

## **Fernando Pessoa.**

### ***Apreciações literárias de Fernando Pessoa.***

**ed. Pauly Ellen Bothe**

"I have outgrown the habit of reading," declares Fernando Pessoa in a text in English estimated to be from 1910, justifying his assertion with the claim, "I am now in full possession of the fundamental laws of literary art." As shown by the 372 documents spanning 1904 and 1935 that comprise Pessoa's aesthetic appreciations collected in this volume, this was hardly the case. Pessoa's pronouncement should thus be read as an act of mystification, signifying the coming-of-age assertiveness of a budding poet who, conversely, declared himself "a reader voracious and ardent" in the same text. Nonetheless, it reveals the principal motivation underlying Pessoa's copious readings and critical responses to those readings, notably the desire for knowledge and mastery of the essence of literary processes. Guided by this view of aesthetic knowledge as creative empowerment, Pessoa read extensively from a mainly Western canon, as this volume attests.

With the explicit intention of giving continuity to the two closing chapters of *Páginas de estética e de crítica e teoria literárias* (1967), which Georg Rudolf Lind and Jacinto do Prado Coelho have devoted to fragments about European and Portuguese literatures, this thoroughly researched and carefully edited book substantially expands the corpus of Pessoa's aesthetic appreciations, including 240 previously unpublished documents. Increasing to ninety-eight the number of authors about whom Pessoa wrote appreciations, the volume is organized in a reader-friendly format as a dictionary of authors in alphabetical order and with an index. The editor went to great lengths to determine the dates of the documents based on examination of physical carriers and various complementary sources, including Pessoa's archives and contemporary newspaper articles, presenting the texts in chronological order, whenever it has been possible to date them, to provide some idea of the development of Pessoa's taste.

As with other volumes of the critical edition of Pessoa's works, *Apreciações literárias de Fernando Pessoa* is divided into two sections: the first comprises the critical text accompanied by footnotes providing information about the editions

of works by the author in question in Pessoa's private library; the second consists of a critical apparatus of variants, including detailed topographic and genetic information about the autograph or typescript and appendices with transcriptions of fragments about different topics from the critical text featured in the document. Given its content, consisting of Pessoa's own writings, and its organization according to critical-genetic principles, this latest volume of the critical edition of Pessoa's works belongs to the *Série Maior* of the *Edição crítica da obra completa de Fernando Pessoa* carried out by *Equipa Pessoa*, but it has been erroneously published with a cover belonging to the *Coleção "Estudos"* (Collection "Studies"), which is devoted to scholarly studies of problems related to Pessoa's archive and the edition of his works. This does not, however, detract from the scholarship with which the volume has been edited.

Pauly Ellen Bothe's judicious cross-referencing of authors mentioned in the same document allows the reader to realize that Pessoa often recorded reflections about different authors on the same piece of paper, which both confirms the avowed voraciousness of his readings and reveals the obsessive manner in which he wrote his aesthetic appreciations. Additionally, by quoting specific passages of works referenced in Pessoa's aesthetic appreciations and indicating reading marks in the existing editions in Pessoa's private library (for example, p. 134), she retraces the poet's dialogue with the author he was reading and writing about, providing valuable information for critical exegesis. According to the editor, Pessoa's aesthetic appreciations consisted mostly of fragmentary and unfinished essays on individual authors that he planned to publish (some of which correspond to titles listed in publication projects in his archive), brief critical pronouncements, and drafts of texts that Pessoa published in his lifetime. Although some of these texts were published as reviews in Portuguese periodicals and magazines, including the influential cultural magazines *Contemporânea* (1922–1923) and *Athena* (1924–1925, founded by Pessoa), and as prefaces to books by other writers, the bulk of Pessoa's aesthetic appreciations remained unpublished at the time of his death.

As indicated in the introduction, the majority of the texts were written in Portuguese and in English, and some are bilingual. That English was as important a vehicle of expression of his aesthetic thought as his mother tongue can be gathered from the fact that Pessoa alternated between the two languages when writing about most of the authors with whom he engaged critically. His dual linguistic and cultural heritage also explains the high incidence of Anglophone

authors, as well as the bias of some of his comments, for instance, his claim that English literature is the greatest of all literatures save the Greek (frag. 70, p. 100), which undoubtedly owes much to his familiarity with it through his formal English education. Elsewhere Pessoa identifies English as one of the three European languages that display the greatest degree of pure lyrical poetry, the other two being German and Portuguese (frag. 120, p. 139). Accordingly, he writes about major poets of the English canon, such as Shakespeare, Milton, and the romantics, as well as American poets such as Poe and Whitman. Within a Lusophone context, despite expressing the intention of examining the works of Portuguese and Brazilian poets he thought “worthy of analysis” (frag. 137, p. 149), Pessoa’s appreciations comprise exclusively Portuguese poets. These include significant figures from the Portuguese canon, such as Camões—whom he praises for his lyrical epopee (frag. 48, p. 85)—as well as Antero de Quental, Cesário Verde, and Camilo Pessanha—his avowed nineteenth- and twentieth-century “masters” (frag. 207, p. 211)—and contemporary poets, such as Mário de Sá-Carneiro and António Botto. However, his appreciations also include novelists, dramatists, and essayists, although these are less numerous.

Pessoa’s aesthetic appreciations of poets are particularly revealing because, while appraising their works and reflecting on their poetic practices, he often expounds his views on poetry. Hence, his appraisal of Shakespeare elicits a definition of lyricism as “o poder de exprimir intensamente (pela fala) emoções e estados de alma concretizando-os o mais possível” (the power to intensely express [through speech] emotions and states of soul rendering them as concrete as possible) (frag. 266, p. 243). Accordingly, supreme lyricism, of the kind he ascribed to Shakespeare, consists of the perfect expression of a great number of “states of soul” in this fashion (frag. 266, p. 243). These pronouncements about Shakespeare reveal the continuities between Pessoa’s aesthetic appreciations and his own poetic practices, in this instance the deployment of a “drama em almas” (drama in souls) through the heteronyms, which allowed him to lyrically express multiple states of soul rendered concrete.

In other cases, an appreciation about a specific poet rehearses or echoes Pessoa’s theoretical formulations about his own practices, as illustrated by the claim that Victor Hugo “is always outside himself, but that in the person of another; but that other is no person: he is no more than an artificial V[ictor] H[ugo]. [. . .] a dramatic mind would have othered itself in more ways than one [. . .] and better” (frag. 125, p. 142; emphasis added). The English turns of phrase Pessoa

uses here recur in statements in Portuguese about his own poetic depersonalization, namely his claim that the work “Cairo-Reis-Campos” was “sentido na pessoa de outro” (felt in the person of another) in a letter to Armando Côrtes-Rodrigues from January 19, 1915, and his remark, “Em prosa é mais difícil de se outrar” (It is much harder to *other oneself* in prose), when comparing *Livro do desassossego* by Bernardo Soares with the works of the heteronyms in a preface for the anthology *Ficções do interlúdio*. These statements show the reciprocity, even across different languages, between Pessoa’s criticism and his own aesthetic thought and poetic praxis.

These aesthetic appreciations also reveal the extent of Pessoa’s critical interest in formal aspects of the structure and composition of a poem. He defined lyrical verse as a compound of words and music (frag. 121, p. 139) and ascribed substantial importance to the melodic quality of the lyric and to rhythm, which he believed could determine the meaning of a poem (frag. 223, pp. 218–19). Hence, his aesthetic appreciations included remarks about several poets in relation to these issues, notably his praise of Tennyson’s “fine music of paragraph” and “melody of line” (frag. 313, p. 274) and of Poe’s (frag. 215, p. 215) and Swinburne’s (frag. 309, p. 272) poetry as rhythmic. Pessoa’s definitions of lyricism and lyrical verse proposed in these passages illustrate Jacinto do Prado Coelho’s claims that Pessoa’s reasoning was scholastic and largely based on definitions with the rigor of mathematical demonstrations (“Sobre as ideias estéticas de Fernando Pessoa,” in *A Letra e o leitor*, Oporto: Lello & Irmãos, 1996, 265).

Coelho also notes Pessoa’s tendency to distinguish, isolate, and classify (“Sobre as ideias estéticas,” 270); this is corroborated by Pessoa’s claim that there are visual and aural poets, such as Victor Hugo and Antero de Quental respectively (frag. 116, p. 136). In this tendency to elaborate typologies of poets, Pessoa resembled other major modernist writers such as W. B. Yeats, whose poetic system expounded in *A Vision* hinges on two types of poets—the objective and subjective—a polarization that also underpins Pessoa’s typologies, as shown by his comments about the “radically objective” nature of Hugo’s “mind” (frag. 125, p. 143). Nonetheless, the expanded corpus collected in this volume shows that Pessoa did not abstain from posing questions and problems about the works he analyzed, particularly in relation to the author’s “temperament” or “mind,” contradicting Coelho’s assertion about the dogmatic quality of Pessoa’s essayistic style (“Sobre as ideias estéticas,” 265).



This critical inquisitiveness, which often led Pessoa to counter the views of other critics regarding the authors he was writing about, is in accordance with the deductive reasoning that Georg Rudolf Lind considers both Pessoa's greatest strength and his weakest point, as he notes in the introduction to his and Coelho's edition of *Páginas de estética e de crítica e teoria literárias* (Lisbon: Ática, [2nd ed. 1973, repr. 1994], xv). And indeed, if on the one hand, the speculative quality of Pessoa's criticism allowed him to make insightful deductions about certain works and authors, particularly those with whom he felt greater aesthetic affinity, on the other hand, the abstract nature of his reasoning prevented him from examining structural and contextual aspects in detail and at length, which, in Coelho's view, makes him more of a theorist than a literary critic ("Sobre as ideias estéticas," 265). Despite this, a more pragmatic facet of Pessoa's criticism emerges in the form of observations about the translation of poetry that recur in the appreciations collected in this volume. Although Pessoa believed that it was nearly impossible to translate lyrical poetry (frag. 119, p. 138), this edition features introductions to his translations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (frag. 288–89, pp. 260–61) and of poems by Poe (p. 480), and a preface to a collection of Portuguese poets and foreign poets in translation that he intended to call "Anthology" (p. 482). His comments about this subject show that he was familiar with translation theory and terminology and, according to information provided in the critical apparatus, he did, at one time, contemplate establishing a "publishing house in Britain for translations of foreign books and 'continental' publications of English ones" (p. 506), referring to an "Oli-sipo in London" (p. 505).

*Apreciações literárias de Fernando Pessoa* provides an invaluable record of Pessoa's literary aesthetic thought, which surveyed the Western canon and his contemporaries, focusing to a large extent on poetry. The appreciations collected in this volume show that Pessoa reflected assiduously on literary matters, and they feature some of his key aesthetic concerns: mystical nationalism, transcendental pantheism and neopaganism, and his obsessive interest in the expression of literary genius, which underlies the often comparative nature of his criticism of major authors. Hence, the critical portraits collected in this edition can also be regarded as portraits of Pessoa the critic and literary theorist.