



FERNANDO PESSOA

(Portugal, 1888-1935)

[Saturday 1 July 2006]

It is sometimes said that the four greatest Portuguese poets of modern times are Fernando Pessoa. The statement is possible since Pessoa, whose name means ‘person’ in Portuguese, had three alter egos who wrote in styles completely different from his own. In fact Pessoa wrote under dozens of names, but Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos were – their creator claimed – full-fledged individuals who wrote things that he himself would never or could never write. He dubbed them ‘heteronyms’ rather than pseudonyms, since they were not false names but “other names”, belonging to distinct literary personalities. Not only were their styles different; they thought differently, they had different religious and political views, different aesthetic sensibilities, different social temperaments. And each produced a large body of poetry. Álvaro de Campos and Ricardo Reis also signed dozens of pages of prose.

Fernando Pessoa and his retinue of writerly alter egos was a hard act to follow. During the rest of the twentieth century, Portuguese poets almost inevitably found themselves being influenced by him – either positively, by knowingly or unknowingly incorporating aspects of his multifaceted work into their own poetry; or negatively, by going out of their way *not* to be influenced by him and his heteronyms. Anxiety of influence ran high, and there was also the anxiety of comparison. Some claimed that Pessoa stole the whole show, leaving little room for other Portuguese poets to be known and appreciated.

Pessoa published relatively little, and almost nothing in book form, so that his work only began to become well known in the 1940s, when the first large-scale edition of his works was issued. At that point Pessoa became a massive poetic presence in Portugal and in Brazil. It was not until the 1980s, however, with the publication of the *Livro de Desassossego* (The Book of Disquiet) – his most stunning prose work – that the poet of many masks began to be widely translated and appreciated in the rest of the world. Did foreign publishers, caught up in Pessoa mania, neglect other Portuguese poets, leaving them to languish in the shade? Not at all. In fact Pessoa’s work was a kind of open-sesame, insofar as it alerted the rest of the world to the

rich literature being produced in a small country situated on southwestern Europe's fringe.

Pessoa began a publishing wave, and soon other Portuguese writers saw their works being translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian and other languages. It's true that Portuguese poets have a harder time than novelists getting their works translated and published, but that's not Pessoa's fault, it's just how it is, whatever the language. Even Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*, which is in fact a heap – a fascinating heap – of prose fragments that the author never organized into a book (it took decades of posthumous scholarly labor to produce the first edition), far outsells his poetry.

Where poetry is concerned, Pessoa still grabs the lion's share of the attention, which is why the Portuguese section of Poetry International has thus far focused on other poets, but people have been asking for him and his heteronyms, so here at last is a necessarily small selection from his and their vast output. Many other translations are available on line. At one site [<http://www.disquiet.com/pessoa.html>], in fact, you can find thirteen different translations into English of Pessoa's signature poem, 'Autopsychography' (and on this site you'll find a fourteenth translation, my own).

Pessoa's handwriting can be notoriously difficult to decipher, which is why much of his work (at this point mostly prose) is still unpublished. To see facsimile images of some original manuscripts, visit the [site dedicated to his archives](#), where all the manuscripts for the poems of heteronym, Alberto Caeiro, can be found (more of the archives will be digitalized as time goes on). Speaking of heteronyms, please note that we have included a separate page telling more about them and the horoscope charts Pessoa devised for his three most important heteronyms. For a biographical sketch of Fernando Pessoa himself, see the link below. Last but not least, check out the video clip from Wordsong, a Portuguese band who have just released a CD/DVD featuring songs based on excerpts from Pessoa's poetry and accompanied by excellent video images. You can find another video clip on their webpage.

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POEMS

ABDICATION

AH, THE FRESHNESS IN THE FACE OF LEAVING A TASK UNDONE!

AUTOPSYCHOGRAPHY

COUNTLESS LIVES INHABIT US.

DON'T TRY TO BUILD IN THE SPACE YOU SUPPOSE

I DON'T KNOW IF THE STARS RULE THE WORLD

I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY SOULS I HAVE.

I HAVE IN ME LIKE A HAZE

MAGNIFICAT

NOTE

OXFORDSHIRE

SINCE WE DO NOTHING IN THIS CONFUSED WORLD

SYMBOLS? I'M SICK OF SYMBOLS...

THE GODS GRANT NOTHING MORE THAN LIFE,

THE KEEPER OF SHEEP II
THE KEEPER OF SHEEP VI
THE KEEPER OF SHEEP XLVII
THE KEEPER OF SHEEP XXXIX
THE WASHWOMAN BEATS THE LAUNDRY
THERE'S NO ONE WHO LOVES ME.
TODAY SOMEONE READ ME ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.
TO SEE THE FIELDS AND THE RIVER

Abdication

O night eternal, call me your son
And take me into your arms. I'm a king
Who relinquished, willingly,
My throne of dreams and tedium.

My sword, which dragged my weak arms down,
I surrendered to strong and steady hands,
And in the anteroom I abandoned
My shattered scepter and crown.

My spurs that jingled to no avail
And my useless coat of mail
I left on the cold stone steps.

I took off royalty, body and soul,
And returned to the night so calm, so old,
Like the landscape when the sun sets.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

Abdicação

Toma-me, ó noite eterna, nos teus braços
E chama-me teu filho. Eu sou um Rei
Que voluntariamente abandonei
O meu trono de sonhos e cansaços.

Minha espada, pesada a braços lassos,
Em mãos viris e calmas entreguei,
E meu ceptro e coroa — eu os deixei
Na antecâmara, feitos em pedaços.

Minha cota de malha, tão inútil,
Minhas esporas, de um tinir tão fútil,
Deixei-as pela fria escadaria.

Despi a realeza, corpo e alma,
E regresssei à Noite antiga e calma
Como a paisagem ao morrer do dia.

© 1913, Fernando Pessoa (himself)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Ah, the freshness in the face of leaving a task undone!

Ah, the freshness in the face of leaving a task undone!
To be remiss is to be positively out in the country!
What a refuge it is to be completely unreliable!
I can breathe easier now that the appointments are behind me.
I missed them all, through deliberate negligence,
Having waited for the urge to go, which I knew wouldn't come.
I'm free, and against organized, clothed society.
I'm naked and plunge into the water of my imagination.
It's too late to be at either of the two meetings where I should have been at the same time, Deliberately at the same time...
No matter, I'll stay here dreaming verses and smiling in italics.
This spectator aspect of life is so amusing!
I can't even light the next cigarette... If it's an action,
It can wait for me, along with the others, in the non-meeting called life.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

Autopsychography

The poet is a faker
Who's so good at his act
He even fakes the pain
Of pain he feels in fact.

And those who read his words
Will feel in his writing
Neither of the pains he has
But just the one they're missing.

Ah a frescura na face de não cumprir um dever!
Faltar é positivamente estar no campo!
Que refúgio o não se poder ter confiança em nós!
Respiro melhor agora que passaram as horas dos encontros.
Faltei a todos, com uma deliberação do desleixo,
Fiquei esperando a vontade de ir para lá, que eu saberia que não vinha.
Sou livre, contra a sociedade organizada e vestida.
Estou nu, e mergulho na água da minha imaginação.
É tarde para eu estar em qualquer dos dois pontos onde estaria à mesma hora,
Deliberadamente à mesma hora...
Está bem, ficarei aqui sonhando versos e sorrindo em itálico.
É tão engraçada esta parte assistente da vida!
Até não consigo acender o cigarro seguinte...
Se é um gesto,
Fique com os outros, que me esperam, no desencontro que é a vida.

© 1929, Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Autopsicografia

O poeta é um fingidor.
Finge tão completamente
Que chega a fingir que é dor
A dor que deveras sente.

E os que lêem o que escreve,
Na dor lida sentem bem,
Não as duas que ele teve,
Mas só a que eles não têm.

And so around its track
This thing called the heart winds,
A little clockwork train
To entertain our minds.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

E assim nas calhas da roda
Gira, a entreter a razão,
Esse comboio de corda
Que se chama o coração.

© 1931, Fernando Pessoa (himself)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Countless lives inhabit us.

Countless lives inhabit us.
I don't know, when I think or feel,
Who it is that thinks or feels.
I am merely the place
Where things are thought or felt.

I have more than just one soul.
There are more I's than I myself.
I exist, nevertheless,
Indifferent to them all.
I silence them: I speak.

The crossing urges of what
I feel or do not feel
Struggle in who I am, but I
Ignore them. They dictate nothing
To the I I know: I write.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

Vivem em nós inúmeros;
Se penso ou sinto, ignoro
Quem é que pensa ou sente.
Sou somente o lugar
Onde se sente ou pensa.

Tenho mais almas que uma.
Há mais eus do que eu mesmo.
Existo todavia
Indiferente a todos.
Faço-os calar: eu falo.

Os impulsos cruzados
Do que sinto ou não sinto
Disputam em quem sou.
Ignoro-os. Nada ditam
A quem me sei: eu escrevo.

© 1935, Ricardo Reis (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Don't try to build in the space you suppose

Don't try to build in the space you suppose
Is future, Lydia, and don't promise yourself
Tomorrow. Quit hoping and be who you are
Today. You alone are your life.
Don't plot your destiny, for you are not future.
Between the cup you empty and the same cup
Refilled, who knows whether your fortune
Won't interpose the abyss?

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

I don't know if the stars rule the world

I don't know if the stars rule the world
Or if Tarot or playing cards
Can reveal anything.
I don't know if the rolling of dice
Can lead to any conclusion.
But I also don't know
If anything is attained
By living the way most people do.

Yes, I don't know
If I should believe in this daily rising sun
Whose authenticity no one can guarantee me,
Or if it would be better (because better or more
convenient)
To believe in some other sun,
One that shines even at night,
Some profound incandescence of things,
Surpassing my understanding.

For now...
(Let's take it slow)

Não queiras, Lídia, edificar no 'spaço
Que figuras futuro, ou prometer-te
Amanhã. Cumpre-te hoje, não 'sperando.
Tu mesma és tua vida.
Não te destines, que não és futura.
Quem sabe se, entre a taça que esvazias,
E ela de novo enchida, não te a sorte
Interpõe o abismo?

© 1923, Ricardo Reis (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Não sei se os astros mandam neste mundo,
Nem se as cartas –
As de jogar ou as do Tarot –
Podem revelar qualquer coisa.

Não sei se deitando dados
Se chega a qualquer conclusão.
Mas também não sei
Se vivendo como o comum dos homens
Se atinge qualquer coisa.

Sim, não sei
Se hei-de acreditar neste sol de todos os dias,
Cuja autenticidade ninguém me garante,
Ou se não será melhor, por melhor ou por mais
cómodo,
Acreditar em qualquer outro sol –
Outro que ilumine até de noite, –
Qualquer profundidade luminosa das coisas
De que não percebo nada...

Por enquanto...

For now
I have an absolutely secure grip on the stair-rail,
I secure it with my hand –
This rail that doesn't belong to me
And that I lean on as I ascend...
Yes... I ascend...
I ascend to this:
I don't know if the stars rule the world.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

I don't know how many souls I have.

I don't know how many souls I have.
I've changed at every moment.
I always feel like a stranger.
I've never seen or found myself.
From being so much, I have only soul.
A man who has soul has no calm.
A man who sees is just what he sees.
A man who feels is not who he is.

Attentive to what I am and see,
I become them and stop being I.
Each of my dreams and each desire
Belongs to whoever had it, not me.
I am my own landscape,
I watch myself journey -
Various, mobile, and alone.
Here where I am I can't feel myself.

That's why I read, as a stranger,
My being as if it were pages.
Not knowing what will come
And forgetting what has passed,
I note in the margin of my reading
What I thought I felt.
Rereading, I wonder: "Was that me?"
God knows, because he wrote it.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

(Vamos devagar)
Por enquanto
Tenho o corrimão da escada absolutamente
seguro,
Seguro com a mão –
O corrimão que me não pertence
E apoiado ao qual ascendo...
Sim... Ascendo...
Ascendo até isto:
Não sei se os astros mandam neste mundo...

© 1935, Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Não sei quantas almas tenho.
Cada momento mudei.
Continuamente me estranho.
Nunca me vi nem achei.
De tanto ser, só tenho alma.
Quem tem alma não tem calma.
Quem vê é só o que vê.
Quem sente não é quem é.

Atento ao que sou e vejo,
Torno-me eles e não eu.
Cada meu sonho ou desejo,
É do que nasce, e não meu.
Sou minha própria paisagem,
Assisto à minha passagem,
Diverso, móbil e só.
Não sei sentir-me onde estou.

Por isso, alheio, vou lendo
Como páginas, meu ser.
O que segue não prevendo,
O que passou a esquecer.
Noto à margem do que li
O que julguei que senti.
Releio e digo, «Fui eu?»
Deus sabe, porque o escreveu.

© 1930, Fernando Pessoa (himself)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

I have in me like a haze

I have in me like a haze
Which holds and which is nothing
A nostalgia for nothing at all,
The desire for something vague.

I'm wrapped by it
As by a fog, and I see
The final star shining
Above the stub in my ashtray.

I smoked my life. How uncertain
All I saw or read! All
The world is a great open book
That smiles at me in an unknown tongue.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

Tenho em mim como uma bruma
Que nada é nem contém
A saudade de coisa nenhuma,
O desejo de qualquer bem.

Sou envolvido por ela
Como por um nevoeiro
E vejo luzir a última estrela
Por cima da ponta do meu cinzeiro

Fumei a vida. Que incerto
Tudo quanto vi ou li!
E todo o mundo é um grande livro aberto
Que em ignorada língua me sorri.

© 1934, Fernando Pessoa (himself)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Magnificat

When will this inner night – the universe – end
And I – my soul – have my day?
When will I wake up from being awake?
I don't know. The sun shines on high
And cannot be looked at.
The stars coldly blink
And cannot be counted.
The heart beats aloofly
And cannot be heard.
When will this drama without theater
– Or this theater without drama – end
So that I can go home?
Where? How? When?
O cat staring at me with eyes of life, Who lurks
in your depths?
It's Him! It's him!

Magnificat

Quando é que passará esta noite interna, o
universo,
E eu, a minha alma, terei o meu dia?
Quando é que despertarei de estar acordado?
Não sei. O sol brilha alto,
Impossível de fitar.
As estrelas pestanejam frio,
Impossíveis de contar.
O coração pulsa alheio,
Impossível de escutar.
Quando é que passará este drama sem teatro,
Ou este teatro sem drama,
E recolherei a casa?
Onde? Como? Quando?
Gato que me fitas com olhos de vida, Quem
tens lá no fundo?

Like Joshua he'll order the sun to stop, and I'll
wake up,
And it will be day.
Smile, my soul, in your slumber!
Smile, my soul: it will be day!

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

É Esse! É esse!
Esse mandará como Josué parar o sol e eu
acordarei;
E então será dia.
Sorri, dormindo, minha alma!
Sorri, minha alma: será dia!

© 1933, Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Note

My soul shattered like an empty vase.
It fell irretrievably down the stairs.
If fell from the hands of the careless maid.
It fell, breaking into more pieces than there was
china in the vase.

Nonsense? Impossible? I'm not so sure!
I have more sensations than when I felt like
myself.
I'm a scattering of shards on a doormat that
needs shaking.

My fall made a noise like a shattering vase.
All the gods there are lean over the stair rail
And look at the shards their maid changed me
into.

They don't get mad at her.
They're forgiving.
What was I but an empty vase?

They look at the absurdly conscious shards –
Conscious of themselves, not of the gods.

They look and smile.
They smile forgivingly at the unwitting maid.

The great staircase stretches out, carpeted with
stars.
A shard gleams, shiny side up, among the

Apontamento

A minha alma partiu-se como um vaso vazio.
Caiu pela escada excessivamente abaixo.
Caiu das mãos da criada descuidada.
Caiu, fez-se em mais pedaços do que havia
loija no vaso.

Asneira? Impossível? Sei lá!
Tenho mais sensações do que tinha quando me
sentia eu.
Sou um espalhamento de cacos sobre um
capacho por sacudir.

Fiz barulho na queda como um vaso que se
partia.
Os deuses que há debruçam-se do parapeito da
escada.
E fitam os cacos que a criada deles fez de mim.

Não se zangam com ela.
São tolerantes com ela.
O que eu era um vaso vazio?

Olham os cacos absurdamente conscientes,
Mas conscientes de si-mesmos, não conscientes
deles.

Olham e sorriem.
Sorriem tolerantes à criada involuntária.

Alastra a grande escadaria atapetada de estrelas.

heavenly bodies.
My work? My primary soul? My life?
A shard.
And the gods stare at it, intrigued, not knowing
why it's there.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

Oxfordshire

I want the good, I want the bad, and in the end I
want nothing.
I toss in bed, uncomfortable on my right side,
on my left side,
And on my consciousness of existing.
I'm universally uncomfortable, metaphysically
uncomfortable,
But what's even worse is my headache.
That's more serious than the meaning of the
universe.

Once, while walking in the country around
Oxford,
I saw up ahead, beyond a bend in the road,
A church steeple towering above the houses of a
hamlet or village.
The photographic image of that non-event has
remained with me
Like a horizontal wrinkle marring a trouser's
crease.
Today it seems relevant...
From the road I associated that steeple with
spirituality,
The faith of all ages, and practical charity.
When I arrived at the village, the steeple was a
steeple
And, what's more, there it was.

You can be happy in Australia, as long as you
don't go there.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*

Um caco brilha, virado do exterior lustroso,
entre os astros.
A minha obra? A minha alma principal? A
minha vida?
Um caco.
E os deuses olham-no especialmente, pois não
sabem por que ficou ali.

© 1929, Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Oxfordshire

Quero o bem, e quero o mal, e afinal não quero
nada.
Estou mal deitado sobre a direita, e mal deitado
sobre a esquerda
E mal deitado sobre a consciência de existir.
Estou universalmente mal, metafisicamente
mal,
Mas o pior é que me dói a cabeça.
Isso é mais grave que a significação do
universo.

Uma vez, ao pé de Oxford, num passeio
campestre,
Vi erguer-se, de uma curva da estrada, na
distância próxima
A torre-velha de uma igreja acima de casas da
aldeia ou vila.
Ficou-me fotográfico esse incidente nulo
Como uma dobra transversal escangalhando o
vinco das calças.
Agora vem a propósito...
Da estrada eu previa espiritualidade a essa torre
de igreja
Que era a fé de todas as eras, e a eficaz
caridade.
Da vila, quando lá cheguei, a torre da igreja era
a torre da igreja,
E, ainda por cima, estava ali.

É-se feliz na Austrália, desde que lá se não vá.

© 1931, Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

Since we do nothing in this confused world

Since we do nothing in this confused world
That lasts or that, lasting, is of any worth,
And even what's useful for us we lose
 So soon, with our own lives,
Let us prefer the pleasure of the moment
To an absurd concern with the future,
Whose only certainty is the harm we suffer now
 To pay for its prosperity.
Tomorrow doesn't exist. This moment
Alone is mine, and I am only who
Exists in this instant, which might be the last
 Of the self I pretend to be.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

Pois que nada que dure, ou que, durando,
Valha, neste confuso mundo obramos,
E o mesmo útil para nós perdemos
 Connosco, cedo, cedo,
O prazer do momento antepoñamos
À absurda cura do futuro, cuja
Certeza única é o mal presente
 Com que o seu bem compramos.
Amanhã não existe. Meu somente
É o momento, eu só quem existe
Neste instante, que pode o derradeiro
 Ser de quem finjo ser.

© 1993, Ricardo Reis (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Symbols? I'm sick of symbols...

Symbols? I'm sick of symbols...
Some people tell me that everything is symbols.
They're telling me nothing.

What symbols? Dreams...
Let the sun be a symbol, fine...
Let the moon be a symbol, fine...
Let the earth be a symbol, fine...
But who notices the sun except when the rain
stops
And it breaks through the clouds and points
behind its back
To the blue of the sky?
And who notices the moon except to admire
Not it but the beautiful light it radiates?
And who notices the very earth we tread?
We say earth and think of fields, trees and hills,
Unwittingly diminishing it,

Símbolos? Estou farto de símbolos...
Uns dizem-me que tudo é símbolo.
Todos me dizem nada.

Quais símbolos? Sonhos...
Que o sol seja um símbolo, está bem...
Que a lua seja um símbolo, está bem...
Que a terra seja um símbolo, está bem...
Mas quem repara no sol senão quando a chuva
cessa
E ele rompe das nuvens e aponta para trás das
costas
Para o azul do céu?
Mas quem repara na lua senão para achar
Bela a luz que ela espalha, e não bem ela?
Mas quem repara na terra, que é o que pisa?
Chama terra aos campos, às árvores, aos montes
Por uma diminuição instintiva,
Porque o mar também é terra...

For the sea is also earth.

Okay, let all of this be symbols.
But what's the symbol – not the sun, not the
moon, not the earth –
In this premature sunset amidst the fading blue
With the sun caught in expiring tatters of clouds
And the moon already mystically present at the
other end of the sky
As the last remnant of daylight
Gilds the head of the seamstress who hesitates
at the corner
Where she used to linger (she lives nearby) with
the boyfriend who left her?
Symbols? I don't want symbols.
All I want – poor frail and forlorn creature! –
Is for the boyfriend to go back to the
seamstress.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

The gods grant nothing more than life,

The gods grant nothing more than life,
So let us reject whatever lifts us
 To unbreathable heights,
 Eternal but flowerless.
All that we need to accept is science,
And as long as the blood in our veins still
pulses
 And love does not shrivel,
 Let us go on
Like panes of glass: transparent to light,
Pattered by the sad rain trickling down,
 Warmed by the sun,
 And reflecting a little.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

Bem, vá, que tudo isso seja símbolos...
Mas que símbolo é, não o sol, não a lua, não a
terra,
Mas neste poente precoce e azulando-se menos,
O sol entre farrapos findos de nuvens,
Enquanto a lua é já vista, mística, no outro lado,
E o que fica da luz do dia
Doira a cabeça da costureira que pára
vagamente à esquina
Onde se demorava outrora (mora perto) com o
namorado que a
deixou?
Símbolos?... Não quero símbolos...
Queria só – pobre figura de magreza e
desamparo! –
Que o namorado voltasse para a costureira.

© 1934, Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Não consentem os deuses mais que a vida.
Tudo pois refusemos, que nos alce
 A irrespiráveis píncaros,
 Perenes sem ter flores.
Só de aceitar tenhamos a ciência,
E, enquanto bate o sangue em nossas fontes,
 Nem se engelha connosco
 O mesmo amor, duremos,
Como vidros, às luzes transparentes
E deixando escorrer a chuva triste,
 Só mornos ao sol quente,
 E reflectindo um pouco.

© 1914, Ricardo Reis (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

The Keeper of Sheep II

My gaze is clear like a sunflower.
It is my custom to walk the roads
Looking right and left
And sometimes looking behind me,
And what I see at each moment
Is what I never saw before,
And I'm very good at noticing things.
I'm capable of feeling the same wonder
A newborn child would feel
If he noticed that he'd really and truly been
born.
I feel at each moment that I've just been born
Into a completely new world...

I believe in the world as in a daisy,
Because I see it. But I don't think about it,
Because to think is to not understand.
The world wasn't made for us to think about it
(To think is to have eyes that aren't well)
But to look at it and to be in agreement.

I have no philosophy, I have senses...
If I speak of Nature it's not because I know
what it is
But because I love it, and for that very reason,
Because those who love never know what they
love
Or why they love, or what love is.

To love is eternal innocence,
And the only innocence is not to think...

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

O Guardador de Rebanhos II

O meu olhar é nítido como um girassol.
Tenho o costume de andar pelas estradas
Olhando para a direita e para a esquerda,
E de vez em quando olhando para trás...
E o que vejo a cada momento
É aquilo que nunca antes eu tinha visto,
E eu sei dar por isso muito bem...
Sei ter o pasmo comigo
Que tem uma criança se, ao nascer,
Reparasse que nascera deveras...
Sinto-me nascido a cada momento
Para a eterna novidade do mundo...

Creio no mundo como num malmequer,
Porque o vejo. Mas não penso nele
Porque pensar é não compreender...
O mundo não se fez para pensarmos nele
(Pensar é estar doente dos olhos)
Mas para olharmos para ele e estarmos de
acordo.

Eu não tenho filosofia: tenho sentidos...
Se falo na Natureza não é porque saiba o que
ela é,
Mas porque a amo, e amo-a por isso,
Porque quem ama nunca sabe o que ama
Nem sabe porque ama, nem o que é amar...

Amar é a eterna inocência,
E a única inocência é não pensar...

© 1914, Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

The Keeper of Sheep VI

To think about God is to disobey God,
Since God wanted us not to know him,
Which is why he didn't reveal himself to us...

Let's be simple and calm,
Like the trees and streams,
And God will love us, making us
Us even as the trees are trees
And the streams are streams,
And will give us greenness in the spring, which
is its season,
And a river to go to when we end...
And he'll give us nothing more, since to give us
more would make us less us.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

The Keeper of Sheep XLVII

On an incredibly clear day,
The kind when you wish you'd done lots of
work
So that you wouldn't have to work that day,
I saw – as if spotting a road through the trees –
What may well be the Great Secret,
That Great Mystery the false poets speak of.

I saw that there is no Nature,
That Nature doesn't exist,
That there are hills, valleys and plains,
That there are trees, flowers and grass,
That there are rivers and stones,
But that there is no whole to which all this
belongs,
That a true and real ensemble
Is a disease of our own ideas.

Nature is parts without a whole.
This is perhaps the mystery they speak of.

O Guardador de Rebanhos VI

Pensar em Deus é desobedecer a Deus,
Porque Deus quis que o não conhecêssemos,
Por isso se nos não mostrou...

Sejamos simples e calmos,
Como os regatos e as árvores,
E Deus amar-nos-á fazendo de nós
Nós como as árvores são árvores
E como os regatos são regatos,
E dar-nos-á verdor na sua primavera,
E um rio aonde ir ter quando acabemos...
E não nos dará mais nada, porque dar-nos mais
seria tirar-nos-nos.

© 1914, Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

O Guardador de Rebanhos XLVII

Num dia excessivamente nítido,
Dia em que dava a vontade de ter trabalhado
muito
Para nele não trabalhar nada,
Entrevi, como uma estrada por entre as árvores,
O que talvez seja o Grande Segredo,
Aquele Grande Mistério de que os poetas falsos
falam.

Vi que não há Natureza,
Que Natureza não existe,
Que há montes, vales, planícies,
Que há árvores, flores, ervas,
Que há rios e pedras,
Mas que não há um todo a que isso pertença,
Que um conjunto real e verdadeiro
É uma doença das nossas ideias.

A Natureza é partes sem um todo.
Isto é talvez o tal mistério de que falam.

This is what, without thinking or pausing,
I realized must be the truth
That everyone tries to find but doesn't find
And that I alone found, because I didn't try to
find it.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

The Keeper of Sheep XXXIX

The mystery of things – where is it?
Why doesn't it come out
To show us at least that it's mystery?
What do the river and the tree know about it?
And what do I, who am no more than they,
know about it?

Whenever I look at things and think about what
people think of them,
I laugh like a brook cleanly splashing against a
rock.

For the only hidden meaning of things
Is that they have no hidden meaning.
It's the strangest thing of all,
Stranger than all poets' dreams
And all philosophers' thoughts,
That things are really what they seem to be
And there's nothing to understand.

Yes, this is what my senses learned on their
own:
Things have no meaning: they exist.
Things are the only hidden meaning of things.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

Foi isto o que sem pensar nem parar,
Acertei que devia ser a verdade
Que todos andam a achar e que não acham,
E que só eu, porque a não fui achar, achei.

© 1914, Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

O Guardador de Rebanhos XXXIX

O mistério das cousas, onde está ele?
Onde está ele que não aparece
Pelo menos a mostrar-nos que é mistério?
Que sabe o rio disso e que sabe a árvore?
E eu, que não sou mais do que eles, que sei
disso?

Sempre que olho para as cousas e penso no que
os homens
pensam delas,
Rio como um regato que soa fresco numa pedra.

Porque o único sentido oculto das cousas
É elas não terem sentido oculto nenhum.
É mais estranho do que todas as estranhezas
E do que os sonhos de todos os poetas
E os pensamentos de todos os filósofos,
Que as cousas sejam realmente o que parecem
ser
E não haja nada que compreender.

Sim, eis o que os meus sentidos aprenderam
sozinhos: –
As cousas não têm significação: têm existência.
As cousas são o único sentido oculto das
cousas.

© 1915, Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

The washwoman beats the laundry

The washwoman beats the laundry
Against the stone in the tank.
She sings because she sings and is sad
For she sings because she exists:
Thus she is also happy.

If I could do in verses
What she does with laundry,
Perhaps I would lose
My surfeit of fates.

Ah, the tremendous unity
Of beating laundry in reality,
Singing songs in whole or in part
Without any thought or reason!
But who will wash my heart?

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

A lavadeira no tanque
Bate roupa em pedra bem.
Canta porque canta, e é triste
Porque canta porque existe;
Por isso é alegre também.

Ora se eu alguma vez
Pudesse fazer nos versos
O que a essa roupa ela fez,
Eu perderia talvez
Os meus destinos diversos.

Há uma grande unidade
Em, sem pensar nem razão,
E até cantando a metade,
Bater roupa em realidade...
Quem me lava o coração?

© 1933, Fernando Pessoa (himself)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

There's no one who loves me.

There's no one who loves me.
Hold on, yes there is;
But it's hard to feel certain
About what you don't believe in.

It isn't out of disbelief
That I don't believe, for I know
I'm well liked. It's my nature
Not to believe, and not to change.

There's no one who loves me.
For this poem to exist
I have no choice

Não tenho ninguém que me ame.
'Spera lá, tenho; mas é
Difícil ter-se a certeza
Daquilo em que não se crê.

Não é não crer por descrença,
Porque sei: gostam de mim.
É um não crer por feitio
E teimar em ser assim.

Não tenho ninguém que me ame.
Para este poema existir
Tenho por força que ter
Esta mágoa que sentir.

But to suffer this grief.

How sad not to be loved!
My poor, forlorn heart!
Et cetera, and that's the end
Of this poem I thought up.

What I feel is another matter...

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

Today someone read me St. Francis of Assisi.

Today someone read me St. Francis of Assisi.
I listened and couldn't believe my ears.
How could a man who was so fond of things
Never have looked at them or understood what
they were?

Why call water my sister if water isn't my
sister?
To feel it better?
I feel it better by drinking it than by calling it
something –
Sister, or mother, or daughter.
Water is beautiful because it's water.
If I call it my sister,
I can see, even as I call it that, that it's not my
sister
And that it's best to call it water, since that's
what it is,
Or, better yet, not to call it anything
But to drink it, to feel it on my wrists, and to
look at it,
Without any names.

© Translation: 2006, Richard Zenith
From: *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*
Publisher: Penguin, New York, 2006

Que pena não ser amado!
Meu perdido coração!
Etcetera, e está acabado
O meu poema pensado.
Sentir é outra questão...

© 1930, Fernando Pessoa (himself)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Leram-me hoje S. Francisco de Assis.
Leram-me e pasmei.
Como é que um homem que gostava tanto das
cousas
Nunca olhava para elas, não sabia o que elas
eram?

Para que hei-de chamar minha irmã à água, se
ela não é minha
irmã?
Para a sentir melhor?
Sinto-a melhor bebendo-a do que chamando-lhe
qualquer coisa –
Irmã, ou mãe, ou filha.
A água é a água e é bela por isso.
Se eu lhe chamar minha irmã,
Ao chamar-lhe minha irmã, vejo que o não é
E que se ela é a água o melhor é chamar-lhe
água;
Ou, melhor ainda, não lhe chamar coisa
nenhuma,
Mas bebê-la, senti-la nos pulsos, olhar para ela
E tudo isto sem nome nenhum.

© 1917, Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

To see the fields and the river

To see the fields and the river
It isn't enough to open the window.
To see the trees and the flowers
It isn't enough not to be blind.
It is also necessary to have no philosophy.
With philosophy there are no trees, just ideas.
There is only each one of us, like a cave.
There is only a shut window, and the whole
world outside,
And a dream of what could be seen if the
window were opened,
Which is never what is seen when the window
is opened.

© Translation: 1998, Richard Zenith
From: *Fernando Pessoa & Co. – Selected Poems*
Publisher: Grove Press, New York, 1998

Não basta abrir a janela
Para ver os campos e o rio.
Não é bastante não ser cego
Para ver as árvores e as flores.
É preciso também não ter filosofia nenhuma.
Com filosofia não há árvores: há ideias apenas.
Há só cada um de nós, como uma cave.
Há só uma janela fechada, e todo o mundo lá
fora;
E um sonho do que se poderia ver se a janela se
abrisse,
Que nunca é o que se vê quando se abre a
janela.

© 1924, Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)
From: *Poesia*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

ARTICLES

The 'Real' Fernando Pessoa: a biographical sketch

June 28, 2006

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa was born in Lisbon in 1888, died there in 1935, and did not often leave the city as an adult, but he spent nine of his childhood years in the British-governed town of Durban, South Africa, where his stepfather was the Portuguese consul. Pessoa, who was five years old when his natural father died of tuberculosis, developed into a shy and highly imaginative boy, and a brilliant student. Shortly after his seventeenth birthday, he returned to Lisbon to enroll in college but dropped out in his second year, preferring to study on his own at the National Library, where he systematically read major works of philosophy, history, sociology and literature (especially Portuguese) in order to complement and extend the traditional English education he had received in South Africa. His production of poetry and prose in English during this period was intense, and by 1910 he was also writing extensively in Portuguese. He published his first essay in literary criticism in 1912, his first piece of creative prose (a passage from *The Book of Disquiet*) in 1913, and his first poems in 1914.

Living sometimes with relatives, sometimes in rented rooms, Pessoa supported himself by doing occasional translations and by drafting letters in English and French for Portuguese firms that did business abroad. Although solitary by nature, with a limited social life and almost no love life, he was an active leader of Portugal's Modernist movement in the 1910s, and he invented several of his own movements, including a Cubist-inspired 'Intersectionism' and a strident, quasi-Futurist 'Sensationism'. Pessoa stood outside the limelight, however, exerting influence through his writings and in his conversations with more conspicuous literary figures. Respected in Lisbon as an intellectual and a poet, he regularly published his work in magazines, several of which he helped to found and run, but his literary genius went largely unrecognized until after his death. Pessoa was convinced of his own genius, however, and he lived for the sake of his writing. Although he was in no hurry to publish, he had grandiose plans for Portuguese and English editions of his complete works, and he seems to have held on to most of what he wrote.

In 1920 Pessoa's mother, after the death of her second husband, returned from South Africa to Lisbon. Pessoa leased an apartment for the reunited family – himself, his mother, his half-sister and half-brothers – on the Rua Coelho da Rocha, number 16, which is today the Casa Fernando Pessoa. This is where Pessoa lived for the last fifteen years of his life – sometimes in the company of his mother (who died in 1925), and sometimes with his half-sister, her husband and their two children. (Pessoa's half-brothers emigrated to England.) Family members have reported that Pessoa was affectionate and good-humored but resolutely private. No one realized how vast and varied a written universe was contained in the large trunk where he deposited his writings over the years.

The contents of that trunk – which today constitute the Pessoa Archives at the National Library of Lisbon – include over 25,000 manuscript sheets of poetry, prose, plays, philosophy, criticism, translations, linguistic theory, political writings, horoscopes and assorted other texts, variously typed, handwritten or illegibly scrawled in Portuguese, English and French. Pessoa wrote in notebooks, on loose sheets, on the backs of letters, advertisements and handbills, on stationery from the firms he worked for and from the cafés he frequented, on envelopes, on paper scraps, and in the margins of his own earlier texts. To compound the confusion, he wrote under dozens of names, a practice – or compulsion – that began in his childhood. He called his most important personas 'heteronyms', endowing them with their own biographies, physiques, personalities, political views, religious attitudes, and literary pursuits. Some of Pessoa's most memorable work in Portuguese was attributed to the three main poetic heteronyms – Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos – and to the 'semiheteronym' called Bernardo Soares, while his vast output of English poetry and prose was in large part credited to heteronyms Alexander Search and Charles Robert Anon, and his writings in French to the lonely Jean Seul. The many other alter egos included translators, short story writers, an English literary critic, an astrologer, a philosopher, a friar, and an unhappy nobleman who committed suicide. There was even a female persona: a hunchbacked consumptive named Maria José, helplessly in love with a metalworker who passed by the window where she always sat and looked out, dreaming. Today, more than seventy years after Pessoa's death, his vast written world has still not been completely charted by researchers, and a significant part of his prose writings is still waiting to be published.

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Pessoa's Heteronyms

June 28, 2006

Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), describing his literary enterprise as “a drama divided into people instead of into acts”, split himself into dozens of *dramatis personae*, the “heteronyms”, who occupied the stage of his otherwise uneventful life. It was a process that began in Pessoa’s childhood, gathered steam in his adolescence with the invention of alter egos who wrote in English, and made literary history in 1914, with the creation of would-be shepherd Alberto Caeiro, Futurist naval engineer Álvaro de Campos, and classicist Ricardo Reis, three of the finest Portuguese poets of the twentieth century.

Caeiro, the first in the poetic trinity to emerge from Pessoa’s soul, was considered the Master of the other two and, indeed, of Pessoa himself. Born, according to his script, in 1887, and dead from tuberculosis already in 1915, Alberto Caeiro lived in the country but never kept sheep, claimed to have no philosophy, and aspired to see things as things, without any added thought. In fact his poetry is a continual philosophical discourse that defends materialism and questions language – a kind of update on Lucretius and a foretaste of Wittgenstein. Caeiro’s ambition – sensation without thought – is impossible in the linguistic domain, and each poem written in his name points ultimately to the blank space on the page, to silence. He was the Master, yes, even Pessoa’s Master: the unreal beginning and end of poetic utterance.

Álvaro de Campos was supposedly born in Portugal’s Algarve region in 1890, studied engineering in Glasgow, traveled to the Orient, lived for a few years in England, where he courted both young men and women, and finally returned to Portugal, settling down in Lisbon. A decadent and a dandy, Campos billed himself a ‘sensationist’ poet, and his long early poems – partly influenced by Walt Whitman – celebrated machines and the modern age with loud exuberance. This attitude gradually gave way to a nagging existential anguish that found expression in shorter poems colored by melancholy, but his motto was still and always “Feel everything in every way”. The largest and most playful of the heteronyms, he even meddled in Pessoa’s real-world life. In addition to taking public stands – in interviews or letters to the editor – against statements made by his progenitor in magazine articles, he would occasionally turn up in lieu of Pessoa at appointments, to the chagrin and ire of those friends who were not amused by such antics.

A physician and classicist, whom Pessoa defined as a “Greek Horace writing in Portuguese”, Ricardo Reis composed metered, non-rhyming odes about the vanity of life and the need to accept our fate. He was born in 1887 in Oporto, which became the focal point of the surviving monarchist forces after the founding of the Portuguese Republic, in 1910. In 1919 the monarchists took control of Oporto but were forthwith defeated, at which point Reis, a royalist sympathizer (his last name means ‘kings’), fled to Brazil, where he presumably lived out the rest of his days, though there is, among the thousands of papers left by Pessoa at his death, an address for a Dr. Reis in Peru.

There was considerable interaction among the heteronyms. Campos and Reis had nothing but praise for the poetry of the ‘master’, Alberto Caeiro, but they were less charitable about each other’s work, and quibbled about what made for good rhythm in poetry, with Campos taking a more intuitive approach. Caeiro, for his part, said that considerations of rhythm have to do with prose, not poetry, since poetry is really just the art of plain speech: “We speak in verse, yes, in natural verse – in verses without rhyme or set rhythm, just the pauses we make in our breathing and feeling.” So

should we close our books of poetry and just talk to each other? Or even to ourselves? Hmm...

Pessoa created horoscopes for each of his heteronyms, which we've included as a bonus.¹

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¹see last page titled "Attachment"

Fernando Pessoa's other nation

May 31, 2010

"My nation is the Portuguese language," Fernando Pessoa famously wrote in *The Book of Disquiet*, to stress that his nationalism was not geographical or political but linguistic and literary. Pessoa loved language, and especially his mother tongue. But he also had a second "nation" – the English language, and his ambition as a young man was to become a great poet in the same linguistic tradition as Shakespeare. This was only natural, since almost all of the aspiring writer's schooling was in English.

Born in Lisbon in 1888, Pessoa lost his father when he was five years old. His mother's second husband was Portugal's consul in Durban, South Africa, where Pessoa lived from age seven to seventeen. Although new to the English language, young Fernando soon stood out among his classmates for his verbal skills. The headmaster at Durban High School pushed his students hard, but Pessoa did not really need pushing. A shy type and not fond of sports, he enjoyed studying and was a voracious reader, especially of Shakespeare, Milton, the English Romantic poets (Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth), Edgar Allan Poe, and Thomas Carlyle for prose. He also read in French and was an excellent student of Latin.

Since Pessoa's poetic models were predominantly English, it was in this language that he penned his first poems. The oldest one to survive, 'Separated from thee', was written shortly before his thirteenth birthday. Virtually all the poetry Pessoa wrote in Durban was in English, and he signed most of his verses with the name of Charles Robert Anon, the first of his literary alter egos with a substantial output. Pessoa's full-fledged "heteronyms" – for whom he invented biographies and distinct literary styles – burst onto the scene in 1914, and in Portuguese, but his two most important pre-heteronyms expressed themselves in English. Charles Robert (or "C.R.") Anon, who signed letters and poems sent to Durban's main newspaper, was followed by the even more prolific Alexander Search, supposed author of almost two hundred poems.

Search emerged a year or so after Pessoa returned to Lisbon, in 1905, to study for a degree in Letters. Bored or impatient with the course, which he eventually ditched without having earned any credits, Pessoa preferred to devote his energies to his own reading and writing. He invented other pre-heteronyms, including a Frenchman, Jean Seul, but his poetic production continued to be almost exclusively in English. When he was thirteen, the family had made a year-long trip to Portugal, where the budding writer composed a number of poems in Portuguese (one of which was published in a Lisbon newspaper), demonstrating a considerable mastery of various poetic forms such as the sonnet, but it was not until late 1908 – three years after returning to his homeland for good – that he

went back to writing verses in his native tongue.

In the 1910s Pessoa flourished as a Portuguese poet, whether writing in his own name or in those of his heteronyms: Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos and Ricardo Reis. But he still nurtured the dream of gaining renown for his poems in English. Throughout the decade he assiduously wrote poetry in both languages. Shakespeare, his literary idol, was the writer he strove to emulate and, if possible, surpass. What so impressed Pessoa was not only the quality of Shakespeare's work but the specific capacity of the Elizabethan poet and playwright to forge personalities. Long before Harold Bloom brilliantly argued that Shakespeare invented us – insofar as he gave vivid dramatic form to previously hazy zones of the human psyche – Pessoa in *The Book of Disquiet* referred to the bard as a “creator of world consciousness”. Pessoa defined himself not as a poet but more essentially as a dramatist, or dramatic poet, and he often compared himself to Shakespeare, saying that his heteronyms were like Hamlets, with the difference that he wrote no play for them to act in.

According to Pessoa, his life was the stage on which Álvaro de Campos and the rest of the heteronymic company spontaneously expressed themselves – and himself. It was as if he had put his entire self into his invented others and then set them free. This extreme form of depersonalisation, described as a “drama divided into people instead of into acts”, was the poet's most profound attempt at one-upmanship over Shakespeare. The sonnets he wrote in English were a more obvious, less successful attempt.

Pessoa told a friend that his English sonnets aspired to reproduce Shakespeare's “complexity” in a “modern adaptation”. In a certain way he succeeded. Shakespeare's 154 sonnets are all about love, whereas Pessoa's sonnets address a wide range of themes, particularly philosophical ones: appearance vs. reality, the impossibility of truly knowing others or ourselves, the tyranny of time and destiny, and the inscrutable mystery of existence. Though these themes are not especially modern, Pessoa's treatment of them in the sonnet form was arguably innovative. In terms of complexity, there is no question that his English sonnets – with their hyphenated compound words, their antitheses, paradoxes and somewhat tortured syntax – are at least as complex as Shakespeare's. But are they good poetry?

Pessoa self-published his 35 Sonnets in 1918 and sent a copy to the *Times Literary Supplement*, which printed a review noting that they had worthwhile things to say and employed “ultra-Shakespearian Shakespearianisms” to say them. The review was basically favorable, and Pessoa may have taken some satisfaction in his “ultra-Shakespearian” achievement. It was a fatally flawed achievement, however. In Shakespeare the linguistic difficulties of the sonnets grow out of the difficult concepts and feelings he so trenchantly traces in his world of love, which entails the whole world of human emotions. In the 35 Sonnets there are two planes – what is being said and the words used to say it – that mirror each other and interact; they do not form an organic whole.

Whether in the sonnets or in the many other poems he wrote in English, Pessoa was held back by his knowledge of a language that – odd as it may sound – was too poetic. In South Africa the great future writer did not have many friends, and at home he spoke Portuguese. His was a marvellously proficient but bookish, literary English. It was not organic, not alive, like his mother tongue. However hard Pessoa tried, his poetry in English could not connect to the womb. It is full of striking moments, however, and takes up the same themes that fascinate us in his Portuguese verses. This is a case in which translated poetry – when the translator is as competent as August Willemsen – stands a good chance of improving on and illuminating the original.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pessoa published many poems in magazines but only one full-fledged book of poems, *Mensagem*, in 1934. (He also self-published several chapbooks of his English poetry.). The posthumous editions are far too numerous to list, and the quality is uneven. Early editions, in particular, were marred by erroneous transcriptions.

The most reliable, up-to-date editions for the general reader are available from [Assírio & Alvim](#) (Lisbon):

Portuguese

Canções de Beber, ed. Maria Aliete Galhoz, 2003. (Contains Pessoa's ruba'iyat in the manner of Omar Khayyam.)

Mensagem, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, 1997.

Poesia 1902-1917, eds. Manuela Parreira da Silva, Ana Maria Freitas and Madalena Dine, 2005.

Poesia 1918-1930, eds. Silva, Freitas and Dine, 2005.

Poesia 1930-1935, eds. Silva, Freitas and Dine, 2006.

Poesia, Alberto Caetano, eds. Fernando Cabral Martins and Richard Zenith. 2nd ed., 2001.

Poesia, Alexander Search, ed. Luísa Freire, 1999.

Poesia, Álvaro de Campos, ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, 2002.

Poesia Inglesa (I), ed. Luísa Freire, 2000.

Poesia Inglesa (II), ed. Luísa Freire, 2000.

Poesia, Ricardo Reis, ed. Manuela Parreira da Silva. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2000.

Quadras, ed. Luísa Freire, 2002.

Most of the same volumes are published in Brazil by Companhia das Letras.

Critical editions of Pessoa's poetry are available from [Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda \(Lisbon\)](#).

Translations

These are even more numerous than editions in Portuguese, and new translations are constantly coming out. Fernando Pessoa's poetry has been rendered into all but the rarest languages, and most visitors to this site should have no problem finding his works in their own language.

Links

In Portuguese

[Insite](#)

Poems, discussion group, "curiosities"

[National Library of Lisbon](#)

Facsimile images of Pessoa's original manuscripts (thus far the poems of Alberto Caeiro – more mss forthcoming)

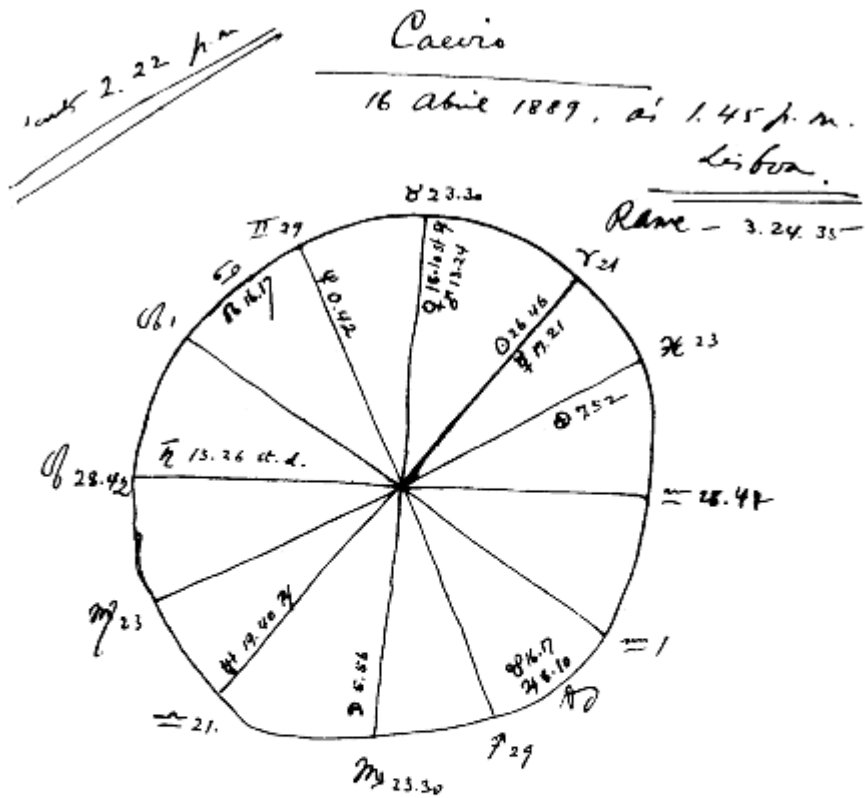
In English

[Pessoa's Trunk](#)

Among other things, 13 different English translations of “Autopsychography”

ATTACHMENT

[see page 20/21 for reference]



1915 comp. 5 - 12 man.

Juan - 2 dt - pro 0 5 ♀ (sub me)

Regular is in 28.38
east 6 Br.

Mental sub conjunct in elevation! (in 9th.)

pro. 24 et pro. 0 death.