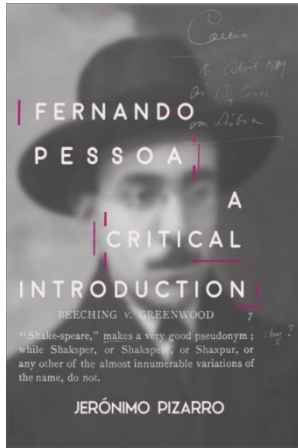


Pessoa, multiple and posthumous

[Pessoa, múltiplo e póstumo]

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PIZARRO, Jerónimo (2021). *Fernando Pessoa: A Critical Introduction*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press. [ISBN: 978-1-78976-069-9]



In *Fernando Pessoa: A Critical Introduction* (Sussex Academic Press, 2021) Jerónimo Pizarro has written a book in which the exceptional breadth of his knowledge and extraordinary insight into Pessoaan scholarship is brought to bear with great effect. The book is a magisterial survey of issues to do with the textuality, interpretation, and reception of Pessoa's work as these issues have evolved in the course of more than half a century. It is not a simple introduction to Pessoa but rather a critical synopsis of the state of the field in Pessoaan studies, and as such is of tremendous value.

The structure of the book is extremely logical. We have chapters exploring the themes of plurality and unity, then of interpretation and heteronymism. These are followed by chapters devoted to Pessoa's three most famous poetic heteronyms, Alberto Caetano, Álvaro de Campos and Ricardo Reis, and a separate chapter on the prose novel *The Book of Disquiet*. There are then chapters on multiplicity and contradiction. The book concludes with three valuable and important special topics: Omar Khayyam, Pessoa's posterity, and finally eleven texts written by Pessoa in English.

It would be impossible for me, in a brief book notice, to do justice to the extraordinary range of Pizarro's scholarship. Let me therefore pick out two representative chapters to give the flavor of the discussion. Chapter 1 leads the reader through the complexities of the discussion about the plurality of Pessoa, that is to say, whether Pessoa is "One, No One, or One Hundred Thousand" (p. 1). Pizarro does so by reviewing the work of three Pessoa scholars, each of whom has defended one of these positions. The first is Jacinto do Prado Coelho, who published a book, entitled *Diversidade e Unidade em Fernando Pessoa* in 1949. Prado Coelho defended the view that there exists "psychic unity in polymorphy" (p. 3), and Pizarro seems to be more sympathetic to this reading than either those of a "null Pessoa" or a "multiple poet", which he goes on to discuss next. The next work of scholarship to be discussed is Leyla Perrone-Moisés' *Fernando Pessoa, Aquém do Eu, Além do Outro*. Published in

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1982, this book defends the view that Pessoa is a “vacuum-person”, someone who “had annulled himself and could no longer return to a unitary self” (p. 5). As Pizarro puts it, “in 1974 [Perrone-Moisés] asked herself if Pessoa was nothing. This is a question that cannot be separated from the general questions about the work of Fernando Pessoa” (p. 6). Pizarro’s exemplar of the “multiple poet” hypothesis is a book by Teresa Rita Lopes entitled *Pessoa por Conhecer*. Pizarro is admirably firm that one does not need to appeal to the psychiatric diagnosis of Pessoa as a schizophrenic in order to acknowledge his multiplicity, and that is why he prefers Teresa Rita Lopes over, for example Mário Saraiva’s *O Caso Clínico de Fernando Pessoa*, which was published in the same year. Pizarro’s own stance on the question “Who is Pessoa?” is that, as he puts it, “I believe Fernando Pessoa was and was not One, No One and a Hundred Thousand” (p. 9), because the three answers refer, respectively, to Pessoa the living human being, Pessoa the literary invention, and Pessoa in his posthumous reception.

Let me now turn to Chapter 11, which is devoted to Omar Khayyam. This chapter illustrates the sensitivity and insight with which Pizarro handles issues of ambiguous authorship and intertextual reception, as well as about the nature of translation and the role of editors in the constitution of texts. The books published by the Victorian writer Edward FitzGerald, entitled *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, cannot in any sense be viewed simply as a translation of Omar Khayyam’s Persian quatrains into English, but is FitzGerald’s free poetic creation in some way loosely related to them. As Jorge Luis Borges would comment, “a miracle happens [...] [there] emerges an extraordinary poet who does not resemble either [Khayyam or FitzGerald]” (p. 128). The works therefore are examples of multiple authorship, all further complicated by the fact that FitzGerald worked from multiple manuscripts, whose poems are not all authentically those of Khayyam, and also by the fact that FitzGerald published not one but four editions of his text, each time altering and expanding “his” poems. As Pizarro puts it, in reference to FitzGerald’s Omar, “both the book and the person of the author were posthumously constructed” (p. 128), and, again, that “a wonderful fact about the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is that it is a book of books, a “multiple book” (p. 130). Pizarro observes how each editor has also contributed to construction of a new book. Indeed, just as every edition of *The Book of Disquiet* produces its own ordering and selection of the fragments which constitute that text, and in doing so creates a new *Book of Disquiet*, so too, Pizarro observes, “editors build different Khayyam’s depending on the documents they consider genuine and the ones they do not think authentic” (p. 134).

For Pessoa, it was exactly this protean character that attracted him, and, evidently fascinated by these collections of quatrains, he continued the process of authorial fabrication. Besides preparing “translations” in Portuguese of some of FitzGerald’s verses, Pessoa composed additional quatrains of his own, and also planned to write an essay on Khayyam. Pessoa comments on this literary endeavor,

“I translated them, as FitzGerald did, with fair, honest dishonesty” (p. 133). I shall conclude my review by noting still another example of the “emergence of an extraordinary poet” who is neither of the original authors, and example not mentioned by Pizarro.

In his copy of Rabindranath Tagore’s collection of poems *Gitanjali and Fruit-Gathering* (1922), Pessoa translates the final lines of poem VIII with the following verses. Tagore’s original reads:

*Be ready to launch forth, my heart! and let those linger who must.
For your name has been called in the morning sky.
Wait for none!*

*The desire of the bud is for the night and dew, but the brown flower cries for the freedom of light.
Burst your sheath, my heart, and come forth!*

After reading this, Pessoa wrote:

O desejo do botão é a noite e o orvalho
Mas a flor chora por a luz livre
Rompe a bainha meu coração, e emerge!

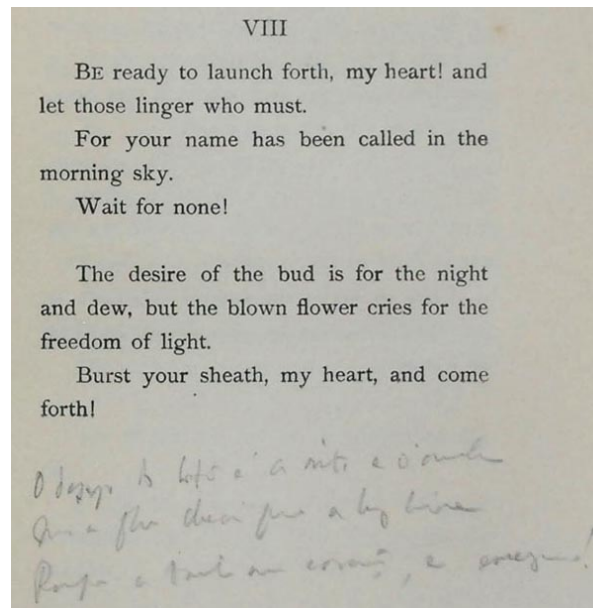


Fig. 1. *Gitanjali and Fruit-Gathering* (1922).

Every chapter in this book is similarly rich in the insightful way that materials from Pessoa are deployed to make exciting contributions to contemporary topics in literary theory. Jerónimo Pizarro’s *Fernando Pessoa: A Critical Introduction* is a very fine book indeed, a must-read for scholars and students of Fernando Pessoa.

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