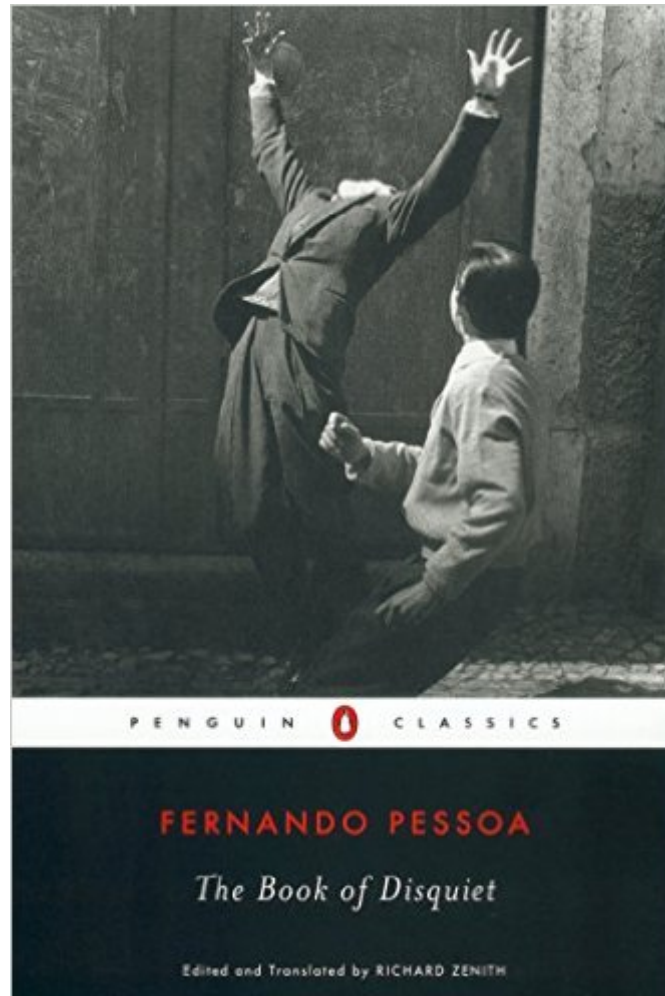




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The Book Of Disquiet (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The prizewinning translation “the best English-language version we are likely to see for a long time, if ever” (The Guardian) of a work of unclassifiable genius: the crowning achievement of Portugal’s modern master. Winner of the Calouste Gulbenkian Translation Prize for Portuguese Translation. Fernando Pessoa was many writers in one. He attributed his prolific writings to a wide range of alternate selves, each of which had a distinct biography, ideology, and horoscope. When he died in 1935, Pessoa left behind a trunk filled with unfinished and unpublished writings, among which were the remarkable pages that make up his posthumous masterpiece, *The Book of Disquiet*, an astonishing work that, in George Steiner’s words, “gives to Lisbon the haunting spell of Joyce’s Dublin or Kafka’s Prague.” Published for the first time some fifty years after his death, this unique collection of short, aphoristic paragraphs comprises the “autobiography” of Bernardo Soares, one of Pessoa’s alternate selves. Part intimate diary, part prose poetry, part descriptive narrative, captivatingly translated by Richard Zenith, *The Book of Disquiet* is one of the greatest works of the twentieth century.

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Customer Reviews

When Pessoa died in 1935, a few years short of 50, he left behind a trunk of mostly unpublished writing in a variety of languages; his Lisbon publishers and variously translators are still sifting them. This perpetually unclassifiable and unfinished book of self-reflective fragments was first published in Portuguese in 1982, and it is arguably Pessoa’s masterpiece. Four previous English translations, all

published in 1991, were compromised either by abridgement, poor translation or error-laden source texts. While he's now a Pessoa veteran-having edited and translated Fernando Pessoa & Co.: Selected Poems, the 1999 PEN Award for Poetry in Translation winner-Zenith's first pass at this book was one of the four misses. He bases this new translation on his own Portuguese edition of 1998, and has done an admirable job in bringing out the force and clarity in Pessoa's serpentine and sometimes opaque meditations. Pessoa often wrote as various personae (as Pessoa & Co. carefully demonstrated); Disquiet is no exception, being putatively the work of "Bernardo Soares, assistant bookkeeper in the city of Lisbon." Thus it is impossible to ascribe the book's anti-humanist logophilia directly to the author: "I weep over nothing that life brings or takes away, but there are pages of prose that have made me cry." That is just one of many permutations of similar sentiments, but the genius of Pessoa and his personae is that readers are left weighing each and every such sentence for sincerity and truth value. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

“A Modernist touchstone . . . no one has explored alternative selves with Pessoa’s mixture of determination and abandon . . . In a time which celebrates fame, success, stupidity, convenience and noise, here is the perfect antidote, a hymn of praise to obscurity, failure, intelligence, difficulty, and silence.” • The Daily Telegraph “His prose masterpiece . . . Richard Zenith has done an heroic job in producing the best English-language version we are likely to see for a long time, if ever.” • The Guardian “The Book of Disquiet was left in a trunk which might never have been opened. The gods must be thanked that it was. I love this strange work of fiction and I love the inventive, hard-drinking, modest man who wrote it in obscurity.” • Independent “Fascinating, even gripping stuff . . . a strangely addictive pleasure.” • Sunday Times “Must rank as the supreme assault on authorship in modern European literature . . . readers of Zenith’s edition will find it supersedes all others in its delicacy of style, rigorous scholarship and sympathy for Pessoa’s fractured sensibility . . . the self-revelation of a disoriented and half-disintegrated soul that is all the more compelling because the author himself is an invention . . . Long before postmodernism became an academic industry, Pessoa lived deconstruction.” • New Statesman “Extraordinary . . . a haunting mosaic of dreams, autobiographical vignettes, shards of literary theory and criticism and maxims.” • The Observer “Pessoa’s rapid prose, snatched in flight and restlessly suggestive, remains haunting, often startling, like the touch of a vibrating wire, elusive and persistent like the poetry . . . there is nobody like him.” • New York

Review of Books "This superb edition of The Book of Disquiet is . . . a masterpiece." "I plan to use this book every year in my course at Yale. Thanks for making it available." K. David Jackson, Yale University

This is just a phenomenal read - I feel that every human being could/should read it to get a deeper understanding of what it means to be in a body on this planet. My only wish is that he lived longer to be able to write more. Thank you Fernando Pessoa for these amazing words.

The man who claims to be nothing - says everything. Beautifully written insightfully honest, revealing the hidden places of the soul. A continual existential crisis of a man who has no need to do anything about it except write.

I have been reading Pessoa's poetry for a long time, which is amazing. He wrote under many different 'characters' fully realized in their backgrounds, each with a distinctive style, which he called "heteronyms". He wrote in English, French and his native language Portuguese. I was thrilled to find this novel, as expected superb writing, every bit as powerful as his poetry. This powerful and passionate novel was published after his death under his name, although he had worked on it for years off and on under various heteronyms. Finally celebrated as a major literary figure in his country-Portugal, he is in my opinion one of the greatest and sadly lesser known writers of the 20th century. Penquin Classics never fails to do a good job with their books. This is a writer I highly recommend to all true lovers of great literature. It is gratifying to see that he is beginning to gain world-wide recognition and his prolific writing, much of which was never published during his life is now coming to light as in this wonderful novel. Ordered direct through , fast delivery.

Entertaining bits but don't try to read it straight thru.. it is better read in the manner in which it was written.

Bernard Soares is the "voice" of these meditations but it really "feels" in so many respects like we imagine Pessoa's own voice (whatever that is). Not a book one would read through from beginning to end, and of course is one of the brilliant parts of this one-of-a-kind book. To call them meditations would hit close to what they are. But there's something more to them than that. The pinpoint acuity of the observations themselves, and the way they are written as such "one offs," like daily journals. When

you really focus on the ideas and sensations he follows, they knock you out.

There is a lot of good philosophy here. But I also got the impression the author was suffering from depression. At times, the book was quite maudlin, at others, brilliant.

In India there are bitter vegetables people eat for their health -- to ward off diabetes and counter the effects of a diet over-high in refined sugars. When I first lived in India, I hated those vegetables. Now I like them best of all. *“Bitter”* is not always a negative adjective. It may also restore life. It can serve as an antidote. There is something similar about *The Book of Disquiet* -- a book about failure, tedium and disconnection that is repeatedly beautiful and compelling, even life-giving. Please excuse me for quoting a blurb. It seems to me exactly right. John Lancaster wrote, *“In a time which celebrates fame, success, stupidity, convenience and noise, here is the perfect antidote, a hymn of praise to obscurity, failure, intelligence, difficulty and silence.”* If you, too, are spooked or nauseated by a world in which people go around trumpeting their own busyness and importance, reciting what appear to be advertisements for themselves, then this book may well feel like an antidote -- as well as a drastically more honest assessment of life, the way it actually feels, as opposed to how it is supposed to feel. If I may give advice, I strongly recommend using this book as a “tincture”, just a few pages at a time. I do not believe Pessoa would be offended even if you set it in the bathroom to accompany intestinal disquiets. As Zenith points out in his introduction, reading at random is actually ideal. I read this book over six months and was glad of its company -- but I think, if I had sat down and tried to read through it in a week, I might have found it insufferable. You could O.D. on ennui. Taken slowly in small doses however, it is brilliant bitter company.

At times despairing, at times ironic and even downright funny, Pessoa is a wonderful writer, an early Existentialist, a man fascinated by the details of living, of being. His descriptions paint sharp mental images of Lisbon, and of those who live there. His observations take the reader a step beyond the conventional, and each brief treatise always left me wanting more. This book is a jewel.

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