

Imaginary poets in a real world (an unpublished lecture, 1996)

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Keywords

Adolfo Casais Monteiro, heteronymism, Joyce Carol Oates, Roy Campbell, *azulejo*, English-language poetry, Benoit van Innis, 8 March 1914.

Abstract

Delivered on Feb. 8, 1996, at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, this lecture was scheduled in conjunction with a Portuguese-government sponsored exhibition titled "Azulejo: Five Centuries of Portuguese Ceramic Tile." It served as an introduction for a general audience of non-specialists interested in learning about Fernando Pessoa's life and work. It surveys the basic facts of the poet's life: as a young student in English-language schools; his life in Lisbon; his theories and practices of heteronymism, including his account of the advent of those major heteronyms and their poems on March 8, 1914; his unsuccessful attempts to be recognized as a poet in the English tradition by having English-language poems printed in Lisbon but circulated only in the British isles. His peculiar triumph was that of a writer who, because he was bi-lingual and bi-cultural, was able to become a great Portuguese poet. As one critic, who is himself fluent in the English language and conversant with England's literary traditions, has put it, "[Pessoa] even 'reinvented' the Portuguese language, because he knew English."

Palavras-chave

Adolfo Casais Monteiro, heteronimismo, Joyce Carol Oates, Roy Campbell, *azulejo*, poesia em língua inglesa, Benoit van Innis, 8 de Março de 1914.

Resumo

Apresentada a 8 de Fevereiro de 1996, na Rhode Island School of Design (*Escola de Desenho Gráfico de Rhode Island*) em Providence, Rhode Island, EUA, esta palestra ocorreu em conjunto com a exposição "Azulejo: Five Centuries of Portuguese Ceramic Tile" (*Azulejo: Cinco Séculos de Cerâmica Portuguesa*), um evento patrocinado pelo governo português. A palestra serviu de introdução à vida e à obra de Fernando Pessoa, dirigindo-se a um público não-especializado. Abrangeram-se os aspectos principais da vida do poeta: seus tempos de jovem estudante em escolas de língua inglesa; sua vida em Lisboa; suas teorias e práticas de heteronimismo, inclusive seu testemunho da gênese dos principais heterónimos e seus poemas a 8 de Março de 1914; suas sucessivas tentativas frustradas em ser reconhecido como poeta de tradição inglesa, tendo seus poemas ingleses publicados em Lisboa mas distribuídos apenas nas ilhas britânicas. Seu triunfo peculiar foi o de um autor que, sendo bilíngue e bicultural, foi capaz de tornar-se um grande poeta português. Como escreveu um crítico, também fluente na língua inglesa e familiarizado com suas tradições literárias: "[Pessoa] chegou a 'reinventar' a língua portuguesa, porque conhecia o inglês".

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Were I to link my remarks on Fernando Pessoa to the world of Portuguese tiles (*azulejos*), the theme of this exhibition at the Rhode Island School of Design,¹ I might begin with a reference to the single poem published by Coelho Pacheco, long considered (erroneously) to be still another of Pessoa's many heteronyms (see GALHOZ, 2007). In "Para além de outro oceano" ("Beyond a further sea"), we read only of "a noble hall of shadows in which there are blue tiles | In which there are blue tiles coloring the walls".² Or I might invoke *Azulejos*, a journal to which Pessoa's friend, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, contributed (see GALHOZ, 1990). Or, offering a third example, I might look at *The Poisoned Kiss and Other Stories from the Portuguese*, Joyce Carol Oates's 1975 collection, about which she writes:

The tales in this collection are translated from an imaginary work, *Azulejos*, by an imaginary author, Fernandes de Briao. To the best of my knowledge he has no existence and has never existed, though without his very real guidance I would not have had access to the mystical 'Portugal' of the stories – nor would I have been compelled to recognize the authority of a world-view quite antithetical to my own.

(OATES, 1975: v)

A curious beginning, this, for a collection of original short stories by a well-read, famous, and prolific author in her own right, stories that she attributes to one imaginary writer called "Fernandes." But things get curiouiser and curiouiser, as Alice says. For Oates never once mentions Fernando Pessoa, not in *The Poisoned Kiss*, nor, I believe, anywhere else in her published essays or fiction.

The story of Oates's bold, utterly fictional "stories from the Portuguese," however, is a tale told elsewhere. Here the subject is the one and several major selves of Fernando Pessoa. Fernando Pessoa is the last great discovery in twentieth-century Western poetry. Only now does it seem that he will be accorded something of his rightful high place among the great poets of the first half of the twentieth century. He has been discovered by the critics, including Harold BLOOM (1994) and George STEINER (1996). Even the spot drawings in the *New Yorker* by the Belgian artist Benoit van Innis suggest that his place is with the Bohemian-Austrian Rainer Maria Rilke and the Anglo-American T. S. Eliot.³ Indeed no other

¹ On Feb. 8, 1996, under the title "Fernando Pessoa and Company: Imaginary Poets in a Real World," an earlier version of this paper was read at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I. in conjunction with the exhibition "Azulejo: Five Centuries of Portuguese Ceramic Tile" (Dec. 8, 1995 – Feb. 25, 1996).

² See *Orpheu* 3 (publication proofs datable to 1917), in *Orpheu – edição fac-similada* (2015). The original Portuguese reads: "Num salão nobre de penumbra em que há azulejos | Em que há azulejos azuis colorindo as paredes"; English translation prepared by the author of this essay.

³ Examples of Benoit van Innis's drawings referencing Pessoa appear in the *New Yorker* (June 21, 1993), p. 62; (Apr. 3, 1995), p. 44; (June 26 & July 3, 1995), p. 66; (Sept. 11, 1995), p. 89; and (Sept. 25, 1995), p. 61. In the last two instances Pessoa's name does not appear.

poet of his time, or perhaps any other time, surpasses him in creative versatility, for Pessoa is not one poet but many. He is the poetic and critical creator of poets who themselves are the ingenious creators of poetry and criticism. Other poets have written poetry in the voices of fictional, historical, and literary figures – one thinks of the English Robert Browning, the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, and the Danish Søren Kierkegaard – but Pessoa is unique in writing for each of the major figures he created (calling them heteronyms) a generous corpus of poetry, which is not only readily identifiable as the work of its fictional author but constitutes in itself an invaluable contribution to Portuguese, European, and world poetry. No poet was ever blessed (or burdened) with a more appropriate family name, for “Pessoa” means both person and persona, a fact that the poet seems to have recognized at an early age, for the writer who became, arguably, Portugal’s greatest poet (at least since the sixteenth-century Luís Vaz de Camões) took to addressing letters to himself at the age of five or six that he attributed to an imaginary companion he recognized as Chevalier de Pas. This precocious French companion of his childhood was followed by other selves, themselves destined to divide and sub-divide into a veritable legion of such projected figures of the imagination. Pessoa’s suggestive name offered him a creative opportunity that he seems to have taken as a challenge. At last look – I say “last look” because new ones keep turning up – the count stood at seventy-two such *dramatis personae* in this, as Pessoa called it, “intimate theatre of the self.”⁴ True, some were names and little more, but several of them were full-blown or nearly so.

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa was born in Lisbon in 1888. The day was June 13th, the birth day, as it happened, of António, the city’s patron saint – hence the future poet’s given middle name. Pessoa received his formal education in South Africa, and because at the time the area was controlled by the British, his education was thoroughly English. At seven he arrived in Durban, the capital of the British colony of Natal, in the company of his mother, recently remarried. His stepfather was the new Consul in Durban. Pessoa remained in Natal – except for a rare visit to Portugal – until, at seventeen, he returned to Lisbon, expecting to continue his studies at the university. He matriculated but over time a student strike interrupted classes. The strike was soon enough over, but Pessoa chose not to return to the university. Instead, he eventually took up what became a life-long job – with the exception of brief stints at running a printing house (1909) and at publishing – handling the foreign-language correspondence of business firms in Lisbon’s commercial district.

Because Pessoa had spent his formative years in a city that was culturally British and linguistically English, it is hardly surprising that he composed his first poems in English. Only after returning to Lisbon, and then not immediately, did he

⁴ Since the presentation of this lecture, Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari counted 136 fictitious authors created by Pessoa (PESSOA, 2013).

turn to composing principally in his native tongue. Yet it was in Portuguese that Pessoa wrote the bulk of his poetry, whether under his own name (as author of his so-called orthonymic poems) or the names of his heteronyms, the major ones being Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos. In 1935, in his last year, a question posed to him by the young poet-critic, Adolfo Casais Monteiro, gave Pessoa an opportunity to spin out his own genesis story, that is, the foundational story of the “birth” of his great heteronyms. “It is rare for a country and a language to acquire four major poets on one day,” Steiner (belatedly and misleadingly) observed in his *New Yorker* piece. “[Yet] this is precisely what occurred in Lisbon on the eighth of March, 1914” (1996: 76).

Though it has become a staple of scholarship, Pessoa’s richly detailed account of that day of “miraculous” creation laid out to answer a query put to him by one of the journal *Presença*’s young co-editors, is well worth reproducing at some length (in MONTEIRO, 1985: 232-233).⁵

[...] on March 8, 1914 – I found myself standing before a tall chest of drawers, took up a piece of paper, began to write, remaining upright all the while since I always stand when I can. I wrote thirty some poems in a row, all in a kind of ecstasy, the nature of which I shall never fathom. It was the triumphant day of my life, and I shall never have another like it. I began with a title, *The Keeper of Sheep*. And what followed was the appearance of someone within me to whom I promptly assigned the name of Alberto Caeiro. Please excuse the absurdity of what I am about to say, but there had appeared within me, then and there, my own master. It was my immediate sensation. So much so that, with those thirty odd poems written, I immediately took up another sheet of paper and wrote as well, in a row, the six poems that make up “Oblique Rain” by Fernando Pessoa. Immediately and totally... It was the return from Fernando Pessoa/Alberto Caeiro to Fernando Pessoa alone. Or better still, it was Fernando Pessoa’s reaction to his own inexistence as Alberto Caeiro.

With Alberto Caeiro’s appearance, I set out right away – instinctively and subconsciously – to discover some disciples for him. I separated out the latent Ricardo Reis from his false paganism, discerned his name, and made adjustments – for at that time I could already *see him*. And suddenly, deriving in a way opposite to that of Ricardo Reis, there came impetuously to my mind a new individual. In a flash and at the typewriter, without interruption or emendation, there emerged the “Triumphal Ode” by Álvaro de Campos – the ode known by that title and the man who now carries the name.⁶

⁵ The following translation from the Portuguese is mine, as are the others throughout the paper, unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Cf. “[...] em 8 de Março de 1914 – acerquei-me de uma commoda alta, e, tomando um papel, comecei a escrever, de pé, como escrevo sempre que posso. E escrevi trinta e tantos poemas a fio, numa especie de extase cuja natureza não conseguirei definir. Foi o dia triumphal da minha vida, e nunca poderei ter outro assim. Abri com um titulo, ‘O Guardador de Rebanhos’. E o que se seguiu foi o apparecimento de alguém em mim, a quem dei desde logo o nome de Alberto Caeiro. Desculpe-me o absurdo da phrase: apparecera em mim o meu mestre. Foi essa a sensação immediata que tive. E tanto assim que, escriptos que foram esses trinta e tantos poemas, immediatamente peguei noutra papel e escrevi, a fio tambem, os seis poemas que constituem a ‘Chuva Obliqua’, de Fernando Pessoa. Immediatamente e totalmente... Foi o regresso de Fernando Pessoa Alberto Caeiro a Fernando Pessoa elle só. Ou, melhor, foi a reacção de Fernando Pessoa

Then Pessoa sums up, crossing t's and dotting i's.

I created, therefore, an inexistent coterie. I fixed everything into plausible patterns. I gauged influences, discovered friendships, and heard, within myself, discussions and disagreements over criteria. In all this, the creator of everything and everyone, I think, mattered the least. It seemed as if all of it had taken place independently of me. And this still seems to be the way things go. If someday I am able to publish the esthetics discussion between Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos, you will see just how different they are and that I am nothing in the matter.⁷

The upshot, unbelievable as the account must have seemed to Casais Monteiro in 1935, was that on a single day in 1914 – at one fell swoop – Pessoa claims to have discovered not only his own voice but the voices of three major heteronyms as well: Caeiro, the oldest of the three and the master, who is a zen-like ascetic of a direct, anti-poetic vision; Reis, a social and political conservative who is a stoic with an obsessive desire for stasis and immutability; and Campos, a bombastic, nihilistic, romantic dandy with bisexual proclivities. Each one of these major heteronyms – and there were others (many others, it will be recalled) – achieved his own body of poetry. And in the cases of Reis and Campos, both of whom considered himself a disciple of Caeiro, the third heteronym, there were also essays and prefaces for anthologies and collections of poetry planned by Pessoa. Campos even wrote letters – to the newspapers – and, on occasion, to Pessoa's own real-life love interest, Ofélia Queiroz. On rare occasions, it was suspected that it was not always the citizen known as Fernando Pessoa who walked along the streets of lower Lisbon but the redoubtable Álvaro de Campos.

It will be useful to recall that as early as 1928, in an article in the journal *Presença* whose editors had proclaimed him to be the “Master” of living Portuguese poets, Pessoa defined what he meant by “heteronyms”: “A pseudonymic work is, except for the name with which it is signed, the work of an author writing as himself; a heteronymic work is by an author writing outside his

contra a sua inexistencia como Alberto Caeiro. | Aparecido Alberto Caeiro, tratei logo de lhe descobrir – instinctiva e subconscientemente – uns discipulos. Arranquei do seu falso paganismo o Ricardo Reis latente, descobri-lhe o nome, e ajustei-o a si mesmo, porque nessa altura já *o via*. E, de repente, e em derivação oposta à de Ricardo Reis, surgiu-me impetuosamente um novo individuo. Num jacto, e à machina de escrever, sem interrupção nem emenda, surgiu a *Ode Triunfal* de Alvaro de Campos – a Ode com esse nome e o homem com o nome que tem” (Pessoa, 2013: 646-647) .

⁷ Cf. “Creei, então, uma coterie inexistente. Fixei aquillo tudo em moldes de realidade. Graduei as influencias, conheci as amidades, ouvi, dentro de mim, as discussões e as divergencias de criterios, e em tudo isto me parece que foi eu, creador de tudo, o menos que alli houve. Parece que tudo se passou independentemente de mim. E parece que assim ainda se passa. Se algum dia eu puder publicar a discussão esthetica entre Ricardo Reis e Alvaro de Campos, verá como elles são diferentes, e como eu não sou nada na materia” (Pessoa, 2013: 647).

own personality: it is the work of a complete individuality made up by him, just as the utterances of some character in a drama would be" (in *Presença*, n.º 17, 1928: 10). Some further clarification of the relationship of his heteronyms to the poet who "created" them is available in the (truncated) piece Pessoa set down for his never published (or even compiled) collected works: "I divide what I have written into orthonymic and heteronymic work. I do not divide it into autonymic and pseudonymic work because those that I publish under fictitious names do not represent either my opinions or my emotions" (in LISBOA & TAYLOR, 1995: 133-134; in LOPES, 1990: II, 379).

Divido o que tenho escripto em obras orthonymas e heteronymas. Não divido em autonymas e pseudonymas, porque aquellas que publico sob nomes ficticios não representam opiniões ou emoções minhas, senão □⁸

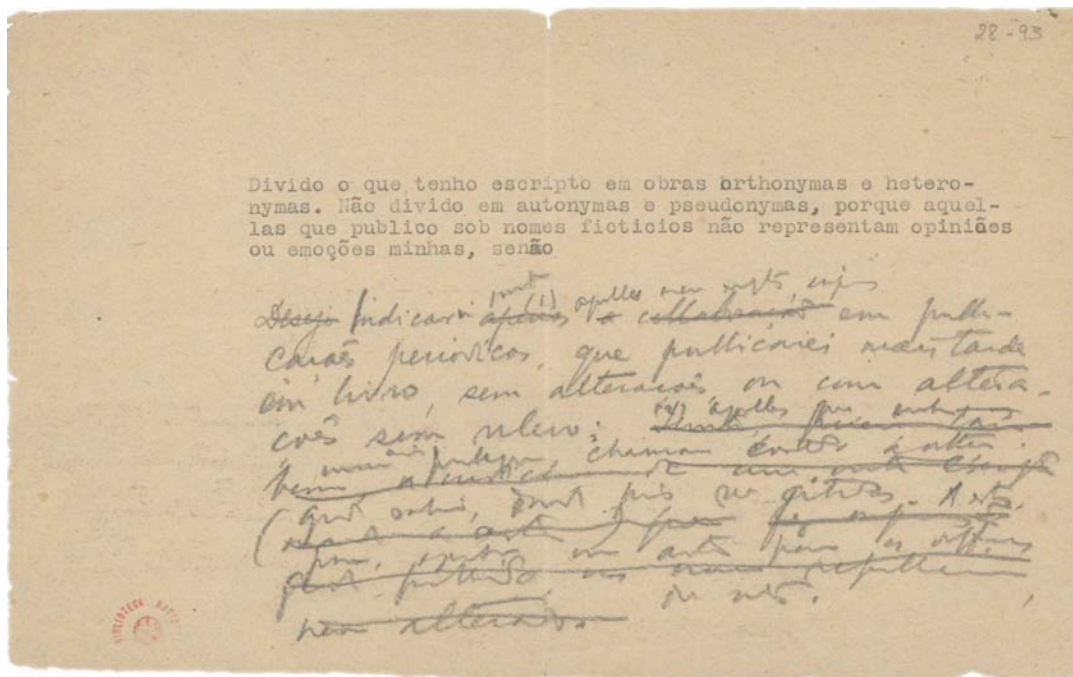


Fig. 1. BNP/E3, 28-93^r

⁸ This is the transcription of the typed part of the document. The handwritten part is hardly legible; a proposed transcription follows:

<Desejo> <i>I\ndicar[↑ei] <apenas a collaboração> [↑ somente (1) aquelles meus escriptos impressos] em publicações periodicas, que publicarei mais tarde em livro, sem alterações ou com alterações sem relevo; <Junto, porem, tambem, a indicação de um outro escripto (*ainda *a *existir) que fez impressão quando publicado, mas nunca republicarei, nem alterado.> [↑ (2) aquelles que, embora os nunca assim publique, chamaram contudo á attenção quando sahiram, devendo pois ser citados. A estes, porem, *ajuntarei *um *autor para os differençar dos outros.

Fernando Pessoa considered his “true” life to be the interior life of the poet and thinker. What happened to him in the streets of Lisbon, in the cafes, in the offices of the firms he served as clerk of correspondence, as journal polemicist – political and artistic – or as the courtier of the young typist Ofélia (aptly so named, given Pessoa’s Hamlet complex) – all this pales before the reality of his interior life, lived in a far and distant land, the news from which are his essays, stories and, above all, poems. In fact, so richly complex was that life that no single one of his many identities – and certainly not the one he called Fernando Pessoa himself (*éle-mesmo*) – could, as John Keats put it, glean his teeming brain.

It took the whole complement of his heteronyms, especially Caeiro, Reis and Campos, to enact that drama-within-persons (*drama em gente*) that he called his life’s work. That work and the surprises it always brought him remained to the last his preoccupation and his sustenance. Even his final words in English, set down as he lay dying in hospital on November 30, 1935, betray a related concern. Those words – “I know not what tomorrow will bring” (*apud* LANCASTRE, 1981: 307) – echo, I suspect, Scripture (“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”; Proverbs 27: 1). What that “tomorrow” did not bring him was oblivion or, as he was wont to put it, inexistence, for the long future brought forth the steady gathering and publication of his opera, both those writings scattered in journals and newspapers and those left behind at his death in the famous chest in which he secured his literary legacy. It might be said that posterity has in Pessoa’s case followed scripture, as, perhaps, he knew it would: “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (Proverbs 27: 2).

That the whole of Fernando Pessoa’s formal education was typical of the schooling accorded the late-nineteenth century British colonial needs to be weighed-in in any determination of just how his knowledge of English literature and literary culture shaped specific poems and affected his work overall. It is this internalized Englishness that is the focus of lines by the English poet, John Wain, in his 1979 suite of poems entitled “Thinking About Mr Person”:

Mr Person did not need to look for England:
 he carried a little of her inside himself.
 He wrote some poems in English.
 He often had English thoughts.
 He once saw Queen *Victoria*, for God’s sake!
 It happened in South Africa,
 when he was at school in Durban.
 What a strange life, a mad history!

(WAIN, 1980: 29)

Those “nuggets of England in his Portuguese mind” (WAIN, 1980: 31) made Pessoa something of an Anglo-Portuguese poet. If the South African writer Roy Campbell,

who was born in Durban and who, like Pessoa, attended Durban schools, cannot claim Pessoa entirely for South Africa, he does claim some of his poetry for South African literature. Campos's "Maritime Ode," he argues, may well begin in Lisbon "but Durban 'of the towering ships | With wine and chanteys on her lips' is the 'dock of which all docks' are fragments, the quay to which nations use their ships in this great 'Maritime Ode'." His evidence is that Pessoa "describes the coal-dust on the quay after the coaling of the ships; and that coal dust glitters. That is the dust on the quays in Durban, not Lisbon, where there is no iron pyrites in the coal." And of "O Mostrengo," the poem at the heart of Pessoa's *Mensagem*, he writes: "[It is] the greatest sea-lyric ever written [...] where a helms man is interrogated by the nightmare sentry of the rocky capes, 'Who goes there?' The helms man trembles but replies, 'It's King Don John the Second.' The whole decor of this poem is the Cape of Storms and its mountainous seas. So it is, by inspiration, that is to say it is in the most profound sense, South African Literature" (CAMPBELL, ms.).⁹

Having written scores of poems in English, it is not surprising that Pessoa at times certainly thought of himself as an English poet. Until the publication in 1934 of the Portuguese-language sequence he called *Mensagem*, he had published in book form only the four English-language chapbooks: *35 Sonnets* (1918), *Antinous* (1918), *English Poems I-II* and *III* (1921). As early as 1917, however, he had tried to interest the London publisher Constable in a collection of his English-language poems he was calling *The Mad Fiddler*. Without denying that his major poetry is indisputably Portuguese, it can be acknowledged that Pessoa never abandoned that part of himself that wrote in English. It was the desire to make his mark as an English poet that led him to send out his Lisbon-published chapbooks to potential reviewers in England and Scotland, as well as to British libraries, and to publish in January 1920 a small poem entitled "Meantime" in the *Athenaeum*. Surely the fact that the *Athenaeum*, edited by John Middleton Murry, was publishing the fine writing of the likes of E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, George Santayana, Conrad Aiken, Aldous Huxley, Katherine Mansfield, T. S. Eliot, and Aubrey Bell, stood tall in London (along with the *Times*) among the handful of periodicals that noticed Pessoa's two 1918 chapbooks encouraged him to submit his poem for editorial consideration.¹⁰ Pessoa would not again appear in the *Athenaeum*, which ceased publication in 1921, but it is obvious that at the time it was the one of the London journals for which the ambitious English poet Pessoa might set his cap. His English-language epitaphs ("Inscriptions") is a case in point. There is only circumstantial evidence to go on, but it seems likely that in choosing to write his "inscriptions" in English, Pessoa was hoping to place them in England. The

⁹ Manuscript quoted with the permission of Francisco Campbell Custodio and Ad. Donker (Pty) Ltd. and the consent of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.

¹⁰ See "List of New Books... Poetry," *The Athenaeum*, n.º 4637 (Jan. 1919), p. 36.

fourteen epitaphs, which Pessoa dates “Lisbon, 1920,” are in the elegiac vein of the Greek Anthology (see SOTTOMAYOR, 1979).¹¹ Preceding their composition in all probability, the *Athenaeum* had published, over several issues in 1919-1920, some thirteen translations from the Greek Anthology.¹² It’s plausible that Pessoa intended to offer his fourteen “Inscriptions” to the *Athenaeum*, but with the demise of the journal as Pessoa knew it, the Portuguese poet lost what he must have considered to be his best bet for the publication of his English-language work. Possibly it was his disappointment at this lost opportunity that led him to include “Inscriptions” in *English Poems: I-II* in 1921, which may have constituted one of Pessoa’s last attempts to get a hearing for his work in England. Unlike his first chapbooks, this one was not reviewed (see HOWES, 1983: 164). Pessoa gave up on his dream to be widely published in England, or so it seems. In this light, it appears that the publication of “Spell,” an English-language poem, in the May 1923 issue of the Lisbon periodical *Contemporanea* can be seen as a gesture of farewell to the English audience he never reached. “Spell” was the last of his English-language poems to achieve print in his lifetime.

The *Athenaeum*’s publication of translations from the Greek Anthology preceded Pessoa’s own translations into Portuguese from W. R. Paton’s *Greek Anthology*, published in five volumes (1916-1918)¹³ Pessoa’s translations appeared in 1924 in *Athena* (which he co-edited). Jorge de Sena (1974: 230) suggests that Pessoa modeled *Athena* on the *Athenaeum*. Sena also thought that Pessoa’s interest in the elegiac poems of the Greek Anthology, which led him to write his own set of “Inscriptions,” flowered unexpectedly into *Mensagem*, the volume that took his followers by surprise in 1934. “In many of the poems that are ‘epigrams’ in his *Mensagem* (not all of them are),” writes Sena, “[Pessoa] employed the tone and the spirit of the ‘epitaph’ praising the hero; see, for example, the epitaph of Bartolomeu Dias” (1974: II, 147). It is intriguing to think of *Mensagem* as a species of “Portuguese Anthology” – to put up there with Portugal’s national anthem – a notion that might deserve some notice. Also worth considering is Sena’s proposition that had the British reader given the author of *35 Sonnets* a fair hearing, Pessoa might have been the one to herald in the Modernist rediscovery of English metaphysical poetry. In a way, it can be said that modern interest in primarily sixteenth-century English poetry was anticipated by Pessoa, working alone to recreate the English

¹¹ Yara Frateschi Vieira (1988), on the other hand, reads the inscriptions in the context of English-language literature, particularly Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology*, published in 1915.

¹² The first ten epitaphs in the *Athenaeum* are credited to P. H. C. Allen (Aug. 1, 1919, 680; Aug. 8, 1919, 713; Aug. 22, 1919, 776; Oct. 3, 1919, 970; and Oct. 17, 1919, 1028), and the last three (Feb. 27, 1920, 272) to R. A. Furness.

¹³ Pessoa’s copy of W. R. Paton’s *The Greek Anthology*, including his markings and preliminary translations, is described in Maria da Encarnação Monteiro, *Incidências Inglesas na Poesia de Fernando Pessoa* (1956: 95, 108-110).

“metaphysical” sonnet, well before the appearance in 1921 of H. J. C. Grierson’s landmark anthology *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, a book widely promoted with great success by the Anglo-American poet-critic, T. S. Eliot. Worth considering, too, is Sena’s proposal that Pessoa was denied this primacy because he was a foreigner living in a foreign land. A young poet without London connections might have expected such cold neglect, argues Sena, but the British cold shoulder contributed undoubtedly to Pessoa’s becoming, from that time on, more Portuguese than English, even though his thinking remained always more English than Portuguese (SENA, 1992: 86-87).

Yet the fact that Pessoa sometimes wanted to be an English poet can be misleading to the reader who wishes to understand his work in its entirety. His Englishness and the way he employed his genuine bi-culturalism can be a stumbling block even to his most perspicacious readers. But the matter should be faced. Jorge de Sena, surely one of Pessoa’s most knowledgeable critics, reached an ingenious conclusion over the period of a quarter of a century. Two short excerpts from Sena will serve to make his point. The first is dated 1953.

The problem of Pessoa’s relationship with “English” and indirectly with British culture (in the broadest accepted sense of the term, which should include its institutions and political customs) is of the highest importance. Let no error in perspective, therefore, modify its true sense, which is that of helping to explain the way in which his intellectual and artistic formation complied with his being a great Portuguese poet.

(1982: I, 92)

The second of these excerpts from Sena dates from 1977, nearly a quarter of a century after the first one.

For Pessoa, English is – within himself – a defensive distancing that he preserves in relation to a Portuguese world to which he senses himself infinitely superior (and so he was), but which exists only for “internal” consumption – in the two senses of a private world and of an expressive freedom in a language that is not that of the tribe to which, whether he wanted to or not, he ended up by belonging, and belonging to it with all that true-falsity (because action is complex in that way) of the converse.... Conversely in a country in which he functions as a stranger in the midst of everyone else, that rare thing: a fictitious Englishman, with no reality, creating in Portuguese a series of equally fictitious poets, with the total reality of great poetry.

(1982: II, 168-169)

To the puzzle posed by Pessoa’s Englishness, Sena offers a solution based on a fruitful contradiction. Pessoa both was and was not English. Having received a standard English Victorian education and acquiring something of an English temperament might not necessarily turn Pessoa into an Englishman, but the gradual realization of how he could use his “Englishness” to forge anew Portuguese poetry turned him willfully into a “fictitious Englishman.” In fact, he

so successfully brought off his tricky cultural identities that in the process he became a great Portuguese poet, or so ventures one critic, who writes: "He even 'reinvented' the Portuguese language, because he knew English" (LISBOA & TAYLOR, 1995: XIV).

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