

# Campos, prose writer

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PESSOA, Fernando (2012). *Prosa de Álvaro de Campos*. Edição de Jerónimo Pizarro e Antonio Cardiello. Lisboa: Ática [Babel], 412 p.

“Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh,” warns the Preacher of Ecclesiastes (12:12). Yet from his lips to the ear of God, I say, for the making of books is something to rejoice in, and if much study wearies the body, it is a welcome weariness. This is true overall, but it is particularly true of the books that continue to emerge from the seemingly bottomless trunk in which Fernando Pessoa kept what could be called, with not entirely unintended morbidity, after his death in 1935 at the age of forty-seven, his literary remains.

Taking its place now among the books emerging from Pessoa’s word-hoard is *Prosa de Álvaro de Campos*, in which previously published materials are combined with hitherto unpublished materials from the trunk. More about the makeup of the book later on. But first a word about the lasting figure of the putative author of these materials. As the Spanish scholar Américo Castro would insist on the subject of *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, much has been said about this book but there is much more still to be said. About the Knight himself, Jorge Luis Borges wrote in the essay “Partial Magic in the *Quixote*”: “Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.” I would add a question: why is it for readers that Cervantes’s imagined creature or Shakespeare’s hero rival their friends, neighbors and relatives, for a prominent place in their thoughts, perceptions, and continuous “reality”? Pessoa himself anticipated this triumph of imagination over actuality in his own case. “Pode ser que, se houver verdade a revelar-nos, nem atravessar-mos perpetuamente, de vida em vida ou de planeta em planeta, estados diferentes da mesma ilusão, eu verifique que eu só fui a ficção, e Caeiro, Reis e Campos, e outros que venha a haver, sejam as verdadeiras realidades de que eu não fui mais que o paiz ou a estalagem.” (74) No wonder that one prominent scholar confesses gladly that she has been in love with Álvaro for decades. Speaking for myself, I have known “Álvaro de Campos” for decades and would be surprised if I encountered him in

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the Baixa only because I have assumed that the living Campos went to his great reward long ago—though the day's newspapers failed to notice.

Following David Mourão-Ferreira's observation years ago that most of the best work by Pessoa and his heteronyms he put into print during his lifetime (the great notable exception being the *Livro do Dessassossego*) and with João Rui de Sousa's indispensable *Fotobibliografia de Fernando Pessoa* (1988) to guide me, I organized my Pessoa seminar not conventionally by themes, subjects or heteronyms, for example, but in line with the chronology of Pessoa's publications in the order in which readers first encountered them during his lifetime. Of course, this put the focus in the seminar on Fernando Pessoa as a working man of letters, who, to a greater or lesser extent, controlled how his readers were to take him as he revealed how he took himself and (importantly) his active roles in the cultural and political life of his times. Thus after attending to his first published poem at the age of fourteen and his high school publications (along with a piece in the *Natal Mercury* by C. R. Anon, his first English heteronym), we took up his two great essays in *A Águia*, Teixeira Pascoaes' journal, in 1912, both of them signed by Pessoa himself. So, importantly, we affirmed that he started out as a critic-theorist, a sort of John the Baptist announcing a new dawn for Portuguese poetry. A handful of pieces follow, including an intervention, some reviews, and "Na Floresta do Alheamento," which later he would identify as belonging to *Livro do Dessassossego*, but at the time identified as being by Fernando Pessoa himself. The first significant poem that Pessoa published is "Impressões do Crepusculo," which appeared over his own name in *A Renascença* in February 1914. Not until the first issue of *Orpheu* in early 1915 did Álvaro de Campos first make it into print, with "Opiário" and "Ode Triunfal," the latter becoming, as Campos is made to reveal, the engineer-poet's favorite poem. In *Orpheu 2* Pessoa publishes Campos's "Ode Marítima," followed by, over his own name, "Chuva Oblíqua." Over the next few years, Pessoa publishes some poetry over his own name. Campos next surfaces in his spectacularly defiant outcry, "Ultimatum," in *Portugal Futurista* in November 1917. Over the next years he publishes numerous poems over his own name, as well as his novella *O Banqueiro Anarchista* in 1922. In that same year Campos, writing from Newcastle-on-Tyne, addresses an expatriate's letter to the journal *Contemporânea*, as well as his famous "Soneto Já Antigo." More of Campos appears in subsequent years.

The point of this rehearsal is that Campos was the first of Pessoa's three major heteronyms to appear in print and he did so fairly often well before the other two major heteronyms—Ricardo Reis and Alberto Caeiro—were introduced to Pessoa's readers in the journal *Athena* (which Pessoa co-edited) in 1924-25. Campos was also the last of the three heteronyms whose work appeared in print. His quintessential poem "Tabacaria" appeared in *presença* in 1933, and the note "Nota ao Caso" was included in Almada Negreiros's *Sudoeste* in the year and month of

Pessoa's death. One more fact. By the time Pessoa released the poetry of Reis to *Athena*, he had already disappeared in the urban wilds of Brazil, a political dissenter, and when he printed the first poems of the un-philosophical philosophical Caeiro—the poet Campos called his master—was already dead. Only Campos had an ongoing life that Pessoa could monitor as it developed and changed over actual time. He was Pessoa's alter-ego, surrogate, big brother (though putatively younger by three years), scolding conscience, and literary competitor—all rolled into one bi-polar side-kick.

Pessoa left so much more material his heirs preserved in the seemingly bottomless *baú* that even now, after decades of its being mined, there are still books being constructed out of what in an earlier age would have been deemed the author's literary remains. Complete works, more or less finished, such as Pessoa's translation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, his own book-length translation of Antonio Botto's *Canções* into English, and, in English, his translations of 300 Portuguese proverbs for a London publisher who did not bring out the book, and a guide to Lisbon for English tourists (which may or may not be considered Pessoa's original work, in part or whole). Others have been constructed, such as Pessoa and his interest in film or Poe in translation, comprised of Pessoa's published translations of the American poet, fragments of unfinished translations, and translations by the creator of the whole text of poems Pessoa marked (it is assumed) for translation but that he did not get to. Now we have, at last, *Prosa de Álvaro de Campos*, edited by Jerónimo Pizarro and Antonio Cardillo, with the assistance of Jorge Uribe. Taking its rightful and worthy place next to the many and various editions of Campos's poetry (which in themselves constitute a whole area needing close investigation), this collection of prose is a harvest of riches.

In this book Álvaro de Campos's prose is divided up and apportioned out to seven sections in this order: 1. "Não publicada"; 2. "Entrevista"; 3. "Notas para a recordação do meu mestre Caeiro"; 4. "Publicada em vida"; 5. "Correspondência"; 6. "Outros textos"; and 7. "Projectos." To these—the main text of the book—are added a good deal of useful editorial material organized: 1. "Notas genéticas"; 2. "Bibliografia"; 3. "Índice sequencial"; "Índice topográfico"; and 5. "Índice onomástico." The editors do their best "to give to Caesar what is Caesar's" by, for example, printing the hitherto unpublished notes intended for "Notas para a recordação do meu mestre Caeiro," the important essay published in 1931 in *presença* (issue 30), to accompany, in the same issue, Caeiro's "O oitavo poema de O Guardador de Rebanhos." This book will be mined over and over again by those readers seriously interested, not only in Campos and Pessoa himself, but in European studies, especially modernist theory, poetry, and criticism. Much of it is new to print, including Campos's intellectual pyrotechnics and unexpected pirouettes, when so much of what he thinks and insists upon depends, as he readily

acknowledges, on his understanding of and commitment to “engineering.” It was not just his vantage point; it was, to change the metaphor, his rock.

In conclusion, let me offer instances of the great wit, hitherto not so aphoristically displayed, that helps us to appreciate even more keenly “the world according to Álvaro de Campos,” the beau ideal Englishman that Pessoa imagines for himself, the young student in Durban whose Portuguese nationality kept him from attending Oxford or Cambridge on fellowship. Among my favorite examples of Campos’s wit are his perversions of well-known proverbs:

- Mais valem dois passaros na mão do que um a voar. (58)
- Nem tudo que é ouro é luz. (58)
- Cadeia que vae adiante allumia duas rezes. (58)
- Deus escreve os tortos por linhas direitas. (58)
- Deus é um conceito economico. Á sua sombra fazem a sua burocracia metaphysica os padres das religiões todas. (58)
- Mais vale nunca do que tarde. E o santo portuguez, como diz o dictado, é S. Nunca. Façamos a festa do seu dia – 29 de Fevereiro em anno não bissexto. (58)

No less snippy are such observations as these:

- O historiador é um homem que põe os factos no seu devido logar. Não é como foi: é assim mesmo. (60)
- Não consegui nunca ser inteiramente desconexo. Delirar, sim, mas com juizo. (60)
- Sem querer, amo a França, porque sabe saber escrever. (61)
- É verdade... Quem é que reveria as provas do Livro do Destino? (61)
- O monotheismo é uma doença da civilização, um stigma da sua decadencia. A nossa civilização monotheista foi sempre uma civilização doente. (138)

To these he adds pithy “definições” of a bevy of cultural luminaries (62-65): Mallarmé (“A musica de metade das palavras, e metade das palavras da musica”), Victor Hugo, Musset, Vigny, Rousseau, Goethe, Shakespeare (“Tudo, excepto o todo”), Milton, Flaubert, Montaigne, Homer, Nietzsche (“Deshumano, demasiado humano”), Camões (“A nau a meio carinho”), Voltaire (“A malicia da malicia”), and a few others. And circa 1932, he sums up “Álvaro de Campos” in an epitaph: “Foi o unico Grande Resultado do Futurismo. Não foi um resultado do Futurismo.” (65)

There is no doubt about it. This book is a keeper, one to be savored.