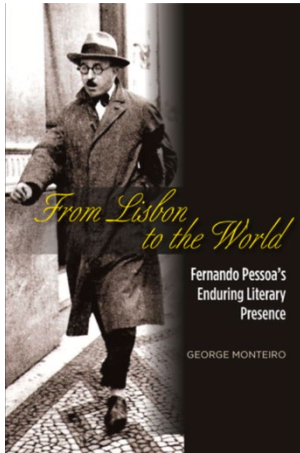


Monteiro's enduring critical presence

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MONTEIRO, George (2018). *From Lisbon to the World: Pessoa's Enduring Literary Presence*. Brighton; Chicago; Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 240 pp. [ISBN 978-1-84519-938-8]



George Monteiro's latest book on Fernando Pessoa is, in light of the author's recent passing, also his final book. This is cause for lamentation since Monteiro—long the leading exponent of Pessoa in the United States—contributed so much to Pessoaan scholarship, particularly to this journal, which counts some eight items among his yield. His two previous English-language books on Pessoa are standard reference works and notably situate the national poet in international contexts. This pioneering critical approach took two distinct forms. *The Presence of Pessoa: English, American, and South African Literary Responses* (1998) considered some of the English-language poets and story-writers who have put Pessoa to their own uses. *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature* (2000) analyzed, conversely, the influence upon Pessoa of the literary tradition that his British colonial education had steeped him in. The latter work, of course, paved the way for Maria Irene Ramalho's argument, in *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa's Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* (2003), that Pessoa belongs, with Whitman, Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens, to an Anglo-American poetic tradition centered on an Atlantic world system.

This international approach to Pessoa studies contributes to the maturation of the field while recalling a parallel stage (or continuing theme) in the "Joyce Industry," when scholars wrestled with the question of whether James Joyce was primarily an Irish or a European writer. From the beginning, Joyce himself, shrewd self-promoter that he was, played both sides against the middle, publicly encouraging both readings of his works. His genuine biculturalism aside, Pessoa resolved the tension between the national and the international by paradoxically defining Portugal as cosmopolitan *ab ovo*. In fact, a comparative study of Pessoa's cultural synthesis and other modernists' treatments of this major theme merits book-length study. Over and above their Anglo-Americanizing approach, Monteiro's and Ramalho's critical interpretation of Pessoa in English itself fills a gap in international criticism. Others who helped fill the gap include Patricio Ferrari, editor of *Inside the Mask: The English Poetry of Fernando Pessoa*, Special Issue of *Pessoa Plural*, n.º 10, and

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Jerónimo Pizarro, who, along with Ferrari, guest-edited *Fernando Pessoa as English Reader and Writer. Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies*, n.º 28. Susan M. Brown should also be mentioned in this regard for her early work on Pessoa and Whitman, "The Poetics of Pessoa's Drama em Gente" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1987).

From Lisbon to the World: Pessoa's Enduring Literary Presence largely continues Monteiro's double-sided Anglo-Americanist tack. This tack gives unity to the book's compilation of revised and unpublished articles. The chapter "Imaginary Poets" tells the story of Pessoa's early (failed) attempts to establish himself as an English-language poet, attempts that nonetheless contributed, more generally, to his (successful) use of his "Englishness" to renew Portuguese poetry. This story gives warrant to Monteiro's approach to Pessoa and sets the stage for much of what follows in the book. "The Great War" reads Pessoa's classic anti-war poem "O menino da sua mãe" in the light of poems by the English poets Rupert Brooke and A.E. Housman. "Campbell's Discovery" examines unpublished translations of Pessoa's poetry, found amid the papers of the South African Roy Campbell. Three of the eighteen chapters—most of them brief—take up Pessoa's lasting interest in Edgar Allan Poe, whose poems and stories he translated. "Translating Nathaniel Hawthorne" argues that a poem by Álvaro de Campos owes a debt to the language and characterization of *The Scarlet Letter*. Here Monteiro also recounts his happy archival discovery of Pessoa's translation of Hawthorne's famous novel. The final chapter takes note of a half-dozen American writers who have paid homage to the Portuguese poet.

Perhaps the most remarkable chapter is the aptly intermediate one, "Pessoa's Critics." Some 60 pages long (the longest in the book), this chapter brings together 33 book reviews ranging from 1971 to 2014—another sign of Monteiro's scholarly generosity. "Pessoa's Critics" forms a gallery of portraits of Pessoaan scholars—a veritable "drama-em-gente" [drama-in-people]—that, in turn, offer a depiction of Monteiro as critic. This specular self-portraiture, daubed piecemeal over many years, recalls Monteiro's *The Pessoa Chronicles: Poems, 1980-2016*: both take the form of "a collection, a scrap-book, an accumulation, an offering, take your pick." The dating of the entries, the poet says, serves to "remind me of what was on my mind on particular days in specific years. As such, the collection works for me as something of an autobiography" (2016: Preface). In the same way, the dated book reviews of "Pessoa's Critics" add up to an autobiography of a scholar whose career, spanning over four decades, played so pivotal a part in the growth of Pessoaan studies in the United States. If I have called the chapter "aptly intermediate," it is because its organization emblemizes both the compilatory mold of the book and the book's encompassing theme: *Pessoa's Enduring Literary Presence*.

The reviews pay erudite attention to books by and about Pessoa (as well as by his peers José de Almada Negreiros and António Botto), in English, Portuguese

and French. It is thrilling to read contemporary accounts of such landmark works as António Cirurgião's 1991 *O "Olhar Esfíngico" da Mensagem de Pessoa*, both for the effect the reviews have of recalling the works' initial impact and for the reviewer's *aperçus*. Here, for example, is Monteiro locating *Message* in the Anglo-American tradition of long poetry: "Like Eliot's *Waste Land*, Pound's *Cantos*, Crane's *The Bridge* or Williams's *Paterson* [...], *Mensagem* will continue to inspire conflicting as well as partisan readings" (76). Richard Zenith's important translation, *Fernando Pessoa & Co.: Selected Poems* (1998), elicits this insightful contrast between Pessoa and Joyce, blended with an allusion to *The Waste Land*: "Pessoa is not the ideal creator, as the still callow Stephen Daedalus imagines him to be—apart, aloof, paring his fingernails—but as one who, like the Greek gods, mingles and interacts with the lesser (or grander) beings of his creation, mixing memory with desire, anger, frustration, and occasionally sorrowful joy at their antics, shenanigans, postures, gestures, and accomplishments" (95). The felicitous style is as much a signature of Monteiro's as the Anglo-Americanist understanding of his subject.

Edwin Honig's 1971 *Selected Poems by Fernando Pessoa*, the first book-length translation of Pessoa's poetry to be published in the United States, launches Monteiro's gallery of book reviews. As Monteiro well says in his later review of Honig's 1988 prose collection *Always Astonished*, "No one has contributed more than has Honig to the making of Pessoa's reputation in the United States" (63). These two pieces link up in a mosaic with Monteiro's chapter on Bishop's role in the controversy over August Willemssen's attack on the American translator in the Porto-based journal *Persona*. This chapter shows Monteiro as a protagonist of many a Pessoa-related affair in the United States, opening as it does with an eyewitness account of Elizabeth Bishop reading her poetry at Brown University, where Monteiro taught for many years. Indeed, another chapter presents an insider account of the first international Pessoa conference, held at Brown on October 7-9, 1977, followed by seven letters from Jorge de Sena pertaining to the symposium. In fact, these two chapters, combined with the reviews' wide compass, in witnessing to the germ and growth of Pessoa studies in the United States, make *From Lisbon to the World* something of a chronicle of the field. No one was better positioned to write this industry history than Monteiro, and his very sketch of it attests to the maturing of the stateside Pessoa scholarship that occasioned it in the first place.

The chapter "Myth Is the Message" also deserves special mention. Monteiro makes a fascinating case that the substance of a letter by William A. Bentley—a Lisbon-based editor to whom in 1918 Pessoa, still hoping for a career as an English-language poet, sent copies of his two chapbooks, *35 Sonnets* and *Antinous*—resulted, some fifteen or so years later, in the shaping and naming of *Mensagem*. Bentley's counsel to "go to your own history" and to "have a message for the Present" recalls Paul Valéry's advice to the young novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias, then living in

Paris, to return to his native Guatemala for inspiration, lest he become just another Francophile expat.

Structurally, Monteiro's book recalls his *As Paixões de Pessoa* (2013), which also consists of a compilation of revised and unpublished articles on Pessoa, rendered in Portuguese. *From Lisbon to the World* suffers from two defects, to one of which compilations of this nature are liable; I speak of repetition. Thus, we read in several chapters and book reviews similar material concerning Pessoa's attempts to publish his poetry in England; his translations of Poe and thoughts on him as a poet; Álvaro de Campos' relationship to Ofélia Queiroz; and Honig's ties to Bishop. The second defect is the typos that span the book. These blemishes are puzzling for a simple reason: Monteiro's writing is graceful; indeed, he is a stickler for proper English expression, as evidenced in his criticism of the quality of writing in Pessoa's *Lisbon: What the Tourist Should See* (1992), which leads him to cast doubt on the work's authenticity. Monteiro's scrupulousness is also demonstrated in another book review, in which he criticizes errors in the author's reproduction of a poem by Eliot. The blemishes in Monteiro's book point to a need for better proofreading.

Quibbles notwithstanding, *From Lisbon to the World* marks a welcome addition to the Sussex Academic Press's series of scholarly books on the modern history, culture and politics of Portugal, Brazil and Africa. Titles include Sarah Ashby's *The Lusophone World: The Evolution of Portuguese National Narratives*; Francisco Carlos Palomanes Martinho's *Marcello Caetano: A Biography (1906-1980)*; and Lucia Grinberg's *The Military and Political in Authoritarian Brazil*. Like Pessoa's literary presence, Monteiro's critical presence, missed already, will endure.

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JOHN PEDRO SCHWARTZ é professor de Inglês na Universidade Americana de Malta. O seu livro mais recente é *Poetry—Minimal Anthology* (Tinta-da-China 2020), uma tradução rimada e metrificada da poesia portuguesa e francesa de Fernando Pessoa. Pertence ao Conselho Editorial de *Pessoa Plural*. Como especialista no modernismo, publicou artigos sobre James Joyce, Henry James, Jorge Luis Borges e Pessoa, assim como ensaios nos interstícios entre estudos de composição, média e museologia. Co-editou dois livros, *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World* (Routledge 2013) e *TransLatin Joyce: Global Transmissions in Ibero-American Literature* (Palgrave 2014). Enquanto Professor na Universidade Americana de Beirute, ele escreveu para *Foreign Policy*, elaborando duas reportagens abrangentes sobre a guerra civil na Síria em 2011 e 2012. Num outro empreendimento jornalístico, publicou uma série investigativa em três partes sobre a insurreição justiceira em Michoacán, México, em *Warscapes* em 2015. Está actualmente a traduzir, junto com o seu pai, mais dois livros de Pessoa, *Prose—Minimal Anthology* e *Message*.