

Lisboa:

Edwin Honig's response to the 1985 conference on Pessoa

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Keywords

Third International Pessoa Conference, Edwin Honig, Susan Margaret Brown.

Abstract

Among the many participants in the Third International Pessoa Conference, held in Lisbon in 1985, were the poet-translator Edwin Honig, Susan Margaret Brown (a specialist on Pessoa and Whitman), and myself. Shortly after the end of the conference Honig sent me a copy of his poet-participant's considered responses to the goings-on at the conference itself and its immediate aftermath. This text, which combines verse and prose, is published here for the first time.

Palavras-chave

III Congresso Internacional de Estudos Pessoaanos, Edwin Honig, Susan Margaret Brown.

Resumo

De entre os vários participantes no III Congresso Internacional de Estudos Pessoaanos, realizado em Lisboa, em 1985, esteve presente o poeta-tradutor Edwin Honig, Susan Margaret Brown (especialista em Pessoa e Whitman) e eu próprio. Pouco tempo depois do fim do Congresso, Honig, como poeta-participante, enviou-me uma cópia das suas ponderadas reacções aos acontecimentos do Congresso e às suas imediatas resultados imediatos. Este texto, que combina verso e prosa, é aqui publicado pela primeira vez.

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The Third Congresso Internacional de Estudos Pessoaanos was held in Lisbon in 1985, marking the fiftieth anniversary of Fernando Pessoa's death. Among those in attendance (including myself) were Pessoa's American translators, Edwin Honig and Susan Margaret Brown. From those meetings there emerged a "packet" of poetry by Honig that he sent me on April 21, 1986, several months after the Lisbon conference, along with his permission to publish it. He probably had in mind publication in *Gávea-Brown*, the Portuguese-American journal published out of the Brown University Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. At that time, however, the journal was appearing irregularly, with long delays between issues, and Honig's "packet" fell between the cracks and was never published. Its appearance here is thus its first publication.

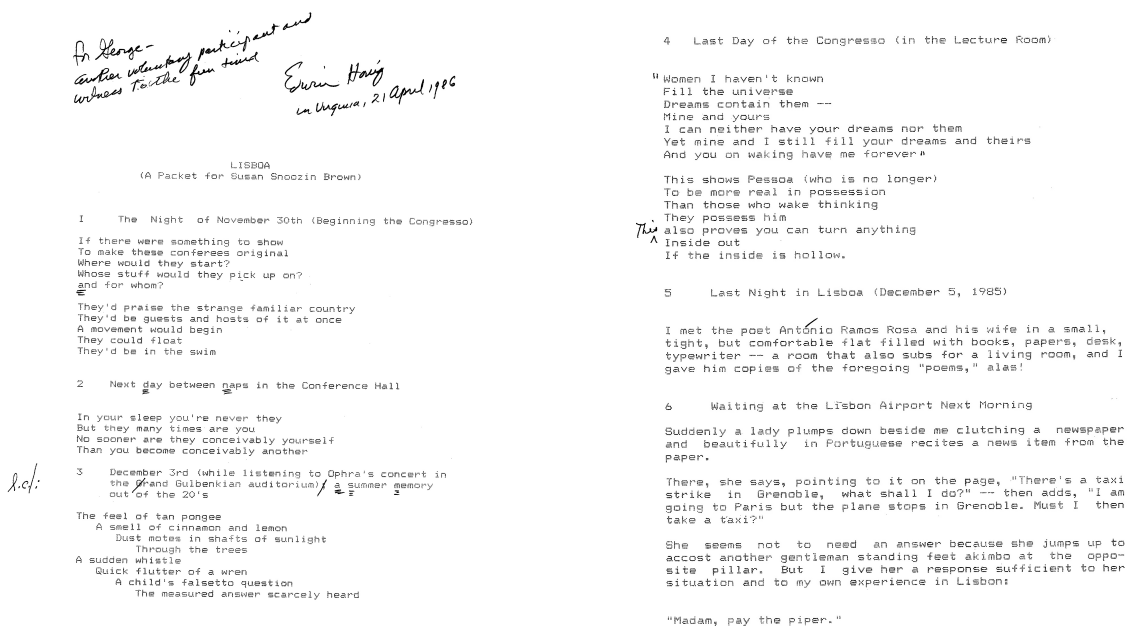


Fig. 1. Edwin Honig's response.

For George –
 Another voluntary participant and
 Witness to the fun time.
 Edwin Honig
 In Virginia, 21 April 1986

LISBOA
 (A Packet for Susan Snoozin Brown)

I The Night of November 30th. (Beginning the Congresso)

If there were something to show
 To make these conferees original
 Where would they start?
 Whose stuff would they pick up on?
 And for whom?

They'd praise the strange familiar country
 They'd be guests and hosts of it at once
 A movement would begin
 They could float
 They'd be in the swim

2 Next Day between Naps in the Conference Hall

In your sleep you're never they
 But they many times are you
 No sooner are they conceivably yourself
 Than you become conceivably another

3 December 3rd (while listening to Ophra's concert in
 the grand Gulbenkian auditorium) A Summer Memory
 out of the 20's

The feel of tan pongee
 A smell of cinnamon and lemon
 Dust motes in shafts of sunlight
 Through the trees
 A sudden whistle
 Quick flutter of a wren
 A child's falsetto question
 The measured answer scarcely heard

4 Last Day of the Congresso (in the Lecture Room)

"Women I haven't known
Fill the universe
Dreams contain them –
Mine and yours
I can neither have your dreams nor them
Yet mine and I still fill your dreams and theirs
And you on waking have me forever"

This shows Pessoa (who is no longer)
To be more real in possession
Than those who wake thinking
They possess him
This also proves you can turn anything
Inside out
If the inside is hollow.

5 Last Night in Lisboa (December 5, 1985)

I met the poet António Ramos Rosa and his wife in a small,
tight, but comfortable flat filled with books, papers, desk,
typewriter—a room that also subs for a living room, and I
gave him copies of the foregoing "poems," alas!

6 Waiting at Lisbon Airport Next Morning

Suddenly a lady plumps down beside me clutching a newspaper
and beautifully in Portuguese recites a news item from the paper.

There, she says, pointing to it on the page, "There's a taxi
strike in Grenoble, what shall I do?"—then adds, "I am
going to Paris but the plane stops in Grenoble. Must I then
take a taxi?"

She seems not to need an answer because she jumps up to
accost another gentleman standing feet akimbo at the opposite
pillar. But I give her a response sufficient to her situation
and to my own experience in Lisbon:

"Madam, pay the piper."