

Fernando Pessoa's Private Library

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A Biblioteca Particular de Fernando Pessoa/Fernando Pessoa's Private Library (2010). Edição de Jéronimo Pizarro, Patricio Ferrari e Antonio Cardiello. Lisboa: D. Quixote.

This voluminous Catalogue of the Private Library of Fernando Pessoa is a monument to Pessoa's book collecting and reading habits, and represents the outcome of a collaborative project, concluded in 2009, between the University of Lisbon, the Casa Fernando Pessoa and the Pessoa Estate. The philosophy behind the project was to demonstrate the affectation that Pessoa had for books and their symbolic value, and to open up the collections, which were purchased by the Portuguese government in 1993 and deposited in the Casa Fernando Pessoa, for research.

The Catalogue uses the Universal Decimal Classification, which allows the reader to get an immediate sense of what Pessoa was interested in. The titles in the Catalogue span from H.P. Blavatsky, *Les origines du rituel dans l'église et la maçonnerie* (Éditions Adyar, n.d.) [UDC 0-1] to P.B. Stephenson, *The Legend of Aleister Crowley, being a study of the documentary evidence relating to a campaign of personal edification* (Mandrake Press, 1930) [UDC 9-77 LMR], and cover all subjects of human knowledge and learning. Appropriately, this trajectory from Generalities to Geography, History, Biography appears to close the circle at a point where theosophy and magic meet. But this sense of completion is only an impression, for another classification system would no doubt have resulted in a different perception of the coherence of Pessoa's personal library. What is important, for one, is not only the book collection itself, but the time the poet acquired them. Unfortunately, the Catalogue does not offer this information where it is available; of course, it is unlikely that a complete chronology could be established *überhaupt*, but some provenance data would have been welcome. But the volume does include transcription of 20 lists with book titles (some of them dated) that Pessoa compiled at various moments, and which give a further sense of his "virtual" library — the books that Pessoa once owned and read but that do not survive in any of the known collections.

The main purpose behind the Catalogue is to describe and categorize in one place all 1311 items which Pessoa acquired between 1898 and 1935 and which are housed in the Casa Fernando Pessoa — which has funded the project — and the Biblioteca Nacional. Apart from the books that Pessoa collected, the Catalogue

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also includes literary and artistic magazines, newspapers, newspaper cuttings that Pessoa read and kept. In addition to an index of authors and an index of serial titles, the Catalogue also contains a number of appendices, which includes a list of books whose current location is unknown, a list of "Memoranda", the book lists already mentioned that Pessoa himself compiled; and "Other Documents", which lists books that Pessoa sold at various points.

The Catalogue contains at least one colour illustration for each item that is described. But the descriptions themselves are minimal (giving author, date, title, publisher, series); no indication is given whether an item contains annotations, dedications, signatures or other markings. Given that Pessoa's pre-heteronyms were also book owners, and that Pessoa's reading was inherently intertwined with his creative output, it is perhaps a surprising oversight that the *Catalogue* does not note what use the writer made of his books. That said, a selection of annotations of particular significance (of significance at least to the editors) are included as well with an image and transcription, and there is also sampling of Pessoa's signatures and of some of the pre-heteronym book owners.

While *A Biblioteca Particular* is a highly useful, lavishly-produced book, it is best used in conjunction with the online *Biblioteca Digital* hosted by the Casa Pessoa. Here the user has access to fully digitized, high-quality reproductions of the books from Pessoa's library (either as pdf or in jpg images). The digital library arranges the material in four complementary ways – by author, by title, by date and by UDC Classification – which allows the user to browse the books in different ways and thereby to discern different patterns in the collections. (A search tool, though, as well as OCR'ed text so that one could search within the text, would have been welcome options.) The need to have fuller catalogue descriptions, however, remains, for in certain cases the Casa Pessoa was not able to include books that are still in copyright (such as Robert Graves's *Lars Porsena or the future of swearing* [Kegan Paul, ?1928]. Though they are few, in this instances one can only guess whether Pessoa read and annotated these books or not.

The Catalogue is completely bilingual in Portuguese and English. This is significant not only because a vast proportion of the books – more than half of them – in the library are English books, which Pessoa purchased from the English bookstore in the rua do Arsenal in Lisbon or ordered directly from the United Kingdom, but also because Pessoa in many respects was a cosmopolitan writer whose literary experiment was not confined by one personality alone, nor by one language. Pessoa's reputation outside of Portugal is still too little known, especially among students of early twentieth-century literature; in Britain and the United States, very few critics know that Pessoa wrote some very good poetry in English. While the *Catalogue* does not – and cannot – set out to influence Pessoa's reception abroad, it is an excellent resource that highlights the way in which the poet was unfettered by national, aesthetic and intellectual borders.