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STAGNATING THE LIFE: MODERN WISDOM IN FERNANDO PESSOA'S *THE BOOK OF DISQUIET**

Hayatı Durağanlaştırmak: Huzursuzluğun Kitabı 'nda Modern Bilgelik

Hakan ATAY**

ABSTRACT: This article aims to draw attention to the existence of a common ground on which modern artist and modern thinker come close to each other in articulating a uniquely modern urgency, which gives shape to a new understanding of wisdom. Departing from the role often assigned to the poets/prose writers as the “stagnators of life” in the ages of turmoil, the article examines *The Book of Disquiet*, owned by Bernardo Soares, the semi-heteronym of Portuguese writer and poet Fernando Pessoa, as a collection of fragments that stage crucial moments of stagnation. After underlining how modernist literature has often been viewed as a separate realm from the devastating socio-political developments of the twentieth century, it exemplifies some experimenting gestures of the so-called “wise” artist through an analysis of *The Book of Disquiet*. The analysis focuses on the co-existence of poetry and prose, the exteriorization of interior experience via the notion of landscape, and the idea that life can best be observed from a distance after it is fully stopped. Drawing on literary readings of Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, and Paul de Man, the article aims to show that *The Book of Disquiet*, like the works of such poet/prose writers as Rilke and Kafka, illustrates how the destiny of modern artist, unlike that of modern world, was to break with the teleological concerns of daily life in favor of capturing life in its reality.

Keywords: Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, modern literature, wisdom, stagnation

ÖZ: Sanatçıların ve düşünürlerin modern zamanlara özgü bir aciliyeti dile getirirken birbirlerine yaklaştıkları ortak zemine dikkat çekmeyi amaçlayan bu makale, söz konusu aciliyetin yeni bir bilgelik anlayışı doğurduğunu öne sürüyor. Çalkantılı dönemlerde şair ve yazarlara biçilen “hayat durağanlaştırıcısı” rolü Pessoa’nın yarı-heteronimi olarak bilinen Bernardo Soares’in sahiplendiği *Huzursuzluğun Kitabı* üzerinden ele alınıyor. Modernist edebiyatı yirminci yüzyılın yıkıcı toplumsal ve siyasi gelişmelerinden bağımsızlaştıran

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anlayışa dair kimi örnekler ortaya konduktan sonra, *Huzursuzluğun Kitabı*'na yakından bakılıyor ve “bilge” sıfatına layık görülen sanatçının deneysel hamlelerinden örnekler sunuluyor. Çözümlemenin odağında şiir-nesir birlikteliği, içsel deneyimin manzara mefhumuyla dışsallaştırılması ve yaşamın ancak tamamen durdurulduğunda gerçek anlamda gözlemlenebileceği fikri yer alıyor. Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot ve Paul de Man'ın edebiyat yorumlarından yararlanan makale, *Huzursuzluğun Kitabı*'nın, Rilke ve Kafka gibi şair/yazarların yapıtlarına benzer biçimde, günlük yaşamın teleolojik kaygılarından kopmuş, hayatı kendi gerçekliği içinde yakalamaya çalışan bir sanatçı imgesi çizdiğini göstermeyi amaçlıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fernando Pessoa, *Huzursuzluğun Kitabı*, modern edebiyat, bilgelik, durağanlaştırma

Introduction

Portuguese poet and writer Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) created as many as 136 heteronyms constructing a dramatic system in which each heteronym refers to a distinct figure with a different name, biography and style.¹ Although Pessoa often works on stylistic differences of heteronyms, Bernardo Soares, the creator of *The Book of Disquiet*, has a prose style quite similar to Pessoa's. Indeed, expressing his affinity with Soares, Pessoa called him a “semi-heteronym” (Pessoa, 2001, p. 258-59). Soares, whose monotonous life as an assistant bookkeeper was akin to Pessoa's life in Lisbon, collected fragments which gave an account of different series of sensations in *The Book of Disquiet*. This paper will read Soares's style as a gesture that stagnates the life and thus creates the figure of wise writer.² In order to better explain the dynamics of this gesture, one can start with the role assigned to literature in turbulent times and the significance of the coexistence of poetry and prose for the reader's imagination in a modern state of literature.

¹ “Heteronym” literally means “other name” in Greek. Fernando Pessoa uses the term for at least some of his fictional author figures to be able to emphasize their difference from mere “pseudonyms”. According to one of the earlier accounts, there are 72 such names, discovered in the contents of Pessoa's heritage, posthumously found in several wooden chests (Lopes, 1990). Pessoa scholars Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari, on the other hand, claim that the total count should be considerably higher, and they end up compiling as many as 136 names, arguably shaping the entire heteronymous universe (Pessoa, 2013). Of course, not all the names added to this long list can be considered heteronyms *per se*. Some of them function more like pseudonyms, or even nicknames.

² The word “stagnation” (“estagnação” in Portuguese), which appears with a curious frequency throughout *The Book of Disquiet*, has the complicated task of laying out the ground for the discourse on tedium (“tédio” in Portuguese), one of the quintessential themes of the book. This paper is but a preliminary exercise in search of a general perspective that we might use in approaching that controversial topic later.

Poetry and Prose in Turbulent Times

The modern state of literature leaves its very first imprints on an intensifying tension between poetry and prose in the literary realm, or more likely, the literary “medium” in general. The continuous contamination, which brings about the glossy vulnerability and touchability of brand-new texts, evokes new but at the same time old-fashioned waves of thought aiming to penetrate into the “primordial” tendencies of some brilliant and seemingly ungraspable literary minds. The so-called modern state of literature is imagined recurrently through the consciousness of the modern reader-critic who is eager to greet the writer or poet as the model who both leads the way towards the work and pretends to be “the guide to the perplexed”. In the age of revolutions, wars and charming instability, it is obvious that there would have to be some “stagnators of life” who laid claim to control over their disturbed beings.

As Jane Goldman underlines, in the turmoil of the events like the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, the Reichstag, and the Second World War, art and literature, which are deemed infinite and transcendent, were often attacked and forced to change (Goldman, 2004: 39). Among various views on the changing nature of literature in this era, Goldman draws attention to Virginia Woolf's suggestion to practice introspection and her perception of the mind as open to a plethora of impressions. This view considers literature as “the subjective site of an aesthetic haven, removed from the vicissitudes of life and certainly remote from political life” (Goldman, 2004: 69). Although this is a limited remoteness considering Woolf's own engagements in political events, the image of literature as “an aesthetic haven” confirms its creators' attributed function of stagnating the life. Likewise, Sara Blair draws attention to the conviction that art and life, aesthetics and politics are and should be distinct spheres; therefore, this conviction maintains, their ways of acting as well as their values and consequences are thoroughly different from each other (Blair, 1999: 161). Although Blair does not agree with such an understanding of art as she thinks that even one's vision of art reflects a political stance, she highlights a common image of modernist art as a separate sphere, preserving its autonomy under the pressure of socio-political developments (Blair, 1999: 157, 161). Yet stagnation of life is not an unconditional consequence; it is rather the wise poet/prose writer who enables it.

The wise poet/prose writer's main gesture, which is recognizable through a very loose kind of reading, is the insistence on experimenting and analyzing the disparate and discrete states of a mind, which is the necessary and sufficient condition of authorial artisanship whose expressive qualities are partially, if not totally, distinct from the usual chain of expressions. This results in the assumption that the more the writer focuses his strength upon the structure of his creative activity, the more he gains access to the very origin of the literary moment and puts himself on the level of *sub specie aeterni* that gives him the ability to meditate even deeper. As one can easily anticipate, the burden of such an artist would correspond to the ideal state for the defenders of modernist criticism's goal to reevaluate contemporary cultural changes and reveal the path to a desirable future for the human condition.

Poetry, as the oral generator of old and new forms of life, and prose, as the modern invention of the free men who refused to be bound by capital and happened to be at odds with the primordial city crowds, turned out to be the most revered devices of the civilized world of "ideal Europe". Due to that fact, not only did their haunted coexistence attract deep anger from the traditionalists, who valued it as the utmost sign of the on-going cultural corruption, but it also encouraged those who vehemently observed its multifarious opportunities for endeavoring to establish the consciousness of "the men to come". Hence the literary man, or European *homme des lettres* is thought to live on the limit-threshold between prose and poetry, on the border that is metamorphized into an abyss, threatening normal human beings who are not aware of the calamities awaiting them. Beginning in the early twentieth century, growing attention to the works of Rainer Maria Rilke, for instance, can be related to his reception by the literary public as an epitome of precisely this condition, which seems to astound some literary critics and paves the way for questioning the very attention and its value itself.

Paul de Man, for example, expresses his astonishment about Rilke's ability to reach a wider audience than most of his contemporaries despite the difficulty of his work. While his language, discourse and themes are expected to be hardly accessible to many readers, he has been read as if he reached the depths of people's selves: "Rilke seems to be endowed with the healing power of those who open up access to the hidden layers of our consciousness or to a delicacy of emotion that reflects, to those capable of perceiving its shades, the reassuring image of their own solicitude" (de Man,

1979: 20). What Rilke calls “the near-impossibility of living” is the basic sense that his readers share with him (de Man, 1979: 21). For Rilke, the alienated self is something that no human experience can overcome, but de Man believes his work “dares to affirm and to promise, as few others do, a form of existential salvation and that would take place in and by means of poetry” (de Man, 1979: 23). Rilke chases not only his own salvation, but also the salvation of others, as the lines like “[y]ou must change your life” exemplify (de Man, 1979: 24). Another affirmation and promise, though in a very different manner, comes from Franz Kafka, who has been read eagerly by some influential thinkers of the twentieth century.

One of these thinkers is Walter Benjamin, who observes that the bases of Kafka's work are twofold: it is nourished both by mystical experience and by the experience of a city inhabitant (Benjamin, 1985a: 141). Benjamin views the former particularly in the context of tradition while the latter mostly in the context of technology. He considers the universe created by Kafka as a “complement” of his time when there were many efforts to destroy the planet (Benjamin, 1985a: 143).

In a catastrophic world Kafka existed as an individual, as a complement to the masses without being aware of what surrounds him. In Benjamin's words, “[h]is gestures of terror are given scope by the marvelous *margin* which the catastrophe will not grant us” (Benjamin, 1985a: 143). Kafka listens to tradition but does not see the catastrophe. The sounds that reach to the listener in this turmoil do not reach everyone's ears. Here Benjamin implies that it is the wise writer who can hear these sounds, but wisdom “defined as the epic side of truth” is something already lost (Benjamin, 1985a: 143).

Therefore, Benjamin says, in Kafka's case we can only talk of the remnants of the decaying wisdom. Hope, however, still exists for Kafka, but in a way that stagnates the life. In Benjamin's words, “there is an infinite amount of hope, but not for us. This statement really contains Kafka's hope; it is the source of his radiant serenity” (Benjamin, 1985a: 144). Kafka's “radiant serenity”, like Woolf's “aesthetic haven” and Rilke's “existential salvation”, endows literature with the function of reevaluating the devastating effects of modern world through a process of stagnation.

All in all, both the negative and affirmative moves of modernism against humanity-laden dehumanized culture had been examined in the works of such artists. Rilke's prose as well as his poetry (of course having *Malte* in mind) or Kafka's poetically scattered notes in his *Diaries* and stories were

noted or scrutinized in an effort to expose those moves, or better, motives. The gradual alienation from both the institutional and the so-called “natural” state of humanity, disdain and contempt towards the “civilized life” - whatever it may be - are but a few of the motives that were expected to open basically “new horizons” to the devastated minds of modern world. Most cultural thinking, then, dwelled in these texts, and in their possible ramifications for the attempt to find a path towards a future comprehension of what is modern, of what is present.

Not surprisingly, the repetitive activity of delving into those conditions by dint of any possible device led to the appearance of the so-called “modern” paradigms which started to hover over every cultural debate regarding the concept of modernity. Therefore, it is worth dwelling on such a text, *The Book of Disquiet*, and conjoining the traces of such paradigms in order to imply a sort of coexistence or parallelism.

Performance of a Life in *The Book of Disquiet*

Even though *The Book of Disquiet* adopted its amorphous shape during the formative period of modern literature, its discovery came rather late.³ Soares was left behind a misty curtain unlike some of the other heteronyms whose biographies were detailed in a rigorous manner.⁴ José Gil, a Portuguese philosopher whose main works focus on the analysis of Pessoa’s lifetime literary activity, regarded this fact as an obvious symptom of what he called “Pessoan poetics” (Gil, 1988: 15).

According to him, Soares’s role has the sole function to make a detailed analysis of what has already been given in Pessoa’s poetry. The life of Soares is veiled behind his basic, eventless, uncomplicated daily routines, almost all of which take place on the same street.

This “obscure” literary hero performs an awkward duty of combining disseminated notes covering a timespan between 1913 to 1934, planned as

³ Fernando Pessoa had published a dozen of the fragments from the book in several journals in his lifetime; unfortunately, he wasn’t able to complete the project and see it published. The first complete edition of *O Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Disquiet*) came to be realized in 1982, in two volumes, based on a selection criteria specified by Jacinto do Prado Coelho in an introductory note entitled “Fernando Pessoa Sempre Existiu” (“Fernando Pessoa Always Existed”) (Pessoa, 1982: vii-xxiii).

⁴ Pessoa’s three major heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro do Campos and Ricardo Reis, even have comprehensive astrological charts made by Fernando Pessoa himself.

parts of an unfinished project of intensely unorganized “autobiography”.⁵ Richard Zenith, both the editor and the translator of the work in question, outlines the somewhat untraceable moulding of the “trunk of notes” that is capable of partaking of the project in his introduction to the work, where we clearly see the semi-randomness of the editing job required to put *the Book* together in recognizable shape. Of course, the very nature of the notes are not particularly editor-friendly. Zenith describes what he calls “perpetual fragmentation” of *the Book* as follows:

“If Pessoa split himself into dozens of literary characters who contradicted each other and even themselves, *The Book of Disquiet* likewise multiplied without ceasing, being first one book and then another, told by this voice then that voice, then another, still others, all swirling and uncertain, like the cigarette smoke through which Pessoa, sitting in a café or next to his window, watched life go by” (Zenith, 2003: x).

The notes are not composed or assembled on the basis of chronological order; nor is there any serious attempt to link them together in proper, in a way that would yield a narrative structure, although it should be mentioned that Pessoa put titles to some of the fragments, which indicates an intention to take a totally different path.

Soares the obscure, unlike the surreal hero of modern literature who is occasionally given the role of the idle wanderer, or flâneur, lives a deliberately static, monotonous life. Both his office and his home are on the same street, Rua dos Douradores, which he defines as the true ensemble of his humble life. As an assistant bookkeeper in a warehouse, he has nothing really to consider except his boss, Senhor Vasques, several office mates, his ledger entries, and his fourth floor apartment from whose window he gazes at the shadowy contours of the city, especially when the night comes and fills the lacunae of his mind. While he admits he does not like to travel, he names what is at stake in his work as the seizing of life “as an experimental journey” (Pessoa, 2003: 309). Accordingly, the title of the completed project

⁵ Some editors of *The Book of Disquiet* claim that the fragments should be compiled according to chronological order, rather than a thematic one, and such an edition should be divided in two parts or phases, each assigned to different authors. For these editors, the first phase, comprising the notes taken between 1913 and 1920 should belong to one Vicente Guedes. Bernardo Soares, on the other hand, can only claim the fragments written down in the second phase, which goes roughly from 1929 to 1934. Columbian Pessoa scholar Jerónimo Pizarro, taking his cue from Jorge de Sena, one of the leading experts on Pessoa manuscripts, has become the contemporary advocate of this editorial preference. His critical edition of Pessoa's book has since been used as one of the primary sources for new translations (Pessoa, 2010; Pessoa, 2017).

turns out to be “the book of travelers” (Pessoa, 2003: 13). The literary form of the journey for Soares is, without any doubt, prose and only prose. The passage where he declares the reason of his insistence on the prose reads as follows:

“Prose encompasses all art, in part because words contain the whole world, and in part because the untrammelled word contains every possibility for saying and thinking. In prose, through transposition, we’re able to render everything: colour and form, which painting can render only directly, in themselves, with no inner dimensions; rhythm, which music likewise renders only directly, itself, without a formal body, let alone that second body which is the idea; structure, which the architect must make out of given, hard, external things, and which we build with rhythms, hesitations, successions, and fluidities; reality, which the sculptor has to leave in the world, with no aura of transubstantiation; and poetry, finally, to which the poet, like the initiate of a secret society, is the servant (albeit voluntary) of a discipline and a ritual” (Pessoa, 2003: 197-8).

We see that prose is considered to be the underlying medium of all the forms and contents of artistic creation. Soares then assures us that prose is the quintessential art form in a civilized world.

Having made room for Soares, Fernando Pessoa emphasizes, not without considerable irony, both the dichotomous relation that holds between prose and poetry and their rubbing against each other. This ironic decision to yield to a prose fanatic, for an unwilling poet, would mean the establishment of, as Gil suggests, “a poetic laboratory” (Gil, 1988: 15) to examine “rhythms, hesitations, successions, and fluidities” of performing a life. As for Soares’s own opinion of himself, continuous anxiety and disquiet, which make him uncomfortable with daily life, lead him to become “a decadent”, a word which has perhaps the longest history in the modern world of notions, starting its journey from German Idealism, Nietzsche and Baudelaire to a bulk of modern writers and free thinkers: “I suppose I’m what they call a decadent, one whose spirit is outwardly defined by those sad glimmers of artificial eccentricity that incarnate an anxious and artful soul in unusual words” (Pessoa, 2003: 321). Soares the decadent reports the sheer artificiality of life’s supposed construction through his “factless autobiography” by concentrating on the oscillations that he feels taking place between this image of life and the life in its reality. The artificiality of the art-work comes to the fore exactly at this point, harboring Soares’s method to achieve the main goal of a finite being like human, on the way to express itself. The so-called method is outlined by the fictional author as follows: “The obsessive analysis of our sensations (sometimes merely imagined sensations), the identification of our heart with the landscape, the anatomic

exposure of all our nerves, the substitution of desire for the will and of longing for thinking" (Pessoa, 2003: 55). The term "landscape" in Soares's vocabulary has a privileged place that may give a certain direction to our journey through the *Book*.

Thinking Through the Landscapes and Distances

As a plastic and visual notion, landscape is a territory defined by observers' sensual experience of a spatial extension. However, it would gain extra significance from the perspective of Soares's reluctant note-taking. One simple extra significance can be brought to light by the repeated reference made throughout the notes to another literary work, capable of being regarded as a kind of vague model for the author. The book in question is the well-known journal of famous Swiss philosopher Henri Frédéric Amiel, entitled *Fragments d'un journal intime*. For Soares, Amiel's notion of landscape is a point of departure, thereby positing a focus for his own work. According to Amiel, "a landscape is a state of emotion" (Pessoa, 2003: 71).

That description Soares neither denies nor affirms, but employs in order to elaborate on what he means to say. Starting off, in direct opposition to Amiel's intent, he turns the phrase around, and declares that an emotion itself constitutes a landscape. While analyzing the banality of his everyday life, he asserts that he is the one who makes his own landscapes: "I make landscapes out of what I feel. I make holidays of my sensations. I can easily understand women who embroider out of sorrow or crochet because life exists" (Pessoa, 2003: 121). Landscape, being a gathering place of sensations, is the border between exterior and interior, a border which has to be transgressed or rendered superficial to be capable of dwelling on the threshold so that the observer sees, indirectly, more than what appears. Soares, at this point, talks about "the inner centuries of outer landscape" (Pessoa, 2003: 420). This is the most flexible point of his analysis, where he stands as a thinker more than anything else. The landscape as interior territory cannot be deemed complete; to the contrary, it begs the interruption of the artist more than ever: "but to give complete exteriority to what is interior, thereby enabling me to realize the unrealizable, to conjoin the contradictory and having exteriorized my dream, to give it its most powerful expression as pure dream" (Pessoa, 2003: 456). Sleep, daydreaming, tedium and weariness are the most apparent themes of Soares's life; they also help him create a specific art-space out of his conditions. By conjoining what is exterior with what is interior, he retains the power to control them, thereby

giving them a considerable plasticity to work on: “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” (Pessoa, 2003: 410). The task being mentioned and adhered to the artist here reflects a paradigmatically modern one.

When Maurice Blanchot appeals to Rilke’s poetry, discussing “the world’s inner space” in *The Space of Literature*, he begins his meditation on this modern poet, who has somehow revived lyric poetry in modern times, from roughly the same perspective concerning the ideal state that an artist occupies:

“Instead of leading consciousness back toward that which we call the real but which is only the objective reality where we dwell in the security of stable forms and separate existences – instead, also, of maintaining consciousness at its own surface, in the world of representations which is only the double of objects such a conversion would turn it away toward a profounder intimacy, toward the most interior and the most invisible, where we are no longer anxious to do and act, but free of ourselves and of real things and of phantoms of things, ‘abandoned, exposed upon the mountains of the heart’, as close as possible to the point where ‘the interior and the exterior gather themselves together into a single continuous space” (Blanchot, 1989: 138).

The “single continuous space”, or “Open” in Rilkean terminology, characterizes the residue left behind in modern consciousness, which develops upon itself in order to realize what is absent in the present moment. Therefore, having dealt with the problem of interiority of the exterior, Rilke’s poetry takes a further step towards the absent coexistence of both his being and the world’s. Blanchot’s interpretative or coextensive observations make use of a bipolar conceptual framework in order to prepare a notion of the modern poet’s task which abruptly differentiates two interiorities, calling one of them “bad”. The demarcation at hand, for Blanchot, displays that the artist necessarily places himself against this bad interiority, thereby creating an unusually convenient place to delve into the matters of his activity:

“For in it [bad interiority], as in the bad outside, objects reign, along with the concern for results, the desire to have, the greed that links us to possession, the need for security and stability, the tendency to know in order to be sure, the tendency to ‘take account’ which necessarily becomes an inclination to count and to reduce everything to accounts – the very destiny of modern world” (Blanchot, 1989: 137).

Now, the destiny of modern artist, unlike that of modern world, is to break with, as it were, the teleological and epistemological concerns of present life. Taking his departure from the same point, and almost from the

same concept, the bookkeeper, or the “accountant” Soares, whose profession is meticulously selected to reflect the core of modern life, like Herman Melville’s *Bartleby*, wants to get rid of the urge to account for the objects at hand by pretending to have a direct access to the world, and to reject the necessary reduction that comes with it. If you are not reducing the world, the life, and that which is real into something else, then you should be able to “stop” or “stagnate” it. So as to stagnate the world, Pessoa, in disguise of Soares, repeatedly describes “rainy landscapes”, “fog”, “clouds and wind”, through which ordinary sensations undergo the sort of radical change that is proper for interior reorientation.

In one of the above-mentioned descriptions, Soares loses or feigns to lose even the solidity of his own body: “It rains and keeps raining. My soul is damp from hearing it. So much rain... My flesh is watery around my physical sensation of it” (Pessoa, 2003: 126). In another passage, the very reality of what is seen is questioned by similar means: “Fog or smoke? Was it rising from the ground or descending from the sky? Impossible to say: it seemed more like a disease of the air than an emanation or something descended. Sometimes it seemed more than an ailment of eyes than a reality of nature” (Pessoa, 2003: 318). Hence, Soares keeps a certain distance to what is given, thereby coming to grips with what is not given, and therefore not expressed. The distance in question leads us to another modern standpoint concerning the place of the art-work situated in direct opposition with the daily conditions of mundane life.

Walter Benjamin, in his article entitled “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, analyzes the reasons of the harm caused by modern life on human vulnerability. According to Benjamin, authenticity of the work of art has encountered an imminent threat of being destroyed or annihilated as a result of the indifference to the “jeopardized authority of the object” (Benjamin, 1985b: 220-21). For Benjamin, this happens because even “natural” objects, let alone those that have artistic value, are about to lose their “auras”, aura being the notion which is defined “as the unique phenomenon of a distance” (Benjamin, 1985b: 222). By reproduction, the essential distance between the seer and the thing seen becomes meaningless, and thereby disappears into thin air.

Bernardo Soares, in the *Book*, depicts a scene which evokes, tracing the same itinerary with Benjamin, a similar attention towards the importance of distance and the effects of reproduction with an example in whose center a “lithograph” picture is placed, lithograph being the technique which most

probably caused Benjamin to write his essay on such a topic in the first place. In that scene, Soares, while staring at “a bad lithograph” in a shop display, suddenly realizes something which makes him look at it even more curiously. The lithograph is of a girl holding some flowers, with sad eyes that startle and devastate Soares by their expression, at which he cannot help staring. So, he leaves whatever he was dealing with a minute ago and crosses the street to understand what exactly is the reason of this allure. After a while, when he is on the way to his office, he thinks as follows: “Oblivious to my departure, as if bidding farewell to something else, those sad eyes of the whole of life – of this metaphysical lithograph that we observe from a distance – stare at me as if I knew something of God” (Pessoa, 2003: 28-9). The unique experience that Soares finds no other choice to account for but by bringing God into play almost like an occasionalist thinker happens to be the one of “a distance”, exactly as Benjamin suggested. Moreover, similar to Benjamin’s description, Soares adds an ironic allusion to the effect of reproduction by these words: “Funny where I know that figure from. In the corner at the back of the office there’s an identical calendar which I’ve seen countless times, but due to some lithographic mystery, or some mystery of my own, the eyes of the office copy express no sorrow” (Pessoa, 2003: 29). Now, he has to call the picture that attracted him in such an undefinable and unpredictable manner “the real lithograph” (Pessoa, 2003: 29).

Thus, Soares is given both the privilege of experimentation, which leads him to undo the effects of reproduction by implying that there is an indirect way to get at what withdraws from presence, and the status of an analyzer of the very encounter that makes this possible; which, in turn, runs parallel to the demonstrated task of modern artist, the task made apparent by paradigms posited by the common effort of the artist as poet/prose writer and its correlate, the modern thinker.

Conclusion

The modern state of literature as imagined through the consciousness of modern reader created the figures of wise writers and poets who, in the unstable times of wars and revolutions, were expected to function as the stagnators of life. *The Book of Disquiet*, with its insistence on experimenting with various states of mind and its departure from the usual chain of expressions, stages crucial moments of this modernist gesture. Despite the fragmentary nature of *the Book*, one may trace how the attempts to stagnate the life occur in a realm that brings poetry, prose, and thought together. Pessoa’s presentation of Soares as a prose writer does not change this fact

and their co-existence finds its best manifestation in some fragments' engagement with landscapes and the idea of distance. By taking its distance from the explicit character of daily life, Pessoa's unfinished book project seems to highlight the irreducibility of life in its reality through a process of stagnation, thanks to the semi-fictional life of its author, Bernardo Soares.

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