

# **The Book of Disquiet Study Guide**

## **The Book of Disquiet by Fernando Pessoa**

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## Plot Summary

Fernando Pessoa describes his work "The Book of Disquiet" as being an autobiography lacking facts. It is written by character Senhor Soares, who is assumed to be an alter ego for Pessoa. Pessoa's book does give few concrete facts about the writer or the world of the writer. The book is rich in describing the inner workings of the mind and soul of the author. Through his book, Soares explores the reasons why he writes and why he writes as he does, as well as an ailment that often affects him which he terms "tedium."

Throughout his book, Soares explores his own personality and his interaction with the world around him. He describes himself as an eccentric artist who works in a fabric warehouse as an assistant bookkeeper by day, but then lives through his dream life at night. His writing is divided into numerous sections, each of which covers a different topic. Some of these topics include Soares's reasons for writing, his relationship with his own self, his relationship with others, and his views of life as it is lived by the common man. One of the more prominent characteristics of this book is that the thoughts in one section often trail off unfinished. In his next section of writing, Soares will start a completely new thought, leaving the thoughts in the prior section unaddressed.

What Pessoa says in his book through his character Soares is perhaps not as important as how he says it. Although he continually indicates nothing written by man can be perfect, Pessoa has a unique flair to his writing that is not seen often. His style may not be perfect but it catches the eye of the imagination. His sense of rhythm in his work makes his writing flow like well-written poetry. Through his vivid descriptions, which often contain oxymorons, similes and metaphors, one can easily grasp the idea of what Soares is trying to describe.



# Sections 1 - 40

## Sections 1 - 40 Summary

In Section 1, Soares explains that he has not lost faith in God as have many of the people who live in this time period. He states that he has also not claimed faith in Humanity, the human species, which is a cult that he believes is not worthy of worship. Therefore, Soares indicates that he joins the group of those kept at a distance from things. He describes this distance as decadence. These people, Soares explains, recognize only their sensations as reality. Soares believes these people, like him, do things simply to keep busy.

In Section 2, Soares describes his life as a combination of dreaming and action. In Section 3, Soares describes the sadness he feels as he walks along his street. He draws a parallel between the daytime business of the streets and his own busy activity during the day. It is only at night that Soares believes he is truly himself. In Section 4, Soares transforms back into his job as an assistant bookkeeper. Instead of causing distress, however, Soares indicates this transformation liberates him. In this transformation, he turns from a pitiful office worker to one who writes as if this action were his means to salvation.

In Section 5, Soares writes about the way in which his mind wanders to writing and poetry of distant countries as he completes his bookkeeping work. In Section 6, Soares writes about the simple pleasures that he feels that he has been denied by life. He feels alone. As he writes, however, Soares feels connected to those before him who have longed for a way to express themselves. When he remembers what his life truly is, Soares chides himself for believing he is anything like those great writers who have come before him. In Sections 7, 8, and 9 Soares writes about his feelings about his job and his relationship with his boss, Vasques. In Section 9, Soares comes to the conclusion that his work represents life while his rented room represents art.

In Section 16, Soares attempts to describe a train trip that he takes between the cities of Lisbon and Cascais. He writes that he puts so much energy into trying to remember the sights he sees on the trip, that he is unable to recall anything at the end of the trip. In Section 18, Soares notes that in his dream life the only way he differed from the delivery boy where he works is his ability to write.

In Section 25, Soares writes about a bad lithograph of a sad-looking girl that he sees in a shop window. There is a similar picture on a calendar in Soares's office. However, Soares indicates the picture in the office does not show any signs of sorrow. In Sections 31 and 32, Soares writes about his thoughts and emotions during a sleepless night.



## Sections 1 - 40 Analysis

Section 1 of this book describes a lot about Soares' view of life and his attitude about his book. Soares believes that he connects with reality only through his physical sensations. He views writing his book as a way to keep busy. He admits that he is not concerned whether people who read his book like it or not. Notice Soares refers to his life as being like a traveler waiting in a roadside inn for a carriage to take him to the abyss. The roadside inn indicates the idea that Soares believes his life is only temporary and that he will not stay on earth for long. The carriage ride to the abyss indicates death. By referring to death as an abyss, Soares lets his reader know he has the idea that death will be a state of unending nothingness.

Section 2 makes an interesting statement on the reality of Soares' life. He believes he is not created for action and that his sensibility hates action. Soares also believes no human is born to dream. Therefore, since Soares cannot decide which of these things he dislikes the most, he chooses to combine the two into one action.

Soares has an interesting way of describing things. He particularly seems to like the oxymoron. Note for instance in Section 3 he writes that he is comforted by sadness. Soares also writes that as he walks along his street, he feels a "peaceful anguish" in his heart. In Section 4, Soares describes his action of writing as a religious experience. He indicates that through writing, he gets an idea of how the monks feel as they grow acquainted with Christ through nature.

In Sections 7, 8, and 9 Soares offers an interesting discourse about the meaning of his boss, his work, and his home. Soares at first believes his boss may have been an important person in a previous life. Later, he comes to realize that he has this feeling about his boss because his boss represents life to him. In the same fashion, Soares' work represents life. Art is represented by Soares' home. Therefore, Soares comes to the conclusion that all of the important parts of Soares' life are located on the one street where he both lives and works.

In his descriptions, notice that Soares also enjoys using personification. For instance, in Section 14, Soares presents a word picture in which his "contempt dozes in the cloak of my discouragement..." (pg. 22.) In Section 15, Soares speaks of giving birth to infinite being as in terms of a woman delivering a baby. Soares indicates even that he had to "wrench myself out of me with forceps" (pg. 23.)



# Sections 41 - 70

## Sections 41 - 70 Summary

In Section 42, Soares describes how he believes people should groom their destiny and their lives the same way that they do with their bodies. He believes people do not change their lives, even if they are repulsed by these lives, because this repulsion keeps them from making any moves. In Section 44, Soares attempts to write about a lapse of attention that he sometimes suffers from. He describes this phenomenon as an unpleasant drunkenness. In Sections 48 and 49, Soares writes about the influence of others on his process of thinking. He indicates that being around other people and talking to them makes him tired. In Section 50, Soares writes about a visit to a friend in the country. He notes that he dislikes the country and would rather be in the city.

Soares writes in section 53 that romanticism is the result of the disappearance of Christianity. He indicates that it is not until Christianity begins to disappear that people realize how much damage it has done. Soares writes that his only sense of peace comes from reading the works of the Classical writers in Section 55.

In Section 56, Soares writes about a photograph of him and his work associates. He describes how his face looks lifeless and lacking in intelligence when viewed beside those of the people with whom he works. Soares describes in Section 62 the way in which he is sickened by the common human beings that he meets every day. Walking through streets where people gather and listening to them talk, Soares develops an even lower vision of his fellow human beings. In the conclusion of Section 63, Soares indicates that he does not read his writing because he cannot understand it when he reads over it.

In Section 69, Soares writes about unconscious intelligence, a phenomenon where a person is unaware of a flash of intelligence. Soares compares this type of intelligence to involuntary bodily functions. In Section 70, he refers to himself as being the only conscious person alive. He seems to believe that all other people, including the man he watches walking down the street, live in an unconscious stupor, as if they are sleeping through their lives.

## Sections 41 - 70 Analysis

Soares dedicates a lot of attention to his own reality in this section. He admits that he cannot think of himself as the Romantics do and picture himself a hero. When he sees a picture of himself, Soares believes he looks less lively and intelligent than those with whom he spends his days. He describes himself as an animal carried in a wicker basket between two train stations. Soares notes in Section 58 that the soul of each thing is defined by its environment. Even people are nothing more than a mass of cells, Soares writes.



In Section 47, Soares describes his dreams and thoughts as a garden. He indicates the paths of the gardens are lined with abandoned gestures. His dreams are described as flower beds. The garden is deserted with broken fountains. This description shows that Soares has a low opinion of his dream and thought life. He believes that his own mind is a cluttered, dead, and unkept place full of disarray. Later in Section 67, Soares uses this idea of a garden as a way to summarize the development of social organization. Soares seems disdainful of this combination of the natural with the unnatural. He describes these gardens found in cities as being caged, with none of the life that should accompany beauty.

Soares ties Sections 52 and 51 together in an interesting way. In Section 51, Soares describes an approaching storm. The wind howls and the sky deepens in color as if night is approaching. Soares trails off his discussion of the coming storm, ending this section with the first half of a leading sentence completed only by ellipses. Soares picks up his line of thought in the following section. He clarifies the storm that he describes in the leading section as portraying the coming of Christianity.

In Section 59, Soares uses the image of a wandering old man to personify the need of man to dream. As Soares watches this man walk past his office window, he realizes the joy he finds in dreaming. He hopes that even if his dreams are changed that the gods will never take away his ability to dream.



# Sections 71 - 108

## Sections 71 - 108 Summary

In Section 71, Soares indicates that he believes that his active thinking life differentiates him from other people. Whereas other people live through their feelings, Soares writes that he lives through his thoughts. Soares shares in Section 76 his vision of an actual machine being built that will allow people the ability for self-analysis. Soares goes on to discuss the possibility of people existing on numerous planes or dimensions of being. For instance, he suggests that the dreams may exist in several dimensions including space, the ego, and the ideal.

Soares writes about a visit to the Tagus River in Section 79. He describes the bad smell coming from the river. To Soares, even the gulls appear to be stagnant. Again in Section 83, Soares describes the detail of what he sees and hears during a typical day in his life. At the middle of this entry, his thoughts switch from the reality of what is going on around him to the details of the thoughts that these surroundings evoke. Soares expresses a yearning to feel and experience things through a sensory mode instead of his regular intellectual mode in Section 90.

In Section 94, Soares writes that the only way to live completely is to experience each new day with no memory of the previous day. In Section 96, Soares argues that the things he sees in his dreams are not identical to those in real life, but instead parallel. Soares describes a wise man as one who can keep outside influences from changing him in Section 97. In Sections 98 and 99, Soares describes a weariness about his life so strong that it makes him nauseated. He wishes to run away from his life.

In Section 104, Soares addresses the idea of collective thought. He concludes that any idea born by a group of people will contain little intelligence and much stupidity. In Section 106, Soares writes that the only way to be anything is to act upon one's thoughts. Again in Section 108, Soares describes the idea of life as making his physically sick.

## Sections 71 - 108 Analysis

In many of these sections, Soares deals with the belief that his life consists of a reality that is only based in his thoughts and dreams. For instance, in Section 71, Soares writes that it is through his thoughts that life becomes real to him. Also in Section 75, Soares notes that he does not have to experience fast automobiles to understand what speed is like. He can experience speed through his own thoughts. Soares also indicates there are some sensations that keep a person from thinking. He refers to these as undreamed dreams. Another colorful description that Soares assigns to this condition is the idea of the soul having a head cold.





Soares also seems to be interested in the scientific realm. He suggests in Section 76 that he could envision a time when a machine could be built that would allow general people to analyze themselves. In addition to this mechanical self-analysis, Soares also likes to analyze himself by the way others react to him. Soares also admits that he feels separated from the rest of humanity. In Section 80, he writes that he feels he is separated from life by glass. Although he can see and understand what is going on, he cannot himself become involved in or touch life. Soares also indicates in 83 that he feels that his life has no reason or purpose.

Also in this section of his book, Soares writes about and analyzes his own writing style. He admits to the reader that he believes the laws of grammar should be broken if there is a need to describe something in a way not allowed by these laws. One example of this is Soares' reference to a girl who is masculine in appearance as a boy using a reference in the feminine. Although the pronoun does not agree with its subject, Soares argues this use is not incorrect since it allows him to describe the situation properly.



# Sections 109 - 150

## Sections 109 - 150 Summary

In Section 109, Soares describes an approaching storm. In Section 110, he writes about the way in which his dream life extends from his time of sleep to his waking hours. He indicates that anytime he is not actively interacting with other people, he is dreaming. In Section 111, Soares addresses the idea of romantic love. Soares states that he believes the idea of romantic love has been fashioned by the ideas of Christianity. He also compares love to a suit of clothes that will eventually wear out and show what is really beneath the clothes. Therefore, he believes that those who participate in romantic love put themselves on a path of disillusionment. Soares builds on this idea in Section 112 by stating that people love only their concept of other people, not the actual person.

In Section 116, Soares writes that he believes that writing is the best way to ignore life. He indicates this is because literature in itself is a product of dreams, a copy of real life. In Section 121, Soares admits that he enjoys being settled in life. He dislikes new situations or places. In Section 124, Soares attempts to describe his idea of living life in the extreme. In Section 125 he writes of his book as a journey of his thoughts. In Section 126 Soares writes about a stagnation of his soul in which he feels that his emotions, thought, and will stop working.

In Section 130, Soares wonders what would have happened to him if his uncle had not helped him to get his job. He credits his current job, although boring, with his ability to write. Soares writes that his co-workers along with the poet Cesário Verde have helped him to perfect his vision of the world. In Section 134, Soares writes that he believes he likes the pompous because he holds this characteristic in his soul. Soares notes in Section 135 that simple things, such as greeting another person, become difficult when he attempts to complete them. In this same section, Soares expresses a desire to have emotions that are easy to describe.

Soares addresses the idea of travel in Section 138. He argues that one can have the sense of freedom that travel gives only if that person has this freedom inside of them. Soares notes that it does not matter how far one goes. People can never travel away from themselves or their emotions. He also writes that trips taken in one's imagination can be far more satisfactory than any actual trip. Soares writes in Section 140 that the true usefulness of literature is to give the writer an outlet to express his emotions.

Dreaming is the topic of Sections 142 and 143. In Section 142, Soares writes that everyone has dreams, just like he does. Soares states his pity for those who dream reasonable dreams in Section 143. Also in this section, Soares notes the fierce anger he feels when the office boy disturbs his dreams. In Section 145, Soares compares the life of a well-known millionaire with the life of the sales representative who works in the office with Soares. Soares states that the two have the same things and just not the same amount of the same things. Soares believes real worth is decided if a person is



able to create something, such as literature that lives beyond them. In Section 146, Soares notes that those who have no dreams are no better than those who have dreams but do not achieve them.

## Sections 109 - 150 Analysis

In Section 113, Soares describes himself as being timid at heart. He attempts to mask this character trait by stating that he believes that by staying in his dream world, he is intelligent because he stays away from the pain that love can bring. Soares also indicates those who pleasure themselves sexually are the only true lovers because they do not use another's body to bring them pleasure. Soares writes that he feels these sexual lovers do not really love and they only use another's body with the disguise of this sexual act as being one of love.

In Section 117, Soares addresses the element of writing that he is perhaps best at, which is the art of definition. Through examples of describing a spiral, Soares shows his unique flair for defining an object in a way that the reader knows exactly what he is writing about. Many times these definitions use imagery from nature. For instance, in Section 117, Soares uses the image of a snake to define what a spiral is.

Soares describes his writings as complaints that come from his weakness in Section 127. He writes that he feels he is not strong, noble, or great and that he does not have any of the attributes of these characteristics. Soares describes his book as an attempt to make his complaints musical. Despite his active thinking life, Soares writes that he enjoys the idea that those around him do not think that he is any different from them. This idea, included in Section 128, indicates that Soares tells no one of his writing project and keeps his manuscript secret. Section 139 addresses a time when Soares writes that he does not feel like himself. He states that he has not written or even dreamed during this period of time. In Section 144, Soares records the events of a sunny Sunday when he does not even feel like dreaming.



# Sections 151 - 184

## Sections 151 - 184 Summary

In Section 151, Soares writes about the best ways to describe a moonlit night. Soares writes also that he astounds himself when he finishes a project. In Section 159, Soares writes that he has been in love twice. As a result of this experience, Soares decided that the women of his dreams are preferable to real women as they cannot embarrass or hurt him as real women can.

Soares makes a statement about revolution in Section 160. Soares believes that violence is an offensive form of human stupidity. Soares explains that he believes people revolt because they are unable to change their own attitudes. Therefore, they try to change others and the world. In Section 161, Soares writes that he is bothered and offended by the language of social responsibility.

Soares insists in Section 163 that it is only those who lack imagination who must experience things directly. He writes that he can have the same experiences of any other man just by reading about these experiences. In Section 166 compares the lives of human beings and animals. He writes that both human beings and animals, with the exception of mystics and ascetics, go through life without thinking. In Section 168, Soares addresses his fear of death.

In Section 173, Soares describes dreaming as a drug. Soares describes in Section 174 the heavy feeling of dislike that he has the day after a sleepless night. He writes of feeling like a stray leaf as he makes his way down the sidewalk. Despite the idea that he believes that people are looking at him strangely, Soares admits that he feels more like himself when he is sleepy than any other time.

Soares makes a strong statement about the state of the world in Section 175. He indicates he believes the only people who are acceptable by the world's standards are those who are stupid, insensitive, and uptight. He describes these are same qualities one would need to be admitted to an insane asylum. In Section 179, Soares writes about the human nature that makes man long for a father figure to guide him. In Section 180, Soares writes about the way that an old way of life is missed, even if one moves to a better way of life. Soares describes an approaching thunderstorm in Section 183. This storm is so bad the workers in his office are forced to turn on the electrical lights even though it is only four o'clock in the afternoon.

## Sections 151 - 184 Analysis

In this section of Soares's book, he spends some time writing about his need to write. He compares writing to an addiction in Section 152. In this same section, Soares also refers to himself as being creatively impotent. He indicates that he intersperses his writing with scenic descriptions because these descriptions help him to get away from



this creative inability. In Section 155, Soares writes that his action of writing sometimes comes from his feeling that he has nothing to say. In Section 169, Soares states that he has read his work again and now believes that it is worthless, including the trouble he took to write them.

Also in this section of his book, Soares continues to write about the benefits of his active imagination and dream life. He insists that through his imagination, he can experience anything just as a man who actually participates in an activity can experience it. In fact, Soares writes that experiencing something through one's imagination is actually superior to actively participating in the action because in one's imagination he is not exposed to any of the danger of the experience as a man of action is. Soares also writes in Section 164 that there are even some experiences, such as being king of the world, that one can have only with the aid of an active imagination.



# Sections 184 - 221

## Sections 184 - 221 Summary

After a depressing look at this life in Section 184, Soares follows with Section 187 where he indicates that life is best if it is not thought about. He writes that if more people thought about life, they would end their own lives as a result of the fears that these thoughts arouse. Soares writes in Section 190 about the liberating affect changing one's schedule has on the spirit. In Section 191, Soares writes about the future in which others may actually read and enjoy his book. He believes this will give him a family even though he will not be alive to associate with these new "family" members. In this section, Soares writes that he hopes most for understanding from future generations.

In Section 193, Soares writes that he has witnessed the downfall of his own life. He explains that he feels as if fate causes him to want things, only to show him that these things cannot be had. However, Soares admits that he has not tired of anticipating what is coming next in life. He believes he is successful in anticipating what will happen in his life because he has prepared himself to expect only disappointment. For instance, if he sees a girl he thinks that he might like, he knows beforehand that he will witness her meet with her lover.

In Section 195, Soares writes that he is the type person who is apt to shed tears because he cannot have the opportunity to actually meet and live with the characters in the novels that he has read. Soares addresses the way in which he aches with grief over things he has left behind in Section 197. In Section 198, Soares writes about a three-day vacation that he took at a beach. He refers to this time as a retreat from himself. At the same time however, Soares writes that while on the beach, he feels closer to himself than he has ever felt before.

In Section 201, Soares writes that he prefers a sunrise in the city to one in the country. He explains that this is because the sunrise in the city makes him think, while the sunrise in the country makes him live. In Section 202, Soares begins writing by describing the coming of autumn. This description evolves into a discussion of the way that the coming of autumn reminds him that all things will eventually die.

In Section 207, Soares attempts to deal with the dual existence of truth. He writes about an experience where two friends have an argument. Both involved speak the truth about what happened in their disagreement, yet both these truths are different. In Section 208, Soares shares his view that he believes in doing neither good nor evil deeds. He does not do evil deeds to others because he does not want to increase the amount of evil in the world. In the same fashion, he does not do good deeds because he believes these good deeds may spark an evil outcome. In this same section, Soares writes that he is glad he has no family because he feels he would find their presence burdensome.



## Sections 184 - 221 Analysis

Although the tone of Soares's writing is never distinctly positive, there are times when it turns very negative and dismal in tone. Section 187 is one of these specifically pessimistic sections. In this section, Soares refers to himself as a dead man who is less respected than the corner grocer. He points out that he does not like his job. His life is composed of dreaming about things that he cannot have. He concludes that his life is meaningless. Soares follows this depressing tone in Section 203 where he discusses the connection of the coming fall with the coming death of all living things.



## Sections 222 - 260

### Sections 222 - 260 Summary

In Sections 222, 223, and 224, Soares writes about a storm and the feelings that rain evokes for him. He states the rain makes him want to sleep. In Section 225, Soares describes a sunset. He indicates that the beauty of this sunset makes him wish that he had the "gift of ruthless self-expression" (Loc 3847.) In Section 229, Soares states that reading is a way to dream but that this dream is guided by another person. In Section 230, Soares writes that he believes that art, like dreams, can be used as a substitute for life. In this same section, Soares makes the statement that there are two types of artists. One type of expression comes from what the artist does not have. The other type comes from the excess of what the artist had at one time. In Section 231, Soares writes that the only poems of his that he considered good were those he wrote as a child when he was a child. Now he is aware that those poems are terrible.

In Section 235, Soares writes about a time in his life when he experienced love, a true human emotion. He states that he found this emotion to be wearying and adds that he hopes that he never experiences these feelings again. The only sorrow that he has following this experience involved causing the other person pain. In Section 238, Soares writes that those who run a business should know how to do all of the jobs that their business entails. These business men should have employees to help them because it makes their job easier not because they do not know how to do the jobs. In Section 244, Soares states that he would like to be a retired major. In Section 249, Soares describes Romanticism as being born from a disease of civilization.

In Section 251, Soares describes the different fields he has been interested in during his search for truth. He states, however, that in all of these fields, he does not find any reassurance. Next, Soares writes that he moves on to study mystics and Kabbalists. At the current time, Soares writes that he is disciplined in his own version of religion. Soares states also that he has no theories about life or the goodness or badness of life. In Section 259, Soares writes that words are touchable and malleable objects to him. He states that he has almost what could be termed as an emotional response when someone speaks well. Soares also writes that he considers his writing as a type of surrender to the words. The written word, he writes, makes him cry in a way that no loss or hurt can.

### Sections 222 - 260 Analysis

Soares again addresses the topic of writing in Section 227. He writes that he prefers prose to poetry because he feels he cannot write in verse. He also writes that he has more freedom to write as he wishes in prose. In poetry, he states that the writer is held in check by poetical rules. Soares clearly does not like poetry since he suggests in the closing of this section that poetry should be left to be written by children because this





form of writing is elementary. In Section 231, Soares writes that the worst thing that can happen to a person is to finish a work of art and then realize it is not good. Although Soares believes his poetry is not good. Yet he admits that he cannot give up the desire to create poetical works.



# Sections 261 - 301

## Sections 261 - 301 Summary

In Section 261, Soares writes that his affections are generally only on the surface similar to that of an actor but sincere. In Section 263, Soares attempts to analyze the symptoms of his tedium. He indicates that there is no pattern to his tedium since it occurs unexpectedly. He also writes that the tedium does not seem to be associated with his state of health or any other condition of his physical body. Soares writes about several different things that might account for his feelings of tedium. However, he does not arrive at a single conclusion that describes what he feels and experiences during these times in his life.

In Section 266, Soares writes about a memory of a girl in the apartment above him who used to play scales on the piano. Although he never knew the girl, he states how different she must be now. He also notes how different he is from the person he used to be. The only thing that has stayed the same is the monotonous rhythm of the scales being played. Soares writes in Section 268 about the way that certain smells can bring back memories. However, Soares indicates that these smells can bring back memories of literature, which he refers to as the only real memories that exist, as well as his own childhood memories.

In Section 270, Soares speaks of art as the only true form of pleasure that exists. He writes that all other forms of pleasure can leave the pleasure seeker disillusioned or even damaged in the experience. He explains that since art cannot be possessed, it can never be lost and therefore never cause any pain. In Section 274, Soares writes that he believes the main problem that revolutionaries have is that they do not realize the difference between the people of the middle class and those of other classes. Soares writes about the departure of the office boy in Section 279. Soares feels a sadness at the loss of this employee not due to emotional ties. Instead, Soares feels that he is losing part of his life. As he considers the loss of this part of his life, Soares meditates on the idea that one day he may move or die. He too could affect someone's life in the same way that the office boy has affected his life.

In Section 287, Soares writes about the reasons that humans worship perfection but also secretly hate it. In Section 288, Soares writes about his certainty that anything that he writes will not be perfect. He even points out that King Lear, which is considered a great piece of literature, is terribly flawed. Soares feels that the errors in this play are so great that he would have been embarrassed if he had been the one to write it.

## Sections 261 - 301 Analysis

Notice in Section 162 where Soares writes about being nothing that he mentions the death of his mother. He notes that she dies so young that he does not even know her. It



appears from this note that Soares may associate his feelings of nothingness with the loss of his mother. Also it is important to note in Section 166 where Soares describes his memory of the young pianist and her scales that he seems to be tormented by these memories. At one point, he writes that he wishes these feelings that overtake his soul would go away and leave without him.

Many sections in this part of Soares's book deal with writing, art, and imperfection. For instance, Soares writes that he would have lived his life in embarrassment if he had written the play King Lear. Although Soares accepts this play as a great work of art, he has studied it closely enough to pick out the errors and faults in the play. Soares notes that because they are written by imperfect humans, any writing project that people undertake will be imperfect. Finally, Soares writes that if there was an office of "improver for art," he would be perfect for a job in this field.

# Sections 302 - 341

## Sections 302 - 341 Summary

Soares begins Section 302 by writing about the vivid nature of his ability to think about two things at once. He goes on to describe how he can be doing his job and at the same time be dreaming about being on a passenger ship at the same time. In Section 305, Soares describes himself as a parasite who feeds off of others' thoughts, emotions, and experiences. In Section 309, Soares writes about the increasing habit of women to care more about what they look like than anything else. He indicates this habit causes women to be more decorative than they are living creatures.

In Section 311, Soares writes about the way in which the lifestyles of the common man makes him physically sick. In Section 312, however, Soares writes that it is these common people that he meets each day that make up his life. Regardless, he writes that he dislikes these people that he meets on a daily basis. Soares continues this same theme in Section 313. In this section, he writes about the way these common people do not even know that they are unhappy. In fact, he describes them as having a gift because they are unaware of their unhappiness. He reconciles himself by saying that although they make him sick, he still loves his fellow men because of their ability to be happy. At the same time however, he belittles these men by calling them vegetables. This theme of happy but unaware people continues in Section 314. Soares writes that all intelligent and sensitive people should be banned to an island where the common people could not be bothered by them. Since there is no such law, Soares suggests that these intelligent people remain as uneducated as possible about the world in which they live. This action of being uninvolved will keep these intelligent people from reminding the common people of their own unhappiness.

In Section 326, Soares describes the way in which a man's dreams are the only things that he completely and totally owns. In Section 328, Soares writes that it is difficult for men to understand each other because any person's conception of what another is saying may be completely different from what the first person intended. Soares continues this idea in Section 329 where he writes about how invisible and unknown human beings are to one another.

## Sections 302 - 341 Analysis

The tone of the passages in this section continues to be dismal. Soares writes often about rain and describes the coming of autumn. Autumn, he indicates, is a symbol of death and dying. Adding to this dismal tone, Soares writes in Section 317 about a clerk in the tobacco shop who commits suicide. It is only at the point of this man's death that Soares realizes the other man felt deeply enough that he wanted to be away from this pain.

Soares often writes about the differences between men of action and those who choose not to act. He has already indicated that he believes it is as exciting to read or dream about doing something than it is to actually do something. In Section 303, Soares writes that in order to be a man of action, one must be insensitive to the feelings of others. He states that it is these unfeeling people who own the world because they do not care what or who they have to step on in order to get ahead.

Although Soares often seems highly critical of religion and faith in God, he admits in Section 307 that this lack of belief in God or belief in something causes man to not have a firm reason for his existence. He describes these men without a belief in something as ships that do not know what port they are supposed to be sailing toward.



# Sections 342 - 381

## Sections 342 - 381 Summary

Soares describes his life as a ball of tangled yarn in Section 342. He writes that he because he dreams so often, he is never sure if he is awake or asleep. In Section 343, Soares expresses the desire to have been the owner of a harem. In Section 344, Soares writes about his future wife. Soares writes first that he hopes that she will be sterile and later, that he never has a wife at all. In Section 347, which is entitled "A Letter Not to Post," Soares seems to be declaring his love to some lady. He follows up in Section 348 by reminding his readers that he finds the affection of others more oppressive than anything else, including hate.

In Section 349, Soares suggests to his readers that if they feel they must disclose information about themselves to others, they should disclose information that is not true. Soares writes in Section 357 that there is something that can be learned from all men, including the dishonest. In fact, he indicates that there is something that can be learned from everything, even inanimate objects. In Section 358, Soares describes a man that he considers to be great. He states that this man appears to be tired and has garbled speech. He does not fit the ideal that the world has of a great man. This apparent contradiction in his world belief causes Soares to wonder if there is not some extra being that possesses this man, causing his greatness.

Soares argues in Section 363 that one person cannot truly love another person. He states that in order to love something, the other person must possess it, but there is no way to possess another human being. Soares continues this line of argument in Section 364 where he indicates that men do not even possess their own body or soul, and therefore they are incapable of possessing another's body or soul. In Section 370, Soares writes the script for a discussion at a tea party. Although this conversation never actually takes place, he believes it is how humans should communicate with each other. He even notes that if the couple having the conversation ever read his book, they may believe these words that Soares created are actually the ones they used as they conversed with each other.

In Sections 376 and 377, Soares writes about the feelings of enjoyment he gets from being sick. For instance, he writes that he loves the times when he has a fever and his thoughts, feelings, and emotions become all jumbled together. Again in Section 377, he describes the pleasant emotion he feels in recovering from a disorder of the nerves.

## Sections 342 - 381 Analysis

In several sections, Sections 344 and 345 specifically, Soares writes about having a wife. He indicates to his readers that he hopes that he will never have a wife and that if he does, that she is sterile. However, in Section 345, Soares writes about a lady in

which he seems to be interested. Instead of wishing to become closer, however, he suggests that the two remain separate. He describes the separation that he desires as that of two stained glass windows, in the same building but opposite each other. In this way, they will remain near each other and their relationship to each other beautiful and lasting but never interfering with the other.

In a change to his usual laments about rain and autumn, Soares speaks in one section about the coming of spring. However, he speaks not of spring in the countryside, but the spring that comes to the small groups of trees tucked into the city streets. Soares writes that he walks the streets, looking at the trees from different angles and admiring them.



## Sections 382 - 436

### Sections 382 - 436 Summary

In Section 385, Soares describes a hazy day in which the air seemed filled with a fog similar to smoke. At the conclusion of this section, Soares describes his feelings of tedium as similar to this fog, being definitely present but hard to describe. In Section 387, Soares describes himself as a decadent. He explains that the qualities present in a decadent individual make him want to express himself. In Section 391, Soares wonders why the only things that people know for certain are things that are not important in terms of life. In this way, he compares people to animals who simply live their lives without ever knowing why they were put on Earth in the first place.

In Section 398, Soares writes about a knowledge he has that nothing will ever turn out favorably for him or people like him. Soares writes that it is for this reason that he does not put forth much effort, but instead relegates himself to luck. In this same section, Soares describes himself as being stoic. He indicates however, that in his writing, he frets like a sick woman. In Section 400, Soares discusses the way a certain activity, smell, or taste can bring back memories. Soares says that it is cigarette smoke that brings back memories of his childhood. In Section 406, Soares writes that he does not believe that animals are happy. He defends his argument by indicating that one must have knowledge of their happiness in order to be happy.

Soares describes in Section 409 the feelings that he has when he discovers that he is alone in his office. Although Soares enjoys the feeling of being alone and being king of his domain, he lies to the clerk who enters the office and says that he finds being alone boring. Soares indicates in this section that he considers time spent alone as being his normal life. In Section 411, Soares discusses the definitions of pride and vanity. In the following section, Soares tells his reader that he is not a pessimist. He instead argues that he is half and half. In Section 413, Soares argues that one should live by dreams and avoid reality at all costs.

In an unusual entry, Soares states in Section 425 that dreaming for him has become painful because these dreams have become so real to him. In Section 426, Soares defines the start of wisdom as the point when a person realizes their greatest area of anxiety is indeed insignificant. In order to be able to think this way while one is involved in an activity involving their greatest anxiety. Then one can truly reach ultimate wisdom. In Section 429, Soares indicates that he believes that others usually see him as a stranger or intruder.

### Sections 382 - 436 Analysis

There are several sections in this novel that are written almost in a dream-like state where the writer's thoughts fly oddly from topic to topic and things appear to make no





sense or have any connection. Section 395 is one example of this style of writing. It is could be considered writing in the style of a stream of consciousness where the writer writes what he is thinking as he is thinking it.

Soares's view of God presented in various quotes is very interesting. Although he does not seem to believe in a God, there are several places in which he does indicate that he believes God has an influence on his life. For instance, in Section 401, Soares indicates that God has forgotten who Soares should have been. Also in Section 403, Soares indicates that the only one who knows his heart is God. By making these statements, it appears that Soares does believe that there is a God. Also, in Section 406, Soares indicates that his belief in God changes on a day-to-day basis. One day he may believe in God, while the next day he may not.



## Sections 437 - 455

### Sections 437 - 455 Summary

In Section 439, Soares describes a Sunday that he spends writing. He tells his reader that as well as it being a physical Sunday, it is also a Sunday in his soul. In Section 442, Soares writes about a night when he is unable to sleep and yet feels sleepy. He reads some of the pages of the book he is writing. He states that in his book he resembles himself more than he would like to believe that he does. Soares describes himself as a rainy day. In Section 443, Soares writes that although he appears to be outwardly calm, he has both hell and heaven inside of him.

Section 445 once again addresses Soares disease of tedium. Although he believes most people believe that tedium is related to a lack of something productive to do, Soares argues that tedium is actually a disease of the soul. He believes that those who work are affected by tedium in a more serious form than those who do not work at all. Soares states that he feels that tedium causes a feeling that there is nothing that is worth doing.

In Section 448, Soares compares himself with Omar Khayyám, a man whom Soares identifies as a Persian sage in Section 446. Soares writes that unlike him, Omar has a single personality, lives in one world only, and has the ability to reject the philosophies of others. In Section 450, Soares writes about a thunderstorm that is so powerful that all of the workers in his offices are scared. In Section 451, Soares argues that a person only needs to exist in order to travel. Soares describes an office boy that he knows who was once a traveler. This boy's means of travel, however, involved going to travel agencies and collecting photos of vacation destinations. Soares calls this young man well traveled in his soul, and says he is the happiest person that Soares had ever known.

In Section 454, Soares writes about the reasons why he hates to read the paper. He indicates that he hates to see people sacrificed for things such as wars that will not matter eventually. He also writes that the best that an intelligent man can do is hope for a way to retire and not have to think about life. In the first half of section 455, Soares writes that people should consider their lives as a journey and not think very seriously about the bumps they encounter in their trip. Additionally Soares writes that along with the bad, there are also many things in life that can bring people comfort.

### Sections 437 - 455 Analysis

Section 442 includes one of Soares' unique and descriptive quotes. He describes his life as being similar to a person who has wrecked his ship on a calm sea in shallow water. The way in which he presents this idea, however, is both humorous and profound. In Section 444, Soares makes a comment that appears to be contradictory. He states that everything but life has become unbearable. In order to understand this statement, one



must understand what Soares considers to be his life. To him, his life is his dream life and not his real life of work, home, and the city. Also it is important to consider that Soares is depressed when he thinks of real life in its individual parts. However, Soares indicates that he can find some consolation in life as a whole.



# Sections 456 - 481

## Sections 456 - 481 Summary

In Section 456, Soares describes a period of time that he calls stagnation where he is unable to write as much as he is accustomed to writing. Later in this same section, Soares writes that although his memories are not happy ones, he goes over his memories because this act of remembering gives him a chance to rest from doing something. In fact, Soares states that he sometimes remembers things that never even happened to him because of the joy it brings him.

Soares writes about the modern invention of mirrors and wardrobes in Section 457. He credits these inventions with the evolution of man into a clothed creature. He says that this act of clothing is done not only to the body, but also to the soul. In Section 461, Soares writes that he isolates himself because he is aware that he is hurt easily by small things. Although Soares tries to break away from life, he writes that it is this action that actually causes him to be even more sensitive to the things of the world.

In Section 466, Soares makes a negative comment about the invention of mirrors. Soares indicates that man was not intended to see his own face except for when he was bent over looking into a pool of water. The ability to see one's face in a mirror allows poison to enter the human heart. In Section 467, Soares is told by a critic that if he has a different face, the combination of his intelligent quotes and his looks would make him a charming person. In Section 469, Soares writes that he now finds even writing is not appealing. He describes the action of writing as being unoriginal.

In Section 747, Soares writes that the only thing worth doing is seeing. Soares believes he would be happy if he was only able to see without living. In Section 481, Soares describes the sense of comfort and familiarity that he feels in a barbershop until he learns one of the barbers has just passed away the day before. This occurrence leads Soares to meditate on the nostalgia that he feels for the people who disappear from his life.

## Sections 456 - 481 Analysis

Although Soares expresses a disbelief in Christ, he seems to know quite a bit about Him. In Section 463, for instance, Soares writes about the time that Satan attempts to tempt Christ with the things of the world. Soares says that he can understand why Christ is not tempted by anything that the world has to offer. God is again the topic of Section 473. Here Soares addresses the difference between an indefinite and a definite God. Soares says that all intelligent men believe there is a God but at the same time, he argues that these intelligent men should not believe in a specific God.

In Section 464, Soares writes that he feels his readers may have gotten the impression from his book that he is a dreamer. However, Soares indicates that he cannot be a real

dreamer because he does not have enough money to be a dreamer. Apparently, Soares does not believe that a poor dreamer is a real dreamer.

# The Book of Disquiet

## Summary

In the opening section of his *Disquiet Anthology*, Soares attempts to give advice to women whom he describes as being unhappily married. Although he suggests that these women should not do anything immoral, he indicates there are ways to cheat on a husband without being immoral. In the second part of this section, Soares describes how these women can cheat on their husbands in their minds. Also in this section, Soares suggests to women that a husband must get angry every once in a while. For this reason, he supplies his female readers with ways to anger their husbands.

In "The Art of Effective Dreaming (I)," Soares tells his readers how to become successful dreamers. Soares indicates that the most difficult part of dreaming is the requirement that the dreamer be passive. While attempting to dream, Soares instructs his students to avoid any external stimulants such as alcohol, masturbation, or drugs. These things are all right to dream about, Soares says, but it is not permissible to actually participate in the activity.

In the section "Divine Envy," Soares shares with his reader that whenever he finds himself enjoying himself with others, he finds himself envious of the role the other people share in his joy. He is almost angry that these people have been able or allowed to penetrate through his social barriers and touch his soul. Later on in the section, Soares admits that he finds it disheartening that others may enjoy a landscape in nature in the same way that he does.

In "The Lake of Possession (I)," Soares explains that he views possession as being a large but shallow lake. In the second section with the same title, Soares tells his reader why he thinks possession of an object is impossible. In the section titled "A Letter (I)," Soares addresses the idea of being able to possess another person. Similar to his idea that a thing cannot be possessed, Soares also believes that a person cannot be possessed. In his section "Lucid Diary," Soares sums up his idea of his life and friends. He writes that through his life choices, he has prevented people from caring for him. In his section entitled "The Major," Soares records his favorite dream. In this dream, he is a retired major loitering in a hotel after dinner.

## Analysis

It is at this point in Soares' autobiography that there is a slight change in his style. In the previous sections of his book, Soares notates his sections with numbers. In his *Disquiet Anthology*, Soares gives his sections titles instead. These titles indicate what topic each section will address.

In his "Advice to Unhappily Married Women (I)," readers are able to see Soares' sense of humor. He admits to his reader that he has no interest in this topic and that instead,



he simply wants to be useful to women. It is interesting that a single man should attempt to give advice to a gender of people with whom he has little contact or understanding.

Soares teaches his readers how to effectively participate in his favorite past time of dreaming in his sections entitled "The Art of Effect Dreaming." In these three sections, Soares tells his reader how to physically and mentally prepare themselves to dream. The highest praise for dreaming, Soares tell his reader, comes from the idea that one can have their ideal life when they dream. This quote explains why a man like Soares, who dislikes life so much, can be so content to dream. It is only in his dreams that he has control over his life and its outcome.



# The Book of Disquiet

## Summary

In his "Maxims," Soares writes that the only lifestyle suited for a wise man is to live in a state of ignorance about things and himself. Soares also stresses that one should be careful not to let others invade their personality. He indicates that he believes that any interest into another's personality actually shows disrespect. In his section "Millimeters," Soares writes about his love of small and insignificant things.

His section "Our Lady of Silence" describes a lady that he dreams about often. This lady is one that Soares has seen in a portrait. He notes that she is a virgin and will remain so. Soares writes that he is not interested in the lady's sexuality or femininity. Instead, he is attracted to the simple idea that since she is a figure in a portrait, she will never have sex with a man. "Pedro's Pastoral" is a piece of prose describing the dream world in which Soares first meets the lady in the portrait. Although he recognizes that the lady is not real, Soares can describe clearly the dream in which the lady walks past him.

In the section entitled "Random Diary," Soares records the way in which he walks down the street and feels that the other people know his real personality. In the section "The Sensationist," Soares writes that the only religion that man finds satisfying is that of his own sensations. In "The Visual Lover (I)," Soares writes that he is happier with things he can love with his sight than those he must love with his heart. He elaborates that he does not allow himself to fantasize about these people that he visually loves. He does not participate in fantasies because he realizes how false they would be.

"A Voyage I Never Made(I)" describes a trip that Soares makes up in his mind. However, Soares describes the details of scenery and landscapes he sees during his trip in vivid detail. He even describes the sounds made as his boat leaves dock. He writes about these things because he has made a promise to his reader to describe the places where he travels.

## Analysis

Soares finds himself able to write words of love and respect to a lady in a portrait. In fact, Soares calls his words to this lifeless lady a prayer. With this in mind, the words do seem reverent and worshipful. Soares indicates that he finds this lady worthy of worship because she is the only one he will meet who is not involved in a relationship with a man. Soares seems to be disgusted by the idea of a lady who has sex with a man. This feeling may be tied to the fact that Soares' mother dies before he can get to know her. He seems to blame many of his emotional problems on his lack of a mother.





# Characters

## Senhor Soares

Senhor Soares is the writer and narrator of the book. He is employed as the assistant bookkeeper in a fabric warehouse. He lives in the city of Lisbon in Portugal. After seeing himself in a group photo of his work colleagues, he describes himself as looking like a nondescript Jesuit. Soares lives in a rented room on the fourth floor of a building near his workplace. He likes to be settled and to be familiar with the places that he visits each day. Soares dislikes new ways of life and unfamiliar places. He enjoys his job because he has the freedom to dream while he works. Even though he does like his job, he shows no interest in being promoted.

Soares would be best described as a loner. He does not enjoy associating with people and does not want to be tied emotionally to any other person. Soares basically has no family or friends. His uncle who helps get him his office job has passed away. Both Soares' parents died when Soares is a small child. Soares does not have a wife. He says he would prefer to not have a wife. However if he had a wife, he would desire a sterile woman. Soares prefers to live in his dream world as opposed to the world where real humans exist. Perhaps the only woman he has come close to loving is a woman in a portrait. He finds her acceptable because she never has or never will have sex with a man.

Soares resents the commonality of the men with whom he lives and works. In fact, there are several places in his writing where Soares indicates that he is actually nauseated by their banality. Soares appears to see himself as having a higher intelligence and sensitivity level than those who share his world. Another distinct characteristic of Soares' ideas is that he does not believe in one, single, and all-powerful God. Although he does not doubt that some higher deity might exist, he does not believe there is one definite God who rules over the whole universe.

## Vasques

Vasques is Soares' boss at the fabric warehouse. Soares describes Vasques as being a pleasant man in good health. He states that Vasques is sincere even though he is self-centered and occasionally short-tempered. Vasques also has a sense of justice that Soares says is lacking in some men. At one point in Soares' description of his boss, Soares indicates that he feels an odd connection with the man. He ascribes this connection to some former life where Vasques may have played a more significant role in Soares' life than he does currently. In Section 130, Soares names Vasques as one of the major influences on his intellectual development.

In Section 303, Soares shares an interesting glimpse into Vasques' personality as he records an instance where a business deal causes sick man financial ruin. Soares



writes that his boss completely forgets about the man's circumstances until after the deal is finished. However, Soares writes that his boss indicates after the deal is finished that if the man ever needs assistance from him, he would gladly give it. Soares backs his boss up by stating that he knows Vasques is a good man. Soares writes that Vasques' only fault comes from being a man of action.

## God

God is a figure that appears often in Soares' writing. However, it soon becomes clear that Soares does not have a clear idea of the personality or the form of God. In fact, he states at one point that a man is a fool if he believes in one definite God. However, Soares approves the idea of a belief in an indefinite God. Moreover, Soares appears not to believe in the Jesus of the Christian Bible. In Section 322, Soares refers to the story of Jesus as a myth, a term that indicates the story is widely accepted as a true story, but probably is not true.

Most often Soares portrays God as a trickster or one who plays games. For instance in Section 303, God is pictured as playing chess against himself. In the section entitled "Cascade," Soares suggests that God may simply be an overgrown child. He indicates that the universe to him appears to be a game played like a child might play a prank on someone. Finally, in Section 375, Soares indicates that he believes that God performs miracles out of laziness instead of an intention to prove his reality and power.

## Soares' Mother

Soares' mother, who is never named in his writings, dies when Soares is merely a one-year-old infant. Therefore, he never knows much about his mother. However, Soares claims that his callous nature and dislike of emotional closeness stems from this lack of motherly affection. He claims that the people who replaced his mother and took care of him could hold him close to their bodies, but not to their hearts. Soares often expresses in his writing a veiled desire to have known his mother better. One of these references comes at the end of Section 262 where Soares is bemoaning his lack of affection for others. At the conclusion of this section, he expresses a desire to have known his mother.

## Soares' Father

In addition to losing his mother at an early age in his life, Soares also loses his father at an early age. Soares' father, who is also not given a name in this novel, kills himself when Soares is just three years old. Unlike his mother, however, Soares does not seem to blame his father for his lack of emotional development or his deeply individual personality. In fact, Soares seems to have a blurred idea of who his father is. In Section 88, Soares indicates that someone told him that his father is God. Soares writes that he finds himself calling out to God, his father, sometimes.



## Moreira

Moreira is the head bookkeeper in Soares' office. Moreira is mentioned often in Soares' writing. He is part of the backdrop of Soares' life. In fact, along with the boss Vasques, Soares considers Moreira to be one of the greatest influences on his intellectual development. Despite this compliment, Soares describes Moreira's personality as being one of monotonous constancy in Section 57.

## Uncle

Soares' uncle is the sole living relative that Soares records in his book. Soares never records his uncle's name and only refers to him as his uncle. This lack of a name indicates an emotional distance between Soares and the uncle. It is his uncle however, who takes Soares to Lisbon and gets him a job in an office. Although Soares admits in his writing that he knows that his uncle loves him, Soares feels an emotion close to relief when his uncle passes away.

## Office Boy António

This office boy is one person who made an effect on Soares. In Section 129, Soares refers to the boy, who is tying up packages during a thunderstorm as a cruel bandit. However, this cruel office boy makes the list of influences on his intellectual development. In Section 143, Soares writes that this same boy enters the office unexpectedly, interrupting Soares. Soares explains that he would have liked to have killed the boy for interrupting his lack of action. In Section 279, Soares reports that this office boy is leaving the office for another job. Although it does not appear that Soares liked the boy much, he is sad and pained that the boy, who is part of his life, is leaving.

## Cesário Verde

Verde is a poet whom Soares respected greatly. He lists Verde as the most important influence on his literary and intellectual development. Soares notes that this poet is not appreciated for his poetry until after his death.

## The Cat

This is an office cat whom Soares admits that he would miss if he left his job as assistant bookkeeper.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Cult of Humanity**

Soares' refers to this cult of humanity as being the opposite of the worship of God. Soares does not believe humanity is worthy of worship and does not subscribe to this belief.

### **Roadside Inn**

Soares compares his life to a roadside inn.

### **Rua dos Douradores**

The Rua dos Douradores is the street where Soares' office and his rented fourth floor room are located.

### **Two Large Pages of the Ledger**

As an assistant bookkeeper, Soares spends most of his day looking at these objects.

### **The Plant**

This plant represents happiness to Soares's crippled neighbor.

### **The First Floor Dining Room**

Soares eats his meals in this location.

### **Calendar Through the Window Opposite**

Soares knows that the sky has cleared after a storm because he can see a calendar that is posted in the room across the street from his.

### **The Tagus**

The Tagus is a river that runs near Soares' residence. Soares often walks along the river banks to think.



## **Mass at the Church of São Domingos**

This is the church ritual that Soares attends when he is younger.

## **Rua da Prata**

This is the road that leads to the Tagus River.

## **Little-used Stairway Leading to a Beach**

When Soares' steps down this stairway to the beach, he feels a magical change and freedom in himself.

## **King Lear**

King Lear is a play written by William Shakespeare. Although this play is accepted as a great work of art, Soares sees it as being terribly flawed.

## **Cigarette Smoke**

Soares says that it is the smell of cigarette smoke that best brings back memories of his childhood.

## **Mirror**

Soares indicates that it is the invention of this object that has poisoned the human heart.



# Themes

## Dreaming

Dreaming is one of Soares' favorite activities. Therefore, he writes about the activity frequently. It is through dreaming that Soares is able to escape from the reality of life that he finds both depressing and distressing. In Section 92 Soares writes that it is the act of dreaming that has given meaning to his life. It is through dreams that Soares escapes from the sorrows of life. In Section 163, Soares writes that through his dream life, he can have the same experiences as someone who actually performs the activities. Soares condemns people who participate actively in direct experiences as lacking any imagination. In Section 173, Soares refers to dreaming as a natural drug. He writes that once one has taken this drug, they are unable to get it out of their system.

Since Soares is such an astute dreamer, it is no wonder that he attempts to share with his readers his method for proper dreaming. Soares outlines the proper method for dreaming in four different sections of writing located in his "Disquiet Anthology." In these sections, Soares writes that the good dreamers not only learn to lose their respect for everything, they must learn to be passive. Although people may at first be tempted to use drugs or other physical stimulant to help them get started with their action of dreaming, Soares warns them to stay away from these things.

## Reasons for Writing

One topic that Soares addresses often involves explaining why he is writing his book at all. In the preface to the book, even Soares refers to his work as a "factless autobiography." Soares explains in Section 193 that it is through his writing that he expresses himself. In Section 259, Soares confides to his reader that he enjoys forming words and groups of words in a way that he can express himself. Instead of seeing these words as inanimate objects, Soares sees words as tangible articles that can be molded and shaped. Soares writes that these word formations create an emotional response similar to what one gets from someone who speaks well.

One may also notice throughout Soares' book that he often criticizes even great works of literature as being imperfect. His meticulous personality makes him adept at picking out the errors in others' works. Soares mourns the idea that any work that he might produce would be so flawed that he would be ashamed of it. Despite this feeling, Soares does go ahead and publish his book. He does so with the consciousness that someone may find some relief from their present troubles by reading it.

## Relationship with Others

Although Soares does not have much interaction with other people, he often makes comments about the way he believes other people perceive him. For instance in Section



107 Soares writes that he believes he has the sort of soul that women love. However, he adds that women never recognize him as that type of soul when they meet him. Soares shows another quirk in his personality in Section 170. In this section, he expresses the desire to buy bananas from a street vendor. However, Soares does not carry through with this desire because he is afraid that the sellers might find the sound of his voice strange. Soares also admits that he does not know the proper ritual for buying bananas on the street. Therefore, he avoids human contact and does not purchase the fruit. Soares also shows a slight form of paranoia when it comes to other people. He often writes that he feels that people look at him as if they find him unusual.

In Section 194, Soares expresses a sadness for not knowing the person that he never is. This feeling of missing who he should have been may come from Soares' idea that it is the loss of his mother at an early age that creates his independent personality. He seems to have the idea that if he was raised by his biological mother, he might have developed a more healthy emotional state as an adult.



# Style

## Point of View

This novel is written in the first-person point of view. Senhor Soares, who is assumedly an alter ego of author Pessoa, is both the writer and narrator of the book. This use of the first-person point of view is demonstrated by the writer's frequent use of the pronoun "I". Also since this is an autobiography, it follows that the text would be written from the first-person point of view.

This story is told primarily through exposition. There are only a very few places where Soares includes quotes from the people around him. This method of writing is used because Soares talks to and associates with very few people. He is mainly concerned with his own thoughts and feelings. This expository writing style is very appropriate for a person who isolates himself from other people.

## Setting

The major setting of Pessoa's novel is Lisbon, Portugal. Soares' uncle brings him to this city to find a job. At one point in the autobiography, Soares takes a train ride from Lisbon to Cascais. Apart from this one trip, Soares does not leave his home city very frequently. He is content to stay in a location with which he is familiar. Soares admits to being uncomfortable in unfamiliar places.

Although the main setting is limited primarily to Lisbon, there are a variety of settings located in this city that are included in Pessoa's novel. Those scenes visited most often include the office of the fabric warehouse where Soares works and the fourth floor rented room where Soares lives. In addition to the time he spends at his office and at home, Soares often walks the city streets, observing those who gather and talk on these streets. Sometimes his walks take him to the Tagus River or a park or group of trees in the city.

Although Soares does not physically travel much, his dreams take him to a variety of locations. In his dreams, Soares lives in country houses, spends time with elderly aunts that he does not have and travels to the Orient. In his dreams, Soares is a retired major lounging in a country hotel. He also takes a boat trip from Portugal to America. Soares indicates that those who read and have good imaginations can enjoy the same benefits of travel as those who actually go to these places.

## Language and Meaning

The use of language is the component of literature where Pessoa shines. He presents Soares as an eccentric writer with a knack for choosing just the right words to say what he wants to say. Although Soares discourages the writing of poetry, except by children,





his prose sometimes carries the rhythm, rhyme, and beauty of poetry. He uses a variety of literary devices to color and enliven his writing. Along with the use of these devices, Soares also bends the rules of grammar to say exactly what he wants.

Soares uses a variety of literary devices in his writing. One of the literary devices that Soares uses often in his writing is alliteration. An example of this alliteration is found in the first sentence of Section 83. Both the "wh" and "f" sounds are repeated in a way that causes the reader to visualize the picture that Soares is trying to paint. Soares also enjoys the use of oxymoron. In an oxymoron, the writer uses two contrasting words to make a statement. One example of this oxymoron is seen on page 80 where Soares refers to people as being "monotonously diverse." Soares also often personifies various inanimate objects or feelings in his novel. For instance, in Section 87, Soares personifies fate and pictures that it is being pushed up against a wall.

In addition to his frequent use of literary devices, Soares also does not believe that the rules of grammar should be followed too closely. For instance, there are places in his book, such as a sentence on page 79 where Soares makes a reference to "this random movements." Although Soares realizes this is not proper grammar, he indicates that this sentence says exactly what he wants it to say. Soares also indicates pronouns can be used in a way that they describe a person with a different gender. An example of this odd pronoun use can be found in Section 85.

## Structure

Pessoa structures his novel as a diary or a journal. Narrator Soares divides his ideas into sections that make up the bulk of the novel. About seventy percent of the novel is comprised of numbered sections. There are about 481 sections in this first part of the book. These sections range in length from a single sentence to several pages. While most of these sections only have identifying numbers, there are a few that also include a title. Most of these titles only indicate the section is intended as an interlude or break. They do not identify what the section will be about.

In the smaller of the two sections included in the book, the sections are identified by title only without any associated numbers. The titles in this section indicate what topic each following section will address. Many times Soares writes one or more sections with the same title. These sections are identified with Roman numerals enclosed in parenthesis following the section title.



## Quotes

"In these random impressions, and with no desire to be other than random, I indifferently narrate my factless autobiography, my lifeless history" (Preface.)

"For my boss I prefer the man named Vasques, who in difficult moments is easier to deal with than all the abstract bosses in the world" (Section 7, pg. 17.)

"I write my literature as I write my ledger entries-carefully and indifferently" (Section 13, pg. 21.)

"What I write, bad as it is, may provide some hurt or sad soul a few moments of distraction from something worse" (Section 14, pg. 22.)

"We're all slaves of external circumstances" (Section 33, pg. 35.)

"An income sufficient for food and drink, a roof over my head, and a little free time in which to dream and write, to sleep; what more can I ask of the Gods or expect from Destiny?" (Section 18, pg. 24.)

"To know nothing about yourself is to live. To know yourself badly is to think. To know yourself in a flash, as I did in this moment, is to have a fleeting notion of the intimate monad, the soul's magic word" (Section 40, pg. 40.)

"I have no peace, nor even alas! the desire to have it..." (Section 41, pg. 43.)

"We should wash our destiny the way we wash our body, and change life the way we change our clothes-not to preserve life, as when we eat and sleep, but out of objective respect for ourselves, which is what personal hygiene is all about" (Section 42, pg. 43.)

"Sickness occurs when we desire what we need and what's desirable with equal intensity, suffering our lack of perfection as if we were suffering for lack of bread" (Section 53, pg. 52.)

"However much my soul may be descended from the Romantics, I can find no peace except in reading Classical authors" (Section 55, pg. 55.)

"Everything wearies me, including what doesn't weary me. My happiness is as painful as my pain" (Section 80, pg. 77.)

"Analyzing myself this afternoon, I've discovered that my stylistic system is based on two principles, and in the best tradition of the best classical writers I immediately uphold these two principles as the general foundations of all good style: 1) to express what one feels exactly as it is felt; clearly, if it is clear; obscurely, if obscure; confusedly, if confused, and 2) to understand that grammar is an instrument and not a law" (Section 84, pg. 81.)



"All I asked of life is that it ask nothing of me" (Section 133, pg. 120.)

"Government is based on two things: restraint and deception" (Section 161, pg. 141.)

"Those who truly suffer don't form a group or go about as a mob. Those who suffer, suffer alone" (Section 165, pg. 146.)

"Society would govern itself spontaneously if it didn't contain sensitive and intelligent people" (Section 314, pg. 265.)

"Life is an experimental journey that we make involuntarily" (Section 373, pg. 309.)

"If all who read me would learn, slowly, of course, as the subject matter requires, to be completely insensitive to other people's opinions and even their glances, that would be enough of a garland to make up for my life's scholastic stagnation" (Section 389, pg. 322.)

"Nothing better symbolizes life than those news articles that contradict today what the newspaper said yesterday" (Section 392, pg. 324.)

"All pleasure is in the mind; all crimes that occur are committed in dreams and in dreams alone!" (Advice to Unhappily Married Women 1, pg. 395.)

"My wish for you, my dear disciples, is that by faithfully following my advice you'll experience vastly multiplied sensual pleasures with, not in the acts of, the male animal to whom Church and State have tied you by your womb and a last name." (Advice to Unhappily Married Women III, pg. 397.)



## Topics for Discussion

What do you think Soares means in Section 6 when he writes that he does not want to be oppressed by the knowledge that he exists? Why do you think he finds this knowledge oppressing?

After reading Soares's book in its entirety, what is your overall impression of Soares? Do you like him? Why or why not? Include specific examples in your answer.

In Section 163, Soares writes that men of action feel that they must actively participate in an activity in order to appreciate it because they have no imagination. Soares writes that he can experience all of the excitement of a tiger hunt just by reading about it. Do you agree with Soares's reasoning? Why or why not?

Consider Soares's quote that government is based on restraint and deception. This quote is found in Section 161. Do you agree with his belief? Give examples from your local government that support your answer.

Reread Sections 263 and 381 in which Soares tries to describe the disorder that he describes as tedium. Do his symptoms remind you of any definable disorder? If so, which one? If not, how would you categorize this tedium that he describes?

What is your opinion of Soares's desire to have a sterile wife? Do you agree with him that sterility is the only worthy state? Why or why not? Why do you think that Soares holds this viewpoint?

Do you believe that Soares and Pessoa share any personality traits? Do you think that Soares an alter ego for Pessoa? Explain your answer.