

Eugenio Montejo and oblique writing: A Pessoaan legacy

[Eugenio Montejo e a escrita oblíqua:
Um legado pessoano]

Nicholas Roberts*

Keywords

Eugenio Montejo, Fernando Pessoa, Oblique writing, Heteronyms, Universal identity.

Abstract

This article explores the heteronymic poetics of Venezuelan author Eugenio Montejo, with particular focus on his concept of *oblique writing* and its affinities with Fernando Pessoa. Through figures such as Blas Coll and other “oblique voices,” Montejo created an expanding corpus that recalls Pessoa’s trunk, while simultaneously developing his own vision of poetic multiplicity. By examining Montejo’s essays, poetry, and Lisbon-inspired reflections, the study reveals how Pessoa became both a model and a pervasive presence, shaping Montejo’s quest for a universal, plural identity.

Palavras-chave

Eugenio Montejo, Fernando Pessoa, Escrita oblíqua, Heterónimos, Identidade universal.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a poética heteronímica do escritor venezuelano Eugenio Montejo, com destaque para o conceito de *escrita oblíqua* e a sua relação com Fernando Pessoa. Através de vozes como Blas Coll e outros “autores oblíquos”, Montejo construiu um corpus em expansão que remete para a célebre arca pessoana, ao mesmo tempo que formulava uma visão própria da multiplicidade poética. A partir dos seus ensaios, poemas e reflexões sobre Lisboa, mostra-se como Pessoa se tornou modelo e presença decisiva na busca de uma identidade plural e universal.

* University of Durham.

When the Venezuelan author Eugenio Montejo passed away in 2008, he left a literary legacy whose range and importance are one of the best kept (relative) secrets of modern Hispanic and world literature. He was, first and foremost, a poet, but also an accomplished essayist, a writer of more fragmentary, difficult-to-define prose, and producer of one lone short story and one work of theatre. I say “he”, but the author was also a prolific heteronymist. For reasons that will become apparent, it is hard to define his output with numerical precision, but a reasonable attempt would identify: thirteen major orthonymic works or collections; eight heteronymic ones, including two published posthumously and one significantly expanded posthumously; and one (constantly-expanding) text that straddles both camps, leaving aside a significant number of pieces not collected in volumes of writing prior to the second edition of the *Obra completa* (MONTEJO, 2022). Given the nature of this output, one might already suspect a Pessoaan influence, and, indeed, Montejo was a reader and huge admirer of Fernando Pessoa’s work from the early 1960s, as well as being a Lusophile: he spoke Portuguese, wrote essays on numerous Portuguese and Brazilian authors and spent six years as the Venezuelan cultural attaché in Lisbon, from 1988 to 1994.¹ The aim of this present article, then, is to offer a way of starting to understand, or at least sketch out, how this connection—both literary and sentimental—with Pessoa, his work and Lisbon (a place inextricably linked to and imbued with Pessoa for Montejo) plays into, informs and is transformed in the work of Montejo.²

A study of the connections and contrasts between Montejo and Pessoa requires an initial comment on terminology. Although Montejo refers to heteronymy by that name in pieces such as the essay “Sobre la prosa de Machado”, dating from 1972 (MONTEJO, 1974: 130), as he developed his thought on the practice and engagement with it, Montejo came to prefer the term “oblique writing” [*la escritura oblicua*], which he coined in the essay “Los emisarios de la escritura oblicua” (MONTEJO, 2012: 121-128). Ostensibly, this term was used to distinguish the practice *per se* from the

¹ In an interview with Francisco José Cruz, in 2001, Montejo underlines both his early discovery of Pessoa, which thus undergirds almost the entirety of his literary production, and his attendant affection for the country, people, capital, and literature of Portugal: “Un amigo portugués ya fallecido, Rui de Carvalho, medico residenciado en Caracas a principios de los sesenta, me indujo a visitarla [Lisboa] y me dio a conocer muy tempranamente a Pessoa. Conservo un imborrable afecto por su tierra y sus gentes, así como una firme admiración por su literatura” (CRUZ, 2006 [2001]: 465-66).

² Beyond the biographical details set out above, the line that connects Pessoa to Montejo in terms of literary production and thought is not, of course, difficult to discern: Miguel Gomes, for instance, has referred to the way in which “el estímulo pessoano [es] crucial” (GOMES, 2007: 18) for an understanding of Montejo’s heteronymic practice. Likewise, DE BASTOS (2012) discusses the influence of Pessoa on both Montejo and his fellow Venezuelan poet Rafael Cadenas, drawing attention both to Montejo’s familiarity with Pessoa’s work and to certain parallels that can be found between Montejo’s voices and those of Pessoa. What has not been undertaken until now is a detailed examination of the diverse strands of this influence and the way in which they subtend the fundamental ideas and stances of Montejo’s work.

Pessoa example of such (MONTEJO, 2012: 122), but several factors, not least the repeated presence of notions of obliqueness in Montejo's work—most notably in the title of his first collection of essays *La ventana oblicua* (1974)—, disclose what, I would suggest, becomes increasingly evident: that “oblique writing” comes to represent not so much the literary use of apocryphal authors generally as it does Montejo's own particular praxis.³

Montejo had, as far as we know, seven principal heteronyms, or oblique voices, as well as a number of much more limited figures. The first—and, for many scholars, main—voice is that of Blas Coll.⁴ A typographer, as well as philosopher and linguist, Coll is, we are told by an editorial Montejo, possibly, even probably (though not definitely), “originario de las Islas Canarias” (MONTEJO, 2007: 31), having arrived by boat in the small (and fictitious) Venezuelan coastal town of Puerto Malo, where he set up a printing press.⁵ According to Montejo, following his death, Coll left behind a notebook of fragmentary comments, aphorisms and musings, which, as we soon discover, are concerned principally with the meeting point of language and ontology. Montejo supposedly gave himself the task of selecting fragments and passages from this notebook to publish (translated from *Colly*, Coll's personal, invented language), and this emerges as *El cuaderno de Blas Coll*, a book published in 1981 under Montejo's name, in which he gives us his rendering of Coll's texts. The conceit here allows Montejo continually to expand this text, and, over the following twenty-six years, he goes on to extricate, transcribe and translate more and more passages, both from the apocryphal notebook and, to a more limited extent, from other sources whose existence becomes apparent (other, mysterious notebooks, as well as objects on which Coll wrote, for example). Thus, five further editions of *El cuaderno de Blas Coll* were published (1983; 1998; 2005; 2006; 2007), each an expanded version of the previous one, a process only halted by Montejo's death.

Before turning to the other voices, it is worth pausing to consider the extent to which Pessoa's presence is felt specifically and clearly in the gestation and nature of both the figure of Coll and his work. Two points stand out in particular. First, the

³ “Los emisarios de la escritura oblicua” was first published in 1989 in the *Revista Universidad de Antioquia*. It was first included in Montejo's second collection of essays, *El taller blanco*, in the second edition (1996).

⁴ Miguel Gomes, for example, one of the most insightful critics to have written on Montejo, describes Coll as “el heterónimo fundamental” (2007: 20). See also LÓPEZ ORTEGA and GOMES (2021: 46).

⁵ Juan Pablo LUPI (2011: 474) intimates that the editorial Montejo, indicated by the initials E.M. in the text, should not be confused with the poet Montejo. The same initials are used at the end of the preface to the various works of the other heteronymic voices. Montejo himself made no explicit attempt at distinguishing between “Montejo poet” and “Montejo editor”, but it remains an aspect of Montejo's (heteronymic) practice that merits further work. For ease of reference, I shall generally refer to this persona simply as Montejo, but such references should be understood as being underwritten with this important caveat.

apocryphal notebook operates in a way that is heavily analogous to Pessoa's infamous trunk: an apparently inexhaustible source of new material to be pored over and published by scholars, here the editor Montejo. This is an aspect of Montejo's practice that is repeated, albeit to a less extreme extent, in regard to his other voices, as we shall see. The second element, more overt, is the physical description that Montejo gives us of Coll: "Quienes lo conocieron lo describen con rasgos más o menos aproximados. Anoto, de mis averiguaciones, las señas que más se reiteran: era menudo, de mediana estatura y rostro ovalado. Llevaba siempre unas gafas doradas y un sombrero de fieltro, al parecer su prenda más definitoria, junto con un lápiz achatado sobre la oreja derecha" (MONTEJO, 2007: 31).

The image created by these lines bears a striking resemblance, of course, with some of the most well-known photographs of Fernando Pessoa, and, added to Coll's identification as a typographer (MONTEJO, 2007: 30-31), contributes, I would contend, to a sense that Blas Coll and Fernando Pessoa are, if not one and the same, then figures who overlap in some way.⁶

The other oblique voices of Eugenio Montejo are all presented as disciples of Coll, or *colígrafos*, although, as I have intimated elsewhere (ROBERTS, 2017), there are substantial grounds for considering the relationship between Coll and these voices as being far more dialogic and mutually informative than the master-disciple dyad might imply. The first heteronym to appear after Coll was Sergio Sandoval. Hailing from a remote village in the Venezuelan *Llanos*, Sandoval is a poet who draws from, and is influenced by, an eclectic range of sources, most notably Far Eastern thought, as he seeks and attempts to write "la voz natural de su pueblo" (SANDOVAL, 2009: 14). He writes primarily in the form of *coplas* (poems of four octosyllabic lines), with accompanying glosses, and produced the collection *Guitarra del horizonte* (1991). Following Sandoval, Montejo gives us the figure of Tomás Linden. Born in the Venezuelan coastal town of Puerto Cabello to a Venezuelan mother and a Swedish father, Linden was brought up in Sweden before returning to Venezuela to reconnect with his mother tongue and land. Having apparently written avant-garde, surrealist poetry in Swedish (he was a "seguid[or] del gran Ekelöf" (LINDEN, 1995: 10)), the vast majority of his texts in Spanish take the form of sonnets—a classicism that offers a link with Pessoa's voice Ricardo Reis—, though he also produced some other verse, including prose poetry, as well as one short story, the only such piece of writing to emerge from any of Montejo's voices, including that of the orthonym. Linden's main publication, a book of sonnets, is *El hacha de seda* (1995). The remaining four oblique authors produced by Montejo comprise, in order of their emergence: Eduardo Polo, an author of poetry for children, who published a collection entitled *Chamario* (2004) and ended up leaving Puerto Malo "para dedicarse a la música y a la arqueología

⁶ See HOWES (1983) for a brief account of Pessoa as a publisher and typographer.

marina en otro país del Caribe" (POLO, 2004: 5); Lino Cervantes, originally a semi-narian and the most avant-garde of the voices (suggestive, then, of the position of Álvaro de Campos in Pessoa's heteronymic universe), who tried to put Coll's ideas of language reduction into poetic practice;⁷ Jorge Silvestre, a mysterious figure about whom we are told little, who accompanies Montejó in his final three orthonymic collections, his poetry appearing as a kind of coda to these;⁸ and, finally, Lucian Vacaresco, a Romanian playwright cast into exile in the South of France, whose existence and work were only discovered after Montejó's death, his play entitled *El Ángel* being published in the third volume of Montejó's *Obra completa* (2023: 383-409).

In each of these cases, apart from Vacaresco, the works of these authors are presented as being selected by an editor Montejó from a wider corpus, and all, including Vacaresco's *El Ángel*, contain a preface penned by this editor figure. This practice, once more, leaves the door open to subsequent editions, or even entirely new collections, of these figures' work being "discovered" and published by Montejó, and this was, albeit to a lesser extent than in the case of Blas Coll, what transpired, both in Montejó's lifetime and in texts discovered since his passing. Thus, Sandoval's *Guitarra del horizonte* was expanded in 2009 and then almost doubled in size in the third volume of the *Obra completa* (MONTEJO, 2023: 99-218), a volume which also brought to light a new collection of poems by Polo, under the title *Rimario* (MONTEJO, 2023: 307-326). Meanwhile, Linden's *El hacha de seda* was amplified in 2007 in its publication as part of Montejó (2007: 119-168). Again, we have an expanding corpus that has resonances with the way in which Pessoa's work has been made known to the world since his death.

Beyond his engagement in the creation and use of heteronyms, or oblique voices, Montejó also wrote essays that engaged with heteronymy from both a historical and a theoretical perspective, most notably "Sobre la prosa de Machado" (MONTEJO, 1974: 125-34), "El arte poética de Juan de Mairena" (MONTEJO, 2012: 70-72), and "Los emisarios de la escritura oblicua" (MONTEJO, 2012: 121-128), and in these texts, as well as in the numerous interviews he gave during his life, it was on the cases of Antonio Machado and, in particular, Fernando Pessoa, that he would generally concentrate. Moreover, regarding Pessoa, Montejó also wrote more expansively, dedicating essays and poems such as "Una profecía del milenismo" (1986) and "La estatua de Pessoa" (2005 [1988]: 213-214) to the Portuguese poet, and heavily inflecting essays on Lisbon and other aspects of Portuguese culture—perhaps most notably "Las piedras de Lisboa" (2012: 91-95)—with a clear skew towards Pessoa.

⁷ Almost all Cervantes's work, as seen in his collection *La caza del relámpago* (2006), takes the form of inverted triangles, an initial line being gradually reduced to a single syllable.

⁸ The collections in question are *Partitura de la cigarra* (1999), *Papiros amorosos* (2002), and *Fábula del escriba* (2006). The limited information we are given about Silvestre, and the lack of work published in his own name, has led some critics to question whether he can properly be designated the status of heteronym in the same way as the other voices (see LÓPEZ ORTEGA and GOMES, 2021: 55-56).

And, in many ways, these texts are the most pivotal in the approach I will be taking in the subsequent sections of the present study. My interest does not lie simply in signalling parallels and similarities between Pessoaan and Montejian voices, striking though this may be. Rather, my aim is to explore some of the key concerns, tropes, and oblique directions in Montejo's and his voices' work in a way that is framed and informed by a series of Pessoaan ideas and references found primarily in the above-mentioned texts. Such an approach lays bare how the Pessoaan themes and fragments that appear in Montejo's work are not just offered up by the writer as examples of an important influence and literary precursor, for whom Montejo clearly has a great deal of affection as well as respect, but are, I believe, profoundly embedded in, and key to the development of, Montejo's own heteronymic poetics, a poetics that, whilst infused with Fernando Pessoa, pushes these motifs and ideas onto new ground, onto his ground, as a Venezuelan writer operating at the turn of the millennium.

Orpheus-Statue-Pessoa

Perhaps the most useful place to start is with what might be considered Montejo's manifesto poem, "Orfeo", which appeared in the 1972 collection *Muerte y memoria*. Leaning on the way the mythic figure straddles poetry and religion, this poem speaks of what the poet perceives to be the loss of the poetic and the sacred in the twentieth century. Orpheus:

Solo, con su perfil en mármol, pasa
por nuestro siglo tronchado y derruido
bajo la estatua rota de una fábula.

"Orfeo" (MONTEJO, 2021: 106)

This sense of loss is, to a significant extent, what is worked through in Montejo's poetry and essays, and a proper understanding of its nature is only found by reading this manifesto poem and the loss it describes within the context of this evolving Montejian discourse.⁹

Certainly, the loss of poetry itself in the second half of the twentieth century was something that characterised and plagued modern humanity for Montejo, and underpins his entire poetics. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in his essay "Poesía en un tiempo sin poesía" (MONTEJO, 2012: 11-15). The title itself should be enough by way of example, but the strength of Montejo's feelings in this regard are brought to the fore in his quoting and taking up in this essay of Nicolás Gómez Dávila's declaration that this represents one of "los dos medios siglos más hueros de poesía en muchos siglos" (MONTEJO, 2012: 11), the other being the first half of the eighteenth century. Significantly – and as intimated by the centrality of the figure of

⁹ For a thorough examination of loss in Montejo's poetry, see ROBERTS (2009).

Orpheus in his writing—, this idea goes hand in hand for Montejó with his oft-repeated assertion that the twentieth century is a time “después de los dioses” (MONTEJO, 2012: 15).¹⁰ Such a statement should not be taken, it must be noted, as a declaration of the loss of a belief in a religious deity *per se*; rather, it reflects the sense of a loss of something more generalised and spiritual, religious with a small “r”. Indeed, this is one of the central messages to emerge from one of the earliest and most important essays by Montejó, “Tornillos viejos en la máquina del poema” (MONTEJO, 1972 [1969]: 59-66), where he describes the modern poet writing “‘después de los dioses’ [...] después que lo divino ya no encarna una presencia dentro de lo cotidiano” (MONTEJO, 1972 [1969]: 61).

However, two further elements of this poetic loss also become apparent when understanding the manifesto poem within the broader context of essays such as the ones we have been examining. Firstly, if the essay “Poesía en un tiempo sin poesía” talks of our being in an era “después de los dioses” (MONTEJO, 2012: 15), it only does so as a precursor to highlighting what appears both as perhaps a more fundamental loss and, for Montejó, the direct cause of the loss of spirituality or sacredness in the world: “Hoy sabemos que hemos llegado no sólo después de los dioses, como se ha repetido, sino también después de las ciudades” (MONTEJO, 2012: 15). What Montejó means by this is essentially the loss of the cities of old, the cities prior to the hustle and bustle of the motor engine, and a relentless focus on the speed of life, cities where there was time and an invitation to contemplate—cities, that is, that were poetic:

[...] la pérdida de la ciudad como centro espiritual donde halla su arraigo privilegiado la poesía. [...] Cada poema, cada obra de arte, encarna un diálogo secreto, a menudo amoroso, con las calles y las casas, las tradiciones y los mitos de ese poema mayor que en ella se fundamenta. El París de Baudelaire, la Alejandría de Cavafy, La Lisboa de los cuatro Pessoa, se nos tornan inseparables de sus logros artísticos[.] [...] En las urbes de nuestro tiempo, rectas y grises, ya no es posible la contemplación.

(MONTEJO, 2012: 13-14)

Lisbon, Pessoa, contemplation, spirituality, poetry: terms among many here, but ones that I shall return to shortly. Crucially, the allusions to Pessoa and to Pessoa’s Lisbon are, as we shall see, far from casual.

Not unrelatedly, an additional—and key—aspect of the loss mourned by Montejó and ciphered in the figure and idea of Orpheus is that of an essential contact with nature. Thus, Montejó talks frequently of the lost oneness shared between humankind and the natural world, inventing the term *terredad* to describe this symbiotic, harmonious conjoining and resonance that he seeks to recover:¹¹

¹⁰ Among the many examples of Montejó’s use of this line, see interviews with Carmen Virginia CARRILLO (2007: 178) and RODRÍGUEZ MARCOS (2002).

¹¹ For a thorough exploration of the concept of *terredad*, see ROBERTS (2009: 136-149); also GOMES (2004).

Estar aquí en la tierra: no más lejos
que un árbol, no más inexplicables;
livianos en otoño, henchidos en verano,
con lo que somos o no somos, con la sombra,
la memoria, el deseo, hasta el fin.

“Terredad” (MONTEJO, 1978: 17)

Montejó’s poetry, then, sets itself up as a poetics that mourns the loss of Orpheus understood in all these ways, and leads to the question: is it also a poetics that envisages and attempts to bring about a return to and of Orpheus? The answer is both yes and no. For it is a poetics—and a work, indeed—that is concerned with and tries to realise a return of Orpheus, but where this is no longer the Orpheus of old, the singular, archetypal, divine poet who moves and enchants the world, makes it one with his tune. Rather, for Montejó, I would argue, the Orpheus that is to return, the Orpheus whose return he attempts to herald, is a figure who can only be understood through and as multiplicity, fragmentation, where the centrifugal thrust becomes the centripetal, that is: heteronymy. Such a conclusion does not depend upon deductive logic, observing the author’s move into a prolific—and also accelerating—heteronymic production (starting in 1981), in terms of both the number of voices and the number of texts produced by those voices, as sketched out above; it is there, written into the very terms of “Orfeo”, published before any apocryphal voice had emerged from Montejó’s pen, and written into it, specifically, in a multiple conjoining with Fernando Pessoa.¹² The poem’s title, of course—the figure of Orpheus—, immediately sends us to Pessoa via the journal *Orpheu*, which he co-founded and wrote for, and, given that particular journal’s avant-garde nature, perhaps hints at the forward- rather than backward-looking direction, of Montejó’s own understanding of this cipher.¹³ Likewise, the two “follow-up” Orphic poems in Montejó’s orthonymic work, “Orfeo revisitado” and “Máscaras de Orfeo”, from *Alfabeto del mundo* (2005 [1988]) and *Fábula del escriba* (2006), respectively, develop and deepen the alignment both with heteronymy generally and with a heteronymic understanding of the Orpheus Montejó seeks. “Orfeo revisitado” replaces the anaphoric *Orfeo* of the first poem:

¹² The 1990s and 2000s, that is, the final two decades of Montejó’s career, were when his heteronyms and their works proliferated. The evidence represented by the discoveries of the editors of the *Obra completa* (see LÓPEZ ORTEGA and GOMES, 2021: 44-57; 72-76) of numerous and extensive new heteronymic—or oblique—writings that had yet to see the light of day at the time of Montejó’s death suggests very strongly that Montejó was, if anything, continuing to increase his engagement with this form of literary production. The origins of Blas Coll, the first of the voices to emerge, can be dated back to the late 1960s, as Montejó revealed in interview with LÓPEZ ORTEGA (1999: 13), but the first publication of his work was not until 1981, as we have seen.

¹³ For a useful study of the journal *Orpheu* and the writers of the *Orpheu* generation, see SILVA (2017).

Orfeo, lo que de él queda (si queda),
 lo que aún puede cantar en la tierra,
 ¿a qué piedra, a cuál animal enternece?
 Orfeo en la noche, en esta noche
 (su lira, su grabador, su casete),
 ¿para quién mira, ausculta las estrellas?
 Orfeo, lo que en él sueña (si sueña),
 la palabra de tanto destino,
 ¿quién la recibe ahora de rodillas?

"Orfeo" (MONTEJO, 2021: 106)

with the neologism *orfear*:

Orfear aquí tal vez el hombre puede
 sólo para sí mismo en la hora atea,
 ante los otros con trucos de ventrílocuo.
 Orfear, acaso, tendido en las aceras,
 con monólogo organillo...
 (¿Qué mujer al oírlo no es Eurídice?).
 Orfear junto al mendrugo de su perro,
 cuando crece el infierno
 y el canto nace a contrasiglo.
 Orfear sin para quién, nota tras nota,
 aunque no mire estrellas en su noche
 y se enmudezca el mundo a la deriva.
 Orfear, verbo que nos declina su alto sueño,
 verbo en milagro del espíritu,
 cuando tartamudeante y roto y solitario
 paga en cantos su vida y jura a ciegas
 que tras sus pasos un ángel musicante
 va recogiendo los últimos sonidos.

"Orfeo revisitado" (MONTEJO, 2005 [1988]: 209)

This move from *Orfeo* to *orfear* thus at once alerts us to the fact that *Orfeo* could be read as the first-person singular of that verb, whilst also immediately replacing it with the neutral space of the infinitive form, no longer a marker of a singular I, or indeed of any delimited voice or speaker at all. "Máscaras de Orfeo", meanwhile, eschews any notion of a singular figure, as it recasts Orpheus in decidedly heteronymic terms with its reference to masks,¹⁴ reinforced by the poem's internal allusion to a whole host of guises for the poet that Montejo has used over the course of his literary output:

¹⁴ Octavio Paz invokes the image of masks when discussing the apocryphal voices of both Pessoa and Machado (PAZ, 1965: 143-144), whilst Montejo himself, in "Los emisarios de la escritura oblicua", invokes Oscar Wilde as he makes a clear alignment between masks and oblique voices (MONTEJO, 2012: 127).

Quizá me vuelva Orfeo definitivo,
 inconfundible con cualquiera de mis máscaras:
 de gallo, pájaro o cigarra,
 aunque prefiera ahora la de sapo.

“Máscaras de Orfeo” (MONTEJO, 2006: 35)

Finally, in the same collection as “Orfeo revisitado”, we are offered a further clear reminder and rejoinder of the earlier “Orfeo” and the broken, desolate statue of its eponymous fallen hero, in a key poem entitled “La estatua de Pessoa”:¹⁵

Son tantas sombras en un mismo cuerpo
 y debemos subirlas a la cumbre del Chiado.
 [...]

 Lo que más cuesta no es la altura de su cuerpo
 ni el largo abierto que lo envuelve,
 sino las horas del misterio
 que se repliegan pétreas en el mármol.
 Cuanto a diario soñó por estas calles
 y desoñó y volvió a soñar y desoñar;
 el tiempo refractado en voces y antivoces.

“La estatua de Pessoa” (MONTEJO, 2005 [1988]: 213-214)

Both implicitly and explicitly, the Orpheus whose return Montejo desires is disclosed to be one founded in, and inspired by, Fernando Pessoa.

House-Statue-Lisbon

The terms of “La estatua de Pessoa”’s invocation of Pessoa, though, do more than just signal an Orpheus-Pessoa identification. They also serve to tie Pessoa in with what emerges, both in Montejo’s orthonymic production and in his oblique voices, as arguably the most sustained motif through which Montejo connotes and understands the (envisioned) restitution of poetic being: the house or home, a construction of being. Blas Coll offers a particularly sharp description of what is at stake here (though a fuller understanding of what is being conveyed and ciphered in this image requires a bringing together of the way all of the voices touch upon and talk about this theme). Signalling his hope and aim for the people—whether of Puerto Malo, Venezuela, America, or the world is (significantly, as will become apparent) left unclear—, Blas Coll states:

Yo me iré un día, pero quedarán en pie los cimientos de una fundación que Vds. habrán de proseguir hasta elevarla sólidamente. Es la casa de todos, a la que cada uno debe su ladrillo. Es una casa hecha con las piedras del lugar, con el barro y las cañas del lugar, pero no será

¹⁵ DE BASTOS (2012: 199-201) elucidates several aspects of this poem that are of interest to my study.

una casa ajena donde se viva como hasta ahora, de modo tan incómodo y desguarnecido.
Será una casa para vivir en paz.

(MONTEJO, 2007: 43)

The house in question is a recasting of Nietzsche's prison-house of language into a Heideggerean home of poetry, a reading that becomes clear when we consider the wider context: Blas Coll repeatedly talks in his fragments of language as needing to be based on, and in harmony with, the nature of the place ["el lenguaje es el paisaje" (MONTEJO, 2007: 52); "una lengua es ante todo su lugar" (MONTEJO, 2007: 53)]; and Montejo, in his orthonymic poetry, refers to his desire as a poet to be an architect, to write a home, where "Alguna vez escribiré con piedras. | [...] | Estoy cansado de palabras" ["Escritura" (MONTEJO, 2005 [1988]: 223)].

Meanwhile, the heteronym Sergio Sandoval, in one of his *coplas*, referring to the traditional adobe houses of Venezuela, asks: "¿de qué hablarán los adobes | con sus palabras de barro?" ["XXXVII" (MONTEJO, 2009: 59)] and extends this image in a further *copla*, talking of roofs now, in addition to the walls:

La lluvia nunca habla nada,
quienes hablan son las tejas:
si están rotas hablan solas,
si no, con su compañera.

"III" (MONTEJO, 2009: 23)

The gloss to this *copla* makes clear that these tiles—like the bricks or stones of the walls—are language, are poetry, as Sandoval states that "Como la teja misma, nacida de la arcilla común, esta copla busca ser también sencilla y fuerte" (2009: 23).

Beyond this reiterated alignment of this construction, this home with poetry, language, nature synthesised as one, it is important to note the insistent reference to its plurality, both in the sense that we are all called to contribute to its construction, and in the sense that we are all to live inside it. This is exactly what the poem "La estatua de Pessoa" signals in its references to Pessoa's statue as a body within which so many live: "Son tantas sombras en un mismo cuerpo" (MONTEJO, 2005 [1988]: 213). In other words, Pessoa, in that poem, acts as the meeting point of the poetics of Orpheus, the Orphic statue whose restitution is so desired, and the motif of the poetic home of authentic identity, of an authentic being. The new Orpheus — the new statue — is the new home. In so doing, this Pessoa poem discloses that, just as Montejo's Orpheus comes to be understood heteronymically, so is the poetic home, whose construction is envisioned and pined after across his voices, revealed not simply to be a poetic one. It is—specifically and insistent in Montejo and his voices—a heteronymic one. The implications are clear: it is by exploring this fusion of the Pessoa (heteronymic) world and the Montejian home in more detail that both the genesis and the nature of the latter can thus start to be understood more accurately.

Such an analytical path is evidently a potentially lengthy one, but we might start the journey by taking up two of the elements that I have signalled in the preceding sections of the present article: stones and Lisbon. Both of these components are the subject matter of an important, though understudied, essay by Montejó called precisely “Las piedras de Lisboa” (MONTEJO, 2012: 91-95). For Montejó, the stones in question are the heart of the city:

A la hora de nombrarla [Lisboa] no le seríamos fiel del todo si no empezamos por sus piedras, por lo que éstas singularizan del espíritu de la ciudad. Todas sus calles están cubiertas de pequeñas piedras combinadas mediante una artesanía meticulosa que el viajero puede contemplar dondequiera que vaya.

(MONTEJO, 2012: 91)

Extending this further, he sees the mosaics that figure on the walls of so many edifices in the Portuguese capital as the vertical continuation of the stones of its streets, as he declares that “los signos de esta ‘gramática de piedras’ [...] no sólo se encuentra [*sic.*] en el suelo, también de allí se elevan para recubrir fachadas y paredes mediante el empleo de los característicos azulejos” (MONTEJO, 2012: 93). Crucially, the way he interprets these stones feeds into and significantly deepens and develops—informs, in fact—our understanding of what stones *per se* in Montejó’s work mean, why they are so powerful, and, I would contend, offers us a potential source for his entire poetics of the essential construction of a poetic home from such stones, as intimated by the linguistic terms he employs in the above quotation.¹⁶ The central strand of Montejó’s reading of Lisbon’s stones is, for this reason alone, worth exploring in full.

After stating that “Las piedras al fin y al cabo son signos con los que algo sabido o no sabido viene a decirse” (MONTEJO, 2012: 92), Montejó goes on to link the city’s stones in with what he sees as a key characteristic of the Portuguese language, declaring that “[un rasgo del portugués] tal vez pueda arrojar alguna luz sobre la significación que nos ocupa. Me refiero a la forma pronominal mediante la cual el hablante se dirige oblicuamente a su interlocutor. Se trata del llamado *pronombre de tratamiento*” (MONTEJO, 2012: 92), in other words, the use of *o senhor* / *a senhora* to refer to the second person. For Montejó, “se trata de un recurso que introduce una zona neutra, un ámbito indefinido que, por menos concreto, confiere a la persona designada cierto atributo intemporal” (MONTEJO, 2012: 92-93). Mapping this onto the city, Eugenio Montejó describes the be-stoned Lisbon as a place steeped in and defined by these traits: a different relation to time, to person, to being from that found in other cities:

¹⁶ For a thorough account of the way stones are used in Montejó’s work and their place in his poetics of construction, see ROBERTS (2009: 184-203). This represents an amended version of ROBERTS (2004).

El verdadero lisboeta suscribiría sin reparos la afirmación [...] de que es la contemplación, no la acción la que da origen a todas las cosas. [...] Su aspecto apacible, su apariencia de otro tiempo, se gana la simpatía del viajero que procede de sitios gobernados por la prisa mecánica y las conductas automáticas. [...] Lisboa resulta siempre oblicua a quien la interroga; nos habla como quien a otro se dirige; se vale de la tercera persona. [...] Al igual que en su trato los antiguos practicantes budistas y cristianos se prohibían la mención expresa del yo, [...] en Lisboa hemos de aguzar el oído para saber cuándo lo que creemos ajeno nos concierne.

(MONTEJO, 2012: 93-94)

These lines, that is, underscore that, for Montejo, Lisbon is the symbol—even the location—of the city more generally that we have seen him to refer to and desire for humanity as a whole in “Poesía en un tiempo sin poesía”, and that that city is thus disclosed as being a heteronymic space: the neutral zone, the use of the third person, the challenge to the notion of the I, the expansion of what we understand as our being, even the allusion in these lines to obliqueness, a nod towards Montejo’s preferred “oblique writing” formulation.

It is little wonder, then, that Montejo sees Lisbon, let us recall, as being inseparable from the work of “los cuatro Pessoa” (MONTEJO, 2012: 14); little wonder that Montejo’s vision of Lisbon is, in short, indelibly inflected by Pessoa and by his heteronymic praxis. Indeed, Montejo returns once more to Pessoa in this essay on Lisbon, when he talks of how:

Afirmaba Pessoa que los portugueses, una vez cumplida la hazaña de descubrir el camino a la India, se habían replegado sobre sí mismos para no hacer nada después. Más allá del efecto que procuran las palabras del poeta, cabría explicarse tan ensimismamiento por la contemplación de su capital, por ese culto tan hondo del arraigo que dio origen a la palabra *saudade*.

(MONTEJO, 2012: 93)

He also refers specifically to the philosopher Eduardo Lourenço’s affirmation regarding Pessoa, that “su sola presencia ha cambiado [...] nuestra imagen de Lisboa” (MONTEJO, 2012: 95).

The point of note here, as signalled by the elements of Montejo’s work I have been discussing, is that Lisbon and Pessoa are conflated and equated as ciphers for the home Montejo seeks. Indeed, this conflation is pointed up by the reference in “La estatua de Pessoa” to Pessoa’s bones as “vuelos ya piedras llenas de saudades” (MONTEJO, 2005 [1988]: 213), its resonance with the lines from “Las piedras de Lisboa”, that I have just cited, evident. Lisbon and Pessoa each emphasise certain traits of that home (its Orphic nature in the case of the Pessoa-statue; the time for and of contemplation in the case of the city of Lisbon, for example), which is to say that Lisbon and Pessoa are one and the same, whilst each bringing something different to our understanding. We might, perhaps, even allow ourselves to say that they are both heteronyms, or oblique voices, of the Montejian poetic home.

Mirrors

The discussion thus far has offered an account of some of the ways in which Pessoa, his praxis, his plurality, Lisbon—his Lisbon—are echoed by and infused into Montejo's thought, writing and ideas. Nevertheless, this should not be taken to imply that the latter represents a derivative poetics that fails to add its own voice. On the contrary, what we see in Montejo's work is an incorporation of Pessoa and Pessoaan resonances into a *new* envisioning of heteronymy, of oblique writing. Once more, a full exploration of the particularities of Montejo's concept and conceptualisation of this literary practice lies beyond the scope of a single article, but a useful starting point for signalling key elements of his vision is found in the motif of the mirror, a motif which exemplifies and indeed grounds the move from Pessoaan heteronymy (or heteronymism) to Montejian oblique writing. It is to this motif that I should like to turn in the remaining part of this study.

Montejo's essay "Las piedras de Lisboa" and his insistent entwining of Lisbon and Pessoa recall several poems by Pessoa and his voices, perhaps the most significant of these for my present purposes being "Lisbon Revisited (1926)", by Álvaro de Campos. It is a poem in many ways more in tune with Montejo's own (orthonymic) poetry of lament at the disjuncture between the Caracas and Valencia of his childhood and youth and that which confronts him as he contemplates all that is now irredeemably past,¹⁷ and offers a very different vision of Lisbon to that which Montejo sets out in the texts we have been looking at thus far. Whilst this points towards a far more extensive and nuanced interplay between Pessoa and Montejo, the poem, nevertheless, contains a key allusion that we can relate to the heteronymic vision that Montejo builds from pieces such as "Las piedras de Lisboa", in the guise of the mirror in its final lines:

Outra vez te revejo,
Mas, ai, a mim não me revejo!
Partiu-se o espelho mágico em que me revia idêntico,
E em cada fragmento fatídico vejo só um bocado de mim —
Um bocado de ti e de mim!...

(PESSOA, 1984: 216)

This, in turn, resonates with and brings to mind one of the most well-known statements by Pessoa himself, a statement, we might add in passing, that dovetails with Montejo's depiction of Pessoa as a home that, to paraphrase Walt Whitman, contains multitudes: "Sinto-me múltiplo. Sou como um quarto com inúmeros espelhos fantásticos que torcem para reflexões falsas uma única anterior realidade que não está

¹⁷ For a detailed examination of this lamenting and disjuncture in Montejo's work, see ROBERTS (2009: 42; 160-207).

em nenhuma e está em todas” (PESSOA, 1966: 93). Lisbon and Pessoa — the two ciphers that inform Montejo’s vision — are defined as and seen in mirrors. What is more, Montejo takes up this specular reference in his most focused essay on Pessoa, entitled “Una profecía del milenismo”, stating that “Pessoa es un espejo nítido pero múltiple, un espejo que, a su manera, desde muchas perspectivas nos rehace” (MONTEJO, 1986: 37).

The mirror motif is a complex and hugely significant one in Montejo’s work, developed over decades, and is the subject of a longer forthcoming study. Nevertheless, there are key elements of it that we can already start to highlight, so as to link and consider them in relation to the aforementioned depictions of Lisbon and, in particular, Pessoa. The mirror we find in “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, like Pessoa’s self-description, speaks of multiplicity: fragments of a shattered mirror and numerous separate mirrors, respectively. Montejo’s own specular depiction of Pessoa, cited above, also leans on this idea of multiple mirrors, but, somewhat confusingly, also refers to him as a single mirror. It is the first indication of a shift into the emerging Montejian specular discourse of heteronymy, a shift that culminates in his definition of oblique writing as being “en cierto modo, [...] una escritura en espejo” (MONTEJO, 2012: 122), a line which underscores how important this motif is for understanding both Montejo’s conceptualisation of heteronymy and the dialogue that is thus set up between this and the specular references to Lisbon and Pessoa on which I have drawn. And, appropriately enough, it is in *El cuaderno de Blas Coll* that we find arguably the most important and instructive texts in these regards. The passages in question concern Diego Velázquez’s famous painting *Las meninas*, and read as follows:

Lo grandioso de Velázquez en *Las Meninas* radica casi todo en la sintaxis de la composición. Allí vemos, o se nos hace ver, el yo en tercera persona. Nadie había imitado antes con tanta astucia el arte de la naturaleza, que nos envuelve en su espejo para reflejarnos desde todos los ángulos.

(Otra línea suya comenta: El famoso cuadro *Las Meninas* constituye una muy acabada ilustración de la frase pictórica elaborada en voz pasiva.)

(MONTEJO, 2007: 70)

This is, to be sure, a rich fragment that requires significant exegesis, but immediately a number of elements here speak eloquently and meaningfully to the present analysis. For one, the reference to this painting-mirror as giving us ourselves in the third person resonates with Montejo’s depiction and understanding of Lisbon, alerting us to the common heteronymic grounding and concerns of Montejo’s essay, Coll’s fragment, and this work of art, as analysed by Coll.

A consideration of the particularities of *Las meninas*, then, allows us to expand our understanding of how the mirror motif put forward by Coll here relates to and advances a new approach to heteronymy. Significantly, it is a painting that denies the viewer a centre. As Leo Steinberg says, “the picture’s focal center keeps shifting.

Ask where the center is, and the answer returned by the picture is not any one point, nor any two, but three and four; it depends on what you are centering" (STEINBERG, 1981: 51). Again, the resonances with heteronymy and with Montejó's oblique writing are manifest, in this instance, in the denial of a clear hierarchy or central figure, the undermining of the notion of the centrality of the orthonym being a notable aspect of the practice of both Pessoa and Montejó.¹⁸ But what about us, the viewer, the subject outside the painting? Do the numerous gazes towards us from the different personages on the canvas all serve to "form" us, as onlookers? Is there a central point outwith the painting? The short answer is: no. Several critics have argued convincingly that the painting lacks a clear vanishing point, with Amy Schmitter (SCHMITTER, 1996: 260), for example, demonstrating that the picture has, rather, a vague zone of numerous possible vanishing points. In other words, it is a painting—a mirror—that denies us a stable position. Coll might claim that the painting reflects us from all angles, but it does so in a way that splays those reflections out and fails to bring them together at a single point. In short, in contrast to Pessoa's specular metaphor, it denies the existence of "uma única anterior realidade" (PESSOA, 1966: 93). Rather, all we are left with is the surface of the canvas with its numerous figures, that is to say—following Coll's hermeneutics—the surface of the mirror, the surface, given the common grounding I have proposed, of the "escritura en espejo" (MONTEJO, 2012: 122): oblique writing with its myriad oblique voices. And this, in turn, reiterates and highlights the importance of the other crucial shift alluded to above: from each voice, each subject position as being the result of a reflection in a different mirror or mirror fragment ["inúmeros espelhos" (PESSOA, 1966: 93)], to seeing the *practice* of writing obliquely as being a single mirror, which produces numerous angles, numerous reflections, numerous voices.

Conclusion

Returning to "Una profecía de milenismo", the nature of the prophecy that Montejó saw in Pessoa is striking. For Montejó, it is "como si su voz fuera de las más próximas a cierta identidad común que procuramos revelarnos" (MONTEJO, 1986: 37), where "el arte de Fernando Pessoa encarna [...] una clara profecía [...] del *milenismo*" (MONTEJO, 1986: 39), that is to say, a new sense of being that Montejó saw as being inevitably required and desired by humankind at the turn of the then upcoming millennium. For Montejó, Pessoa's work signals and contains within it a vision for a future understanding of identity. Crucially, though, Montejó does not couch this in terms of the way in which each of us is to perceive our individual identity; it is far

¹⁸ On the lack of clear hierarchical order in Montejó, see ROBERTS (2017: 31). In the case of Pessoa, as Morris puts it, "Pessoa destroys the possibility that a hierarchy of authorship might exist between the heteronyms, semi-heteronyms, and the architect of the heteronymic system" (MORRIS, 2014: 135).

more expansive: “cierta identidad común” (MONTEJO, 1986: 37). And this is much more in line, I would suggest, with the vision of heteronymy’s role and nature that emerges from Montejo’s *own* praxis and that this study has sought to disclose, both explicitly and implicitly.

The implications of this vision, however, can be—and demand to be—pushed further. Notably, the singular mirror of Montejo’s oblique writing suggests a less clear delineation between voices: not produced by individual mirrors or mirror fragments, but by the same mirror, each voice thus segueing into others. This is what we see in Montejo’s own oblique family: individual voices where each one exists in its own right, but also blurs, overlaps, has a closeness with others, as we have seen Blas Coll to overlap with Fernando Pessoa. Indeed, that example is pertinent, for the merging, the porosity we have in Montejo’s voices repeatedly and insistently involves other figures—real and apocryphal—and not just the other voices of Montejo’s pen: Sergio Sandoval was a devoted reader of Antonio Machado and talks of the latter’s apocryphal voice Juan de Mairena with genuine fondness (SANDOVAL, 2009: 26), hinting at a closeness between them; Tomás Linden appears, we are informed, in a photograph on a yacht with Maqroll el Gaviero, heteronym of the Colombian poet Álvaro Mutis (LINDEN, 1995: 13), suggestive of a bond between the two figures; Lino Cervantes, meanwhile, is strongly influenced by the work of Paul Valéry (MONTEJO, 2007: 182), an author, we might note, who also wrote under the imaginary persona Monsieur Teste, as Montejo was, of course, well aware (MONTEJO, 2012: 122). It may be, as I have argued, that oblique writing is a term that reflects and refers to Montejo’s particular form of heteronymic practice, but the implication of that practice could not be more wide-reaching: every single voice in the world—real or heteronymic—comes to be seen as a potential product of the mirror of oblique writing; every single voice is in some way connected, is in some way a part of a common identity. And each writer who writes is contributing their voice to a universal voice, a universal identity, adding their stone, their words to the universal home that is who we are as a collective identity and being. Each writer who writes, then, is not just an individual figure, but one who inevitably and necessarily resonates in and through—is conjoined with—each and every other. And is this not exactly how Fernando Pessoa appears in Montejo’s work? He is a figure, an individual, the subject of essays, the essential literary precursor, but he is also a presence in numerous other aspects of Montejo’s work: he is there in Blas Coll, he is there in the image of the home, of Orpheus, of the Orphic statue, in Lisbon with its stones and mosaics. He is, one might say, an exemplary oblique voice of Eugenio Montejo: present, pervasive and porous.

“Sê plural como o universo!” (PESSOA, 1966: 94), wrote Fernando Pessoa. In Montejo’s oblique writing, the universe—or universal identity—is, ultimately, the only way we can truly understand ourselves. Oblique writing is the response — and has been the response throughout Montejo’s work—to the sense of loss that Montejo

experiences and vocalises not just on a personal level, as he laments the passing of the quasi-rural, sacred past, the passing of the age of the poetic, but on a universal level: Orpheus, the poet of the world; the poetic house, which is, Blas Coll tells us, “de todos” (MONTEJO, 2007: 43); the city of Lisbon, described by Montejo as one which brings together “realidades opuestas, la presencia y la ausencia, la memoria y el olvido, la vida y la muerte” (MONTEJO, 2012: 95), exactly as envisioned by his own term *terredad*, which Guillermo Sucre describes as “un ritmo, un dinamismo, en que la vida entera participa”, which “acog[e] lo material y lo inmaterial, lo concreto y lo virtual” (SUCRE, 1985: 311). Universal terms for the being Montejo seeks, pines after, all ciphered, as this study has shown, in and as oblique writing. In other words, Pessoa’s call to “be plural like the universe” is transformed through Montejo into a call for a fundamental realisation that each individual’s—each voice’s—identity can only be fully realised as and through every other voice, and that each individual, each voice thus itself also participates in—and is a part of—the identity of every other voice in the world. And in that case, not only is Fernando Pessoa an essential oblique voice of Eugenio Montejo, but maybe Eugenio Montejo is also, in turn, an essential heteronym of Fernando Pessoa.

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NICHOLAS ROBERTS. Associate Professor at Durham University, UK. He has published extensively on the work of Eugenio Montejó, including the monograph *Poetry and Loss: The Work of Eugenio Montejó* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009). He also works on the Argentine author Julio Cortázar, and recently published the monograph *Julio Cortázar and Music* (Oxford: Legenda, 2019).

NICHOLAS ROBERTS. Professor Associado na Universidade de Durham, no Reino Unido. Tem publicado extensivamente sobre a obra de Eugenio Montejó, incluindo a monografia *Poetry and Loss: The Work of Eugenio Montejó* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009). Trabalha também sobre o autor argentino Julio Cortázar, e publicou recentemente a monografia *Julio Cortázar and Music* (Oxford: Legenda, 2019).