

Fernando Pessoa.

Eu sou uma antologia: 136 autores fictícios.

ed. Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari

Edgar Allan Poe, one of Pessoa's two great American masters (the other being Walt Whitman), begins his tale "The Man of the Crowd" with the mysterious statement that "it was well said of a certain German book that '*er lasst sich nicht lesen*'—it does not permit itself to be read." That's not entirely true of the book under review, but, modifying what Poe's narrator said about that German book, I would come close to saying that it "does not permit itself to be reviewed"—at least not readily.

From childhood, Pessoa was the creator of fictitious beings. In his famous letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, dated January 13, 1935, he named the Chevalier de Pas "o meu primeiro heteronymo, ou, antes, o meu primeiro conhecido inexistente." He also recalled that the Chevalier had a rival, though he could not at the moment recall his name. Interestingly, this hinted-at interplay between these childhood nonexistent acquaintances seems to foreshadow what would become, for the adult Pessoa, the fruitful way of extending his notion of "drama-em-gente" to a "drama entre" those fictitious beings. As he wrote in "Tábua bibliográfica" (1928), prepared at the request of José Régio in his capacity as one of the editors of *Presença*, "As obras heterónimas de Fernando Pessoa são feitas por, até agora, trez nomes de gente—Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, Alvaro de Campos. Estas individualidades devem ser consideradas como distintas da do auctor dellas. Fórma cada uma uma espécie de drama; e todas ellas juntas formam outro drama." Let us single out the words *até agora*. Never mind that here, Pessoa chooses to ignore his numerous other heteronyms, such as Alexander Search, Antonio Mora, or the Barão de Teive, to name but three. What stands out for me is the hint that besides the possibility that other heteronyms might participate in the drama that has been created by the big three, there may be other heteronyms whose individual dramas might form a separate cluster, that is, a drama played out among themselves.

There's a chicken-and-egg question here. Given Pessoa's lifelong fascination with the names and signatures of all sorts of fictitious beings of his own

making, along with multiple and varied signatures of those names (including his own), one can legitimately ask if the existence of a given heteronymous being preceded his naming, or vice versa. I suspect that it could go either way. Yet an answer to this mystery might well contribute to our understanding of how the complex creative mind of Pessoa actually worked, especially given the all-but-professional interest Pessoa took in the character analysis of signatures and all handwriting. Recognizing this, the editors of *Eu sou uma antologia* reproduce such signatures, sometimes, when available, in generous quantities.

One hundred thirty-six fictitious authors. That is the number the editors have settled on as the so far identifiable body of writers barely named, shadowy, sketchy, or, in the cases familiar to all of Pessoa's readers, bodied forth substantially with a body of writing of their own. Besides presenting the facts and comments that give the "fictitious author" an identity, the editors offer samples (when they exist) of that author's writing. This combination of biographical dictionary and anthology makes *Eu sou uma antologia* a valuable resource for future scholarly work on the nature and extent of Pessoa's heteronymous project.

There have been other compilations of the names of Pessoa's fictitious persons, but the authors of this "anthology" have honored the listings of those predecessors by applying a simple test. Was the fictitious name that of a "writer"? The editors allow, moreover, that their list (or compiled evidence) is not to be considered definitive. After all, in many cases, there is presented no more than a name and the title of a work that was merely projected and, as far as anyone knows (at least *até agora*), not even begun. No doubt Pessoa, despite the sheer quantity of his writing that has survived, was the victim of the old adage: "His eyes were bigger than his belly."

Well, I must confess that, despite my initial reservations about the possibility, this is a book that can be read. In fact, this part reference book, part anthology made for compelling reading. Its length militated against my usual sort of sit-down, straight-ahead reading, yet my gradual fascination with this anthology kept me interested in just what name, old or new, would be considered next, all the way through its more than 600 pages. For the scholar, moreover, *há pano p'ra mangas*—that is, leads that call for further exploration. I am grateful once again to Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari for coming up with the idea for this book and then providing scholars with such an excellent tool for future research into this phenomenon that is Fernando Pessoa.