

Anibal Frias. *Fernando Pessoa et le quint-empire de l'amour: Quête du désir et alter-sexualité*. Paris: Petra, 2012.

Fernando Beleza

Issues of gender and sexuality had until recently occupied an ambivalent position in the vast *corpus* of Fernando Pessoa's criticism, being at the same time pervasively present—since as early as the public reception of Álvaro de Campos's odes published in *Órpheu* (1915)—and peripheral to, if not completely absent from, theoretical considerations of the poet's *drama mental*. In recent years, the academic interest in the questions of gender, sexuality, and corporeality in Pessoa studies has undoubtedly increased, contributing to a clarification of the importance of such issues for a deeper understanding both of Pessoa's work and of Portuguese "First Modernism." Nevertheless, as Robert Bréchon, the acclaimed French biographer of Pessoa, states in the first lines of his preface to Anibal Frias's *Fernando Pessoa et le quint-empire de l'amour: Quête du désir et alter-sexualité*, this book is indeed the first monographic study to discuss exclusively and systematically the role of sexuality, gender, corporeality, and desire in the work of the foremost modern Portuguese writer. For this reason alone, Frias's study deserves the attention of anyone interested in Pessoa's work, Portuguese Modernism, or issues of gender and sexuality in Portuguese and lusophone studies. Its relevance is not, however, due only to the growing importance of this field in Pessoa studies; the book's thematic interest is amplified by the original and thought-provoking readings it contains, readings often unafraid of problematizing well-established critical positions and as such deserving a wide circulation among the academic and non-academic public.

At the core of Frias's approach there is an attempt at a reconstruction, and consequent reading, of the unfinished "love cycle" ("ciclo amoroso") that had been planned and partially written by Pessoa from 1913 till at least 1930. Among the five projected poems of the cycle, only the first two were completed and published by the poet: *Antinous* and *Ephitalamium*. Of the other three, mere fragments or sketches of the project remain, as far as is known.

Through a well-informed literary and philosophical approach to a selected corpus of Pessoa's texts—illuminated by references to such writers and thinkers as Nietzsche, Rimbaud, Blanchot, Yourcenar, Merleau-Ponty, Freud, and Foucault—*Fernando Pessoa et le quint-empire de l'amour* suggests a reconstitution of the five-poem cycle, which is productively read in relation to the poet's utopian (re)conceptualization of the Fifth Empire in *Mensagem*.

Frias's book is divided in three parts. The first part is composed of a reading of a wide corpus of Pessoa's texts, informed to a large extent by post-structuralist thought and recent gender theory. Refusing psycho-biographical approaches—and this is definitely a critical posture that strongly marks this book, for better or for worse, depending on the reader—Frias argues instead for an inseparability of textuality and sexuality in Pessoa's work that must be accounted for, naming it as the poet's *tlsex/tluality*. In Pessoa's oeuvre, he suggests, the textual (heteronymic) multiplications of a decentered subject in a constant process of becoming go hand in hand with a questioning of the stability of gender and sexual identities, which makes Pessoa, at least in this realm, postmodern *avant la lettre*. Even if some of the conclusions of this first section are not totally new, Frias's well-informed and thought-provoking argumentation offers a crucial theoretical and critical background for his subsequent (re)construction and reading of Pessoa's "love cycle."

The study's second part is dedicated to a close reading of the poem *Antinous*, and to its contextualization in what Frias considers to be the projected logic, architecture, and dynamics of the whole "love cycle," outside of which, he argues, each individual text is unable to attain the fullness of its possible meanings. Frias rejects both the tradition of psycho-biographic readings of *Antinous* (as his reader has come to expect by this point), along with the often argued notion of homosexual/heterosexual complementarity between *Antinous* and *Epithalamium*. Instead he follows Pessoa's lead in regarding these texts as the first two elements of a cycle of poems, projected to reflect on five successive cultural moments in which worldviews, sexualities, and different desires emerge as deeply intermingled: Greece, *Antinous*; Rome, *Epithalamium*; Christianity, *Prayer to a Woman's Body*; modern Empire, *Pan-Eros*; Fifth Empire, *Anteros*. Furthermore, Frias's reading exposes the relevance to Pessoa's project of topics such as memory, art, and temporality, which had been previously neglected by the critics.

The central element in the book's third part is a hypothetical (re)construction of the unfinished "cycle," based on a corpus that ranges from fragments

of the three unfinished poems to texts by Álvaro de Campos, Alberto Caeiro, Bernardo Soares, António Mora, and Jean Seul de Méluret, as well as by Nietzsche and other non-Pessoa authors. Frias's reading leads him to argue for a similarly organic relationship between the whole "love cycle" and the poet's *Mensagem*, and to suggest the pertinence of a comparative juxtaposition between the final stage of the cycle, *Anteros* (said to be characterized by a yet to be invented neo-pagan form of love reaching beyond sexuality and gender), and Pessoa's idea of the cultural and spiritual Fifth Empire. From this reading emerges what Frias boldly names as Pessoa's "Fifth Empire of love"—an esoteric (or, as some might argue, *queerly* esoteric), literary reinvention of love and desire pointing towards a realm beyond dualisms and modern categorizations of gender and sexuality.

Anibal Frias's book opens up many new possibilities for reconsidering Pessoa's work, not only in relation to issues of corporeality, gender, and sexuality, but also for readings oriented by other critical perspectives. This wide scope of prospective critical consequences both shows the relevance of this topic for a broader understanding of Fernando Pessoa's work and makes this book a crucial contribution not only to the fields of gender and queer studies within Pessoa scholarship but also to Portuguese literary and cultural studies in general. Furthermore, Frias's study is very well written, clearly organized, and, despite the complexity of the topics it discusses, reasonably accessible also to the non-academic public.

**Fernando Beleza** holds a BA in Romance literatures from the University of Coimbra and an MA in comparative literature from the University of Porto. He has published articles in peer-reviewed publications on nineteenth-century fiction and presented papers at international conferences on Modernism, gender, and queer theory, as well as on Lusophone postcolonial topics. He is currently a PhD candidate in Luso-Afro-Brazilian studies and theory at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Email: fernando.beleza@gmail.com