

LA BIBLIOTHEQUE DE MA GRAND-MERE.

My grand-mother's library.

De Tatjana Pessoa.

Tatjana Pessoa

Born in Brussels in 1981, Tatjana Pessoa comes from a multicultural background: her mother is Portuguese and her father is from Switzerland (German part). At the age of 15, she moved to Germany and started to do theatre with a group of young people. Then, at 20 years old, she flew to West Africa where she integrated a theatre school. Afterwards, she came back to her country of birth, Belgium, to enter the Conservatory of Liège. During her years of study at the Conservatory, she chose to focus her training mainly on directing. Tatjana Pessoa, keen on multiculturalism, started to learn English and Italian to finally juggle with 5 different languages. She has a very specific way of conceiving the use of languages. Indeed, she declared: “*My language is a “plurilanguage”. I don’t want to choose. I want to be able to move freely from one language to another and draw from all the richness and singularities*”. She also enjoys multilingualism because, in her opinion, each language has its specificities: “*We do not express the same things in this or that language*”. According to her, Portuguese is more comfortable to express feelings, French is more precise, German evokes the theatre, while English is the language of fiction and creativity.

Tatjana Pessoa assisted a lot of directors and in 2014, her young public play she wrote and directed, *Lucien*, was presented at the *Espace culturel Senghor*. This play, written for Gabriel da Costa, is about Portuguese immigration and the father-son relationship. In 2017, she presented her creation, *What’s after Babel*, a multilingual play. In the same year, she died her grand-mother, Wanda, in Lisbon. The latter bequeathed to Tatjana her immense library. From there, she started to question herself: what to do with such a gift, with such a legacy?

The idea of the play, *La bibliothèque de ma grand-mère*, emerged at that moment....

Birth of the play

Tatjana left for Lisbon with two companions, Gabriel da Costa, comedian, and Edith Bertholet, from the Theatre of Liège, to begin an investigation through the books left by her grand-mother. Wanda Pessoa had a lot of books, all arranged and filed in a precise order, and in each book she underlined sentences, wrote personal notes. Tatjana will try to get to know the true personality of this woman she knew very little. As it often happens, when a loved one dies, we regret not having taken the time to get to know her personality, her convictions, and her past life. We realize that many things remain and for Tatjana, those things are in her grand-mother’s books. Indeed, she discovered that her grand-mother had a real dialogue with her books, richer than the dialogue that ever existed between her and her granddaughter. She also discovered that she had been writing obsessively for years, as if to fill the void left by the death of her husband. Through these books, Tatjana will have a new representation of her grandmother: she understood that her grand-mother was far from the severe figure that she projected on her. She

will discover that her grandmother, Wanda, was a strong woman, independent, in love, vulnerable, impulsive, uncompromising, generous, curious,...

She began to open her books, looking for clues about her childhood in Lisbon in the 1930s, her connection with Fernando Pessoa, her own grandmother's famous cousin, her departure to Angola just after the Second World War, her return to Portugal after the Salazar dictatorship.

So, who was Wanda Pessoa, born in Portugal in 1920 et passed away in 2017? A woman of character for sure: She was the first Portuguese woman to graduate in agronomy in 1947 at the age of 27. She married an entomologist against the will of her family. They moved to Angola, at the time a Portuguese colony. The couple had eight children in a dozen years. Twenty years later, in 1967, she became a widow at the age of 47 with 7 children still young. In 1975, Angola gained its independence, all the Portuguese returned to the country but not her. She stayed there until 1980. For what reasons? What did she experience there? What were her convictions? These are all questions that will be at the heart of this play.

Tatjana's wish is "to turn this private heritage into a public event, to create a space of memory and creation, a symbolic place where the living have as much to learn from the dead as the dead from the living.

Fernando Pessoa

Tatjana is a descendant of Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), the famous Portuguese writer, critic, polemicist and poet. Fernando Pessoa is the great-great uncle of Tatjana.

Born on June 13, 1888 in Lisbon, where he died of alcoholism on November 30, 1935, he lived part of his childhood in South Africa. Although he almost never signed his works with his real name, Fernando Pessoa's name is one of the most famous in Portugal. So many "heteronyms", a term used by the writer, for so many poetic approaches to the world: "sensationalist" and modernist when he takes the word of Alvaro de Campos, stoic with Ricardo Reis, pagan sage with Alberto Caeiro.

The poet thus develops a complex universe marked by skepticism but also by esotericism and mysticism. His brilliant studies in South Africa, where his father-in-law was a consul in Durban, explain his great mastery of English and his Anglo-Saxon influences, particularly those of Walt Whitman.

A very discreet person, Pessoa worked as a secretary and wrote music columns for newspapers. His texts remained unknown to the public until the 1980s, when his masterpiece, *The Book of Intranquillity*, was published. A diary kept by Bernardo Soares, whom Pessoa considers his double, this ode to the city of Lisbon evokes the dissolution of being and the supremacy of art.

Author of a masterly work, Fernando Pessoa, whose name means "person", is now recognized and admired far beyond the borders of his country.

He lived poor and unknown. Some of his works were published between 1942 and 1946. A little bit of theater in the 50s and finally *The Book of Intranquillity* was published in 1982 and his *Faust* in 1988.

When he died, 27,543 texts were found buried in a trunk and gradually exhumed. All these manuscripts have been in the National Library of Lisbon since 1979. It was only when the family agreed to give the manuscripts to the National Library that these last works were published.