.

When it comes to dreams, I'm no different from the errand boy and the seamstress. The only thing that distinguishes me from them is that I can write. Yes, that's an activity, a real fact about myself that distinguishes me from them. But in my soul I'm just the same.

I know that there are islands in the South and grand cosmopolitan passions and [...]. I'm sure that even if I held the world in my hand, I'd exchange it all for a tram ticket back to Rua dos Douradores.

Perhaps it's my destiny to remain a book-keeper for ever and for poetry and literature to remain simply butterflies that alight on my head and merely underline my own ridiculousness by their very beauty.

I'll miss Moreira, but what does missing someone matter compared with a chance for real promotion?

not envy — has a directness in his smile that far outshines the insignificant dullness of my face, of me, the sphinx of the stationery cupboard.

What does all this mean? Is it true that the camera never lies? What is this truth documented by a cold lens? Who am I that I possess such a face? Honestly . . . And then to add insult to injury . . . Moreira suddenly said to me: 'It's a really good one of you.' And then, turning to the clerk, 'It's the absolute image of him, isn't it?' The clerk's happy and companionable agreement signalled my final relegation to the rubbish heap.

9 [27]

My soul is a hidden orchestra; I know not what instruments, what fiddlestrings and harps, drums and tambours I sound and clash inside myself. All I hear is the symphony.

10 [28]

*1.12.1931*

Today, suddenly, I reached an absurd but unerring conclusion. In a moment of enlightenment, I realized that I'm nobody, absolutely nobody. When the lightning flashed, I saw that what I had thought to be a city was in fact a deserted plain and, in the same sinister light that revealed me to myself, there seemed to be no sky above it. I was robbed of any possibility of having existed before the world. If I was ever reincarnated, I must have done so without myself, without a self to reincarnate.

I am the outskirts of some non-existent town, the long-winded prologue to an unwritten book. I'm nobody, nobody. I don't know how to feel or think or love. I'm a character in a novel as yet unwritten, hovering in the air and undone before I've even existed, amongst the dreams of someone who never quite managed to breathe life into me.

I'm always thinking, always feeling, but my thoughts lack all



reason, my emotions all feeling. I'm falling through a trapdoor, through infinite, infinitous\* space, in a directionless, empty fall. My soul is a black maelstrom, a great madness spinning about a vacuum, the swirling of a vast ocean around a hole in the void, and in the waters, more like whirlwinds than waters, float images of all I ever saw or heard in the world: houses, faces, books, boxes, snatches of music and fragments of voices, all caught up in a sinister, bottomless whirlpool.

And I, I myself, am the centre that exists only because the geometry of the abyss demands it; I am the nothing around which all this spins, I exist so that it can spin, I am a centre that exists only because every circle has one. I, I myself, am the well in which the walls have fallen away to leave only viscous slime. I am the centre of everything surrounded by the great nothing.

And it is as if hell itself were laughing within me but, instead of the human touch of diabolical laughter, there's the mad croak of the dead universe, the circling cadaver of physical space, the end of all worlds drifting blackly in the wind, misshapen, anachronistic, without the God who created it, without God himself who spins in the dark of darks, impossible, unique, everything.

If only I could think! If only I could feel!

My mother died very young; I never knew her. . .

11 [29]

Give to each emotion a personality, to each state of mind a soul.

12 [67]

*20.6.1931*

Today is one of those days when the monotony of everything closes about me as if I had just entered a prison. That monotony,

---

\*Pessoa uses a neologism 'infinítupla'.

Whether we like it or not, we are slaves to the hour in all its forms and colours, we are the subjects of heaven and earth. The part of us that despises its surroundings and plunges deepest into the forests within us does not take the same paths when it rains as when the sky is clear. Simply because it's raining or has stopped raining, obscure transmutations take place, felt only perhaps in the very heart of our most abstract feelings; we feel these transmutations without knowing it because we feel the weather even when we are unaware that we do.

Each of us is more than one person, many people, a proliferation of our one self. That's why the same person who scorns his surroundings is different from the person who is gladdened or made to suffer by them. In the vast colony of our being there are many different kinds of people, all thinking and feeling differently. Today, as I note down these few impressions in a legitimate break brought about by a shortage of work, I am the person carefully transcribing them, the person who is pleased not to have to work just now, the person who looks at the sky even though he can't actually see it from here, the person who is thinking all this, and the person feeling physically at ease and noticing that his hands are still slightly cold. And, like a diverse but compact multitude, this whole world of mine, composed as it is of different people, projects but a single shadow, that of this calm figure who writes, leaning against Borges's high desk where I have come to find the blotter he borrowed from me.

16 [74]

[...] ships that pass in the night and neither acknowledge nor recognize one another [...]

17 [96]

As with all tragedies, the real tragedy of my life is just an irony of

Fate. I reject life because it is a prison sentence, I reject dreams as being a vulgar form of escape. Yet I live the most sordid and ordinary of real lives and the most intense and constant of dream lives. I'm like a slave who gets drunk during his rest hour – two miseries inhabiting one body.

With the clarity afforded by the lightning flashes of reason that pick out from the thick blackness of life the immediate objects it is composed of, I see with utter lucidity all that is base, flaccid, neglected and factitious in this Rua dos Douradores that makes up my entire life: the squalid office whose squalor seeps into the very marrow of its inhabitants' bones, the room, rented by the month, in which nothing happens except the living death of its occupant, the grocer's shop on the corner whose owner I know only in the casual way people do know each other, the boys standing at the door of the old tavern, the laborious futility of each identical day, the same characters constantly rehearsing their roles, like a drama consisting only of scenery and in which even that scenery is facing the wrong way . . .

But I also see that in order to flee from all this I must either master it or repudiate it. I do not master it because I cannot rise above reality and I do not repudiate it because, whatever I may dream, I always remain exactly where I am.

And what of my dreams? That shameful flight into myself, the cowardice of mistaking for life the rubbish tip of a soul that others only visit in their sleep, in that semblance of death through which they snore, in that calm state in which, more than anything, they look like highly evolved vegetables! Unable to make a single noble gesture other than to myself, or to have one vain desire that was not utterly vain!

Caesar gave the ultimate definition of ambition when he said: 'Better to be the chief of a village than a subaltern in Rome'. I enjoy no such position either in a village or in Rome. At least the grocer merits some respect on the block between Rua da Assumpção and Rua da Victoria; he's the Caesar of the whole block. Am I superior to him? In what respect when nothingness confers no superiority, no inferiority, and permits no comparisons?

I have a spontaneous, natural sympathy with these waiters in cafés and restaurants, with barbers and street corner errand boys, which I cannot honestly say I feel for those with whom I have more intimate relations, if 'intimate' is the right word. . .

Fraternity is a very subtle thing.

Some govern the world, others are the world. Between an American millionaire with property in England and Switzerland and the Socialist boss of a village there is no qualitative difference, only quantitative. Below [...] them come us, the amorphous ones, the unruly dramatist William Shakespeare, the school teacher John Milton, that vagabond Dante Alighieri, the boy who ran an errand for me yesterday, the barber who always tells me stories, and the waiter who, simply because I drank only half my bottle of wine, proffered the fraternal hope that I would feel better tomorrow.

## 20 [56]

Only one thing surprises me more than the stupidity with which most men live their lives and that is the intelligence inherent in that stupidity.

To all appearances, the monotony of ordinary lives is horrific. I'm having lunch in this ordinary restaurant and I look over at the cook behind the counter and at the old waiter right next to me, serving me as he has served others here for, I believe, the past thirty years. What are these men's lives like? For forty years the cook has spent nearly all of every day in a kitchen; he has a few breaks; he sleeps relatively little; sometimes he goes back to his village whence he returns unhesitatingly and without regret; he slowly accumulates his slowly earned money, which he does not propose spending; he would fall ill if he had to abandon (for ever) his kitchen for the land he bought in Galicia; he's lived in Lisbon for forty years and he's never even been to the Rotunda\*, or to the theatre, and only once

---

\*The Rotunda was the name given by *lisboetas* (natives of Lisbon) to the Praça Marquês de Pombal.

to the Coliseu (whose clowns still inhabit the inner interstices of his life). He got married, how or why I don't know, has four sons and one daughter and, as he leans out over the counter towards my table, his smile conveys a great, solemn, contented happiness. He isn't pretending, nor does he have any reason to. If he seems happy it's because he really is.

And what about the old waiter who serves me and who, for what must be the millionth time in his career, has just placed a coffee on the table before me? His life is the same as the cook's, the only difference being the four or five yards that separate the kitchen where one works from the restaurant dining room where the other works. Apart from minor differences like having two rather than five children, paying more frequent visits to Galicia, and knowing Lisbon better than the cook (as well as Oporto where he lived for four years), he is equally contented.

I look again, with real terror, at the panorama of those lives and, just as I'm about to feel horror, sorrow and revulsion for them, discover that the people who feel no horror or sorrow or revulsion are the very people who have the most right to, the people living those lives. That is the central error of the literary imagination: the idea that other people are like us and must therefore feel like us. Fortunately for humanity, each man is only himself and only the genius is given the ability to be others as well.

In the end, everything is relative. A tiny incident in the street, which draws the restaurant cook to the door, affords him more entertainment than any I might get from the contemplation of the most original idea, from reading the best book or from the most pleasant of useless dreams. And, if life is essentially monotonous, the truth is that he has escaped from that monotony better and more easily than I. He is no more the possessor of the truth than I am, because the truth doesn't belong to anyone; but what he does possess is happiness.

The wise man makes his life monotonous, for then even the tiniest incident becomes imbued with great significance. After his third lion the lionhunter loses interest in the adventure of the hunt. For my monotonous cook there is something modestly apocalyptic

about every streetfight he witnesses. To someone who has never been out of Lisbon the tram ride to Benfica is like a trip to the infinite and if one day he were to visit Sintra, he would feel as if he had journeyed to Mars. On the other hand, the traveller who has covered the globe can find nothing new for 5,000 miles around, because he's always seeing new things; there's novelty and there's the boredom of the eternally new and the latter brings about the death of the former.

The truly wise man could enjoy the whole spectacle of the world from his armchair; he wouldn't need to talk to anyone or to know how to read, just how to make use of his five senses and a soul innocent of sadness.

One must monotonize existence in order to rid it of monotony. One must make the everyday so anodyne that the slightest incident proves entertaining. In the midst of my day-to-day work, dull, repetitive and pointless, visions of escape surface in me, vestiges of dreams of far-off islands, parties held in the avenues of gardens in some other age, different landscapes, different feelings, a different me. But, between balance sheets, I realize that if I had all that, none of it would be mine. The truth is that Senhor Vasques is worth more than any Dream King; the office in Rua dos Douradores is worth more than all those broad avenues in impossible gardens. Because I have Senhor Vasques I can enjoy the dreams of the Dream Kings; because I have the office in Rua dos Douradores I can enjoy my inner visions of non-existent landscapes. But if the Dream Kings were mine, what would I have to dream about? If I possessed the impossible landscapes, what would remain of the impossible?

May I always be blessed with the monotony, the dull sameness of identical days, my indistinguishable todays and yesterdays, so that I may enjoy with an open heart the fly that distracts me, drifting randomly past my eyes, the gust of laughter that wafts volubly up from the street somewhere down below, the sense of vast freedom when the office closes for the night, and the infinite rest of my days off.

Because I am nothing, I can imagine myself to be anything. If I

were somebody, I wouldn't be able to. An assistant book-keeper can imagine himself to be a Roman emperor; the King of England can't do that, because the King of England has lost the ability in his dreams to be any other king than the one he is. His reality limits what he can feel.

## 21 [119]

The morning unfurls itself upon the city, interleaving light and shade (or rather degrees of intensity of light) amongst the houses. It does not seem to come from the sun but from the city itself, for the light issues forth from the city's walls and roofs (not from them physically but from the simple fact of their being there).

As I feel that, I feel full of hope, at the same time recognizing that hope is a purely literary feeling. Tomorrow, spring and hope are all words connected poetically with one emotion and in the soul with the memory of that emotion. No, if I observe myself as closely as I observe the city, I realize that all I have to hope for is that today, like every other day, will come to an end. The eyes of reason also look at the dawn and I see that the hope I placed in it, if it ever existed, was not mine. It belonged to those men who live for the passing hour and whose way of thinking I, for a moment, unwittingly embodied.

Hope? What have I got to hope for? The only promise the day holds for me is that it will be just another day with a fixed course to run and a conclusion. The light cheers but does not change me for I will leave here as I came – older by a few hours, gladdened by a new feeling but saddened by thought. Whenever something is being born one can as easily concentrate on the fact of its birth as imagine its inevitable death. Now, in the strong, generous sunlight, the city landscape looks like a field of houses – broad, natural and orderly. But, even as I see all this, can I really forget my own existence? Deep down my consciousness of the city is my consciousness of myself.

I suddenly remember as a child seeing, as I can no longer see it,



an apocalypse of anguish, an upturning of all known heavens and universes over the soul's desolation.

To feel oneself superior and yet find oneself treated by Fate as inferior to the least significant of beings – who can feel proud to be a man in such circumstances?

If one day I were to achieve a power of expression so great as to concentrate all art in me, I would write an apotheosis of sleep. I know of no greater pleasure in the whole of life than that of sleep. The wholesale blotting out of life and soul, the complete removal of all other beings, all other people, a night without memory or illusion, possessed of neither past nor future [ . . . ]

121 [340]

23.3.1930

There is such a thing as a weariness of the abstract intelligence, which is the most terrible of all wearinesses. It does not weigh on you like physical weariness, nor does it trouble you like a weariness of the emotions. It is the consciousness of the weight of the whole world, an inability in the soul to breathe.

In that moment, as if they were clouds blown by the wind, every idea through which we have experienced life, all the ambitions and plans on which we have founded our hopes for the future, are torn apart, ripped open, carried far off like the grey remnants of mists, the tatters of what never was nor ever could be. And in the wake of that defeat arises the black, implacable solitude of the deserted, starry sky in all its purity. Life's mystery wounds and frightens us in many ways. Sometimes it comes to us as a formless phantasm, the monstrous incarnation of non-being, and our soul trembles in the most terrible of fears. At other times it – the whole truth in all the horror of our inability ever to know it — lurks behind us, visible only so long as we do not turn round to see it.

But the horror that racks me today is at once less noble and more corrosive. It is a wish not to think, a desire never to have been anything, a conscious despair in every cell of my soul. It is a sudden



sense of being locked up in an infinite prison. Where can one even think of fleeing, if the prison cell is all there is?

And then there comes over me an absurd and irresistible desire, a kind of satanism predating Satan, that one day – a day outside of all time and matter – we might find a way of fleeing beyond God in order that whatever constitutes the deepest part of us might cease entirely (though how I don't know) to participate in either being or non-being.

122 [352]

28.9 1932

No one has as yet produced an exact definition of tedium, at least not in language comprehensible to someone who has never experienced it. What some people call tedium is nothing more than boredom; others use the word to mean a certain physical malaise; for still others tedium is simply tiredness. Tedium does contain tiredness, malaise and boredom but only in the way water contains the hydrogen and oxygen of which it is composed. It includes them without resembling them.

If some give tedium a restricted, incomplete sense, others lend it an almost transcendental significance, as, for example, when the word 'tedium' is used to describe someone's deep sense of spiritual nausea at the randomness and uncertainty of the world. Boredom makes one yawn; physical malaise makes one fidget; tiredness prevents one from moving at all; none of them is tedium. Neither is it that profound sense of the emptiness of things, out of which frustrated aspirations struggle free, a sense of thwarted longing arises and in the soul is sown the seed from which is born the mystic or the saint.

Yes, tedium is boredom with the world, the malaise of living, the weariness of having lived; in truth, tedium *is* the feeling in one's flesh of the endless emptiness of things. But, more than that, tedium is a boredom with other worlds, whether they exist or not; the malaise of living, even if one were someone else, with a different life, in another world; a weariness not just with yesterday

or today but with tomorrow too, with all eternity (if it exists) and with nothingness (if that is what eternity is). It isn't just the emptiness of things and beings that hurts the soul when it is immersed in tedium, it's the emptiness of something else too, the emptiness of the soul experiencing that emptiness and feeling itself to be empty, the emptiness that provokes a sense of self-disgust and repudiation.

Tedium is the physical sensation of chaos and of the fact that chaos is everything. Someone who is bored, uncomfortable or tired feels himself to be imprisoned in a tiny cell. Someone disenchanted with the narrowness of life feels himself to be chained up in a large cell. But someone afflicted by tedium feels himself the prisoner of a futile freedom, in a cell of infinite size. The walls of the cell surrounding the bored, uncomfortable or weary prisoner might crumble and bury him beneath them. The chains may fall from the limbs of the prisoner disenchanted with the narrowness of the world and allow him to flee; or, unable to free himself from them, the chains may hurt him and the experience of that pain may revive in him his appetite for life. But the walls of an infinite cell cannot crumble and bury us, since they do not exist, nor can we claim as proof of our existence the pain caused by handcuffs no one has placed round our wrists.

These are my feelings as I stand before the placid beauty of this immortal but dying evening. I look up at the high, clear sky where vague, pink shapes, like the shadows of clouds, are the impalpable down on the wings of distant life. I look down at the river where the water, shimmering slightly, is of a blue that seems the mirror image of a deeper sky. I look up again at the sky and already, in the invisible air, amongst the vague colours that unravel without quite disintegrating, there is an icy dull whiteness, as if in all things, at their highest and most incorporeal level, there were some malaise, a tedium in matter itself, a sense of the impossibility of something just being what it is, an imponderable nexus of anxiety and desolation.

But what if there is? What else is there in the high air but the high air, which is nothing? What else is there in the sky but borrowed

colour? What is there in these tiny scraps, barely clouds, whose presence I already doubt, but a little reflected light scattered by a submissive sun? What is there in all this but myself? Ah, but in that and only that lies tedium. It's the fact that in all this – sky, earth, world – there is never anything but myself!

**123 [332]**

What I feel above all else is weariness and the disquiet that is the twin of weariness when it has no other reason to exist than the fact of existence itself. I feel a deep dread of gestures as yet unmade, an intellectual timidity about words as yet unspoken. Everything seems doomed in advance to insignificance.

The unbearable tedium of all these faces, foolish with intelligence or the lack of it, grotesque to the point of nausea in their happiness or unhappiness, horrific in the mere fact of their existence, a separate tide of living things quite alien to me . . .

**124 [350]**

I've reached the point where tedium has become a person, the fiction made flesh of my life with myself.

**125 [291]**

True wealth is closing one's eyes and puffing on an expensive cigar.

With the aid of a cheap cigarette I can return, like someone revisiting a place where they spent their youth, to the time in my life when I used to smoke. The light tang of that cigarette smoke is enough for me to relive the whole of my past life.

At other times a certain type of sweet might serve the same purpose. One innocent chocolate can rack my nerves with the profusion of memories it provokes. Childhood! And as my teeth

bite into the soft, dark mass, I bite into and savour my humble joys, as contented companion to a lead soldier, as competent horseman with a stick for a horse. Tears fill my eyes and the taste of chocolate mingles with the taste of my past happiness, my lost childhood, and I cling voluptuously to that sweet pain.

The simplicity of this ritual tasting does not detract from the solemnity of the occasion.

But it is cigarette smoke that most subtly rebuilds past moments for me. It just barely touches my consciousness of having a sense of taste and that's why, more than anything else [...] it evokes hours to which I am now dead, makes far-off times present, makes them mistier the closer they wrap about me, more ethereal when I make them flesh. A mentholated cigarette, a cheap cigar can bathe in tenderness almost any moment from my past. With what subtle plausibility I use that combination of taste and smell to reconstruct dead scenes and once more borrow [...] from a past, as distant, bored and malicious as the eighteenth century, as irredeemably lost to me as the middle ages.

126 [171]

25.7.1932

Generally speaking, the classifiers of the world, those men of science whose only knowledge consists in their ability to classify, are ignorant of the fact that what is classifiable is infinite and therefore unclassifiable. But what amazes me most is that they know nothing of the existence of certain unknown classifiable categories, things of the soul and the consciousness that live in the interstices of knowledge.

Perhaps because I think or dream too much I simply cannot distinguish between existent reality and the non-existent reality of dreams. And so I interleave in my meditations on the sky and earth things that neither gleam in the sun nor are trodden under foot: the fluid marvels of the imagination.

I clothe myself in the gold of imagined sunsets, but what is imagined lives on in the imagination. I gladden myself with

imaginary breezes, but the imaginary lives when it is imagined. Various hypotheses furnish me with a soul and since each hypothesis has its own soul, each gives me the soul it possesses.

There is only one problem: reality, and that is insoluble and alive. What do I know about the difference between a tree and a dream? I can touch the tree; I know I have the dream. What does that really mean?

What does it mean? That I, alone in the deserted office, can live and imagine without detriment to my intelligence. My thoughts can continue untroubled by the presence of the abandoned desks and the despatch section with its paper and balls of twine. I've left my own high stool and, enjoying in advance a hypothetical promotion, I lean back in Moreira's curve-armed chair. Perhaps it's the influence of the place anointing me with the balm of abstraction. These very hot days make one sleepy; I sleep without sleeping, for lack of energy. That's why I have these thoughts.

127 [173]

14.3.1930

The silence that emanates from the sound of the falling rain spreads in a crescendo of grey monotony along the narrow street I gaze down at. I'm sleeping on my feet, standing by the window, which I lean against as if there were nothing else in the world. I search myself to find out what feelings I have before this unravelling fall of dark luminous water standing out clearly against the grubby façades and, even more clearly, against the open windows. And I don't know what I feel, I don't know what I want to feel, I don't know what I think or what I am.

Before my unfeeling eyes, the repressed bitterness of my whole life peels off the suit of natural joy it wears in the prolonged randomness of every day. I realize that I'm always sad, however happy or content I may often feel. And the part of me that realizes this stands a little behind me, as if it were leaning over me standing at the window, and stares out, with more piercing eyes than mine, over my shoulder and over my head at the slow, slightly undulating rain that filigrees the brown, evil air.

One should abandon all duties, even those not demanded of us, reject all cosy hearths, even those that are not our own, live on what is vague and vestigial, amongst the extravagant purples of madness and the false lace of imagined majesties . . . To be something that does not feel the weight of the rain outside, or the pain of inner emptiness . . . To wander with no soul, no thoughts, just pure impersonal sensation, along winding mountain roads, through valleys hidden amongst steep hills, distant, absorbed, ill-fated . . . To lose oneself in landscapes like paintings. To be nothing in distance and in colours . . .

Safe behind the window panes, I do not feel the soft gust of wind that tears and fragments the perpendicular fall of the rain. Somewhere a section of the sky clears. I know this because behind the half-cleaned window immediately opposite I can just make out the calendar on the wall that I couldn't see before.

I forget. I stop seeing, stop thinking.

The rain stops but lingers a moment longer in a cloud of tiny diamonds like crumbs shaken off a great blue tablecloth somewhere up above. You can sense now that part of the sky is already blue. Through the window opposite I can see the calendar more clearly now. It bears the face of a woman and I easily recognize it as an advertisement for one of the more popular brands of toothpaste.

But what was I thinking about before I lost myself in looking? I don't know. The will? Effort? Life? From the spreading light I can tell that the sky must be almost completely blue again. But there is no peace – nor will there ever be! – in the depths of my heart, that old well at the far corner of the estate long since sold, the memory of childhood locked up under the dust of an attic in someone's else's house. There is no peace and, alas for me, not even a desire to find it . . .

128 [178]

7.10.1931

The sunset is scattered with stray clouds that fill the whole sky. Soft reflected lights of every colour fill the multifarious upper air and

anything. It has the unfortunate disadvantage of being deadly only to those things I want.

**159 [263]**

It is not love itself but the outskirts of love that matter. . .

The sublimation of love illuminates the phenomena of love much more clearly than the actual experience of it. There are some very wise virgins in the world. Action has its compensations but it confuses the issue. To possess is to be possessed and therefore to lose oneself. Only in ideas does one achieve, without spoiling it, a knowledge of reality.

**160 [264]**

Be pure, not in order to be noble or strong, but to be oneself. If you give love, you lose love.

Abdicate from life so as not to abdicate from oneself.

Woman is a rich source of dreams. Never touch her.

Learn to separate the concepts of voluptuousness and pleasure. Learn to take pleasure not in what something actually is, but in the ideas and dreams it provokes. For nothing is what it is: dreams are always dreams. That's why you must touch nothing. If you touch your dream it will die and the touched object will then fill your senses.

Seeing and hearing are the only noble things in life. The other senses are plebeian and carnal. True aristocracy means never touching anything. Never go too near – that is true nobility.

**161 [275]**

In me all affections are superficial, but sincerely so. I've always been an actor, and a good one. Whenever I have loved, I've only pretended to love, even to myself.



scientific ideas. Finally I was drawn to sociological theories. But at no point in the various stages of my search for the truth did I find security or relief. I read little in any of these fields, but in what I did read of all these theories it wearied me to see how contradictory they were, though all were based on a convincing line of argument, all equally probable and in accord with certain chosen facts that seemed to stand for *all* the facts. If I raised my weary eyes from the books, or if my restless attention wandered off to the outside world, I saw one thing that negated the usefulness of all reading and thinking, that plucked off one by one all the petals from the idea of that effort: the infinite complexity of things, the immense sum [. . .], the infinite unattainability of the few facts one needs in order to create a science.

186 [327]

Little by little I discover in myself the pain of finding nothing. I found neither reason nor logic only a scepticism that makes not the slightest attempt to create a logic with which to defend itself. I never thought of trying to rid myself of this illness: why should I? What does being healthy mean? How could I be so sure my state of mind was an unhealthy one? Who can say that just because it is an illness, that illness is not more desirable, more logical, more [. . .] than health? If health were preferable, why did I fall ill in the first place unless it was natural to do so, and if it was natural, why go against Nature which for some reason, assuming Nature has reasons, apparently wanted me to be ill?

All the arguments I come up with are merely justifications for inertia. Increasingly, with each passing day, the dark realization has filtered through to me that I have the inert soul of a born abdicator . . . I have stopped reading; I have abandoned the chance caprices of this or that aesthetic way of life. From the little I read I learned to extract only those elements I could use in dreams. From the little I saw, I took care to take only what could, after mature reflection, be put to use in my inner life. I struggled hard in order



that all my thoughts, every daily chapter of my experience supplied me only with sensation. I gave my life the tenor of an aestheticism. And I tailored that aestheticism to suit my personality. I made it mine alone.

Then, in the course of my pursuit of an inner hedonism, I applied myself to avoiding social niceties. I gradually armoured myself against the fear of appearing ridiculous. I taught myself to be insensitive both to the appeals of the instincts and to social blandishments [...]

I reduced my contact with others to a minimum. I did my best to lose all fondness for life [...]. Like some very weary person getting undressed before bed, I slowly disrobed myself of any desire for glory.

#### 187 [331]

I wonder how many people have contemplated as it deserves to be contemplated a deserted street with people in it. Even putting it that way makes it seem as if I were trying to say something else, which in fact I am. A deserted street is not one along which no one walks, but a street along which people walk as if it were deserted. It isn't a difficult concept to grasp once one has seen it, after all, to someone whose experience of the equine is restricted to mules, a zebra must seem inconceivable.

Feelings adjust themselves within us to certain degrees and types of comprehension of them. There are ways of understanding that dictate the ways they are to be understood.

Sometimes there arises in me, as if it rose up from the alien ground through my body to my head, a tedium, a grief, an anxiety about life that only seems bearable to me because I do in fact bear it. It's a suffocation of life in my own self, a desire in every pore of my being to be another person, a brief warning that the end is near.