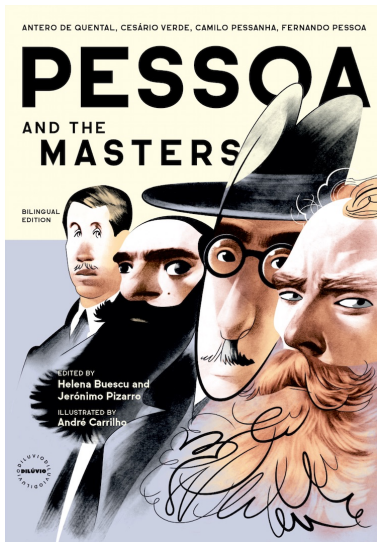


Pessoa, Antero, Cesário, Camilo: A new anthology in English

[Pessoa, Antero, Cesário, Camilo:
Uma nova antologia em tradução inglesa]

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Pessoa and the Masters: Antero de Quental, Cesário Verde, Camilo Pessanha, Fernando Pessoa (2024). Edition and introduction, Helena Buescu e Jerónimo Pizarro. Translation, Jamie Rising, Jeffrey Childs. Illustration, André Carrilho. Lisboa: Dilúvio. 368 pp. [ISBN: 978-989-53657-6-0].



Pessoa and the Masters (2024), organized in Portugal by comparatist specialists Helena Buescu and Jerónimo Pizarro, relies on documents researched in the archive of Fernando Pessoa in which he comments on three major Portuguese poets of the 19th century, one of whom was his contemporary. These documents, reproduced in images, underwrite the volume's core concept as a comparative study connecting Pessoa to the three poets. At the same time, this large volume (368 pp.) is primarily a bi-lingual anthology of poetry by the three poets named in Pessoa's documents, presented chronologically, Antero de Quental (1842-91), Cesário Verde (1855-86), and Camilo Pessanha (1867-1926), who are the masters of the title. Some of the English translations of Antero by Pessoa that he left unfinished are completed in the anthology.

A major contribution of this book is to assemble new translations of the poetry of three major poets who deserve more attention in literary studies, and to do it through the attention given to them by Pessoa. Thus, Portugal's most famous 20th century poet, Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), frames and enhances the presentation of his predecessors in the anthology. The revelation of unknown documents from Pessoa's archive describing the three poets will attract English-language readers who follow Pessoa, with the laudable aim of encouraging them to read these major Portuguese poets, encouraged by the direct link to Pessoa, although knowledgeable readers of Pessoa will certainly have already done so. Perhaps the Pessoa name in the title will attract the curious reader who has simply heard of Pessoa and will be enticed by the wider frame to delve deeper?

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Balanced between research, translation, and poems in Portuguese, the anthology is directed both to the specialist and the newcomer. A more questionable implicit assumption is whether Pessoa's work is more dependent on these three poets than scholarship has previously admitted. In order to emphasize the connection between the poets in this anthology and Pessoa, his poetry is added to the others in the anthology as if he were the fourth "master," an editorial decision that some readers may find to disturb the title, which distinguishes Pessoa as an observer and critic of the other three, rather than their poetic "disciple" or follower. The thematic and stylistic features found in common among their works, detailed in the preface, may be features of the period rather than direct influences stemming from Pessoa's reading and admiration of these notable predecessors.

There are ample justifications for this publication in Portuguese, both historical and textual, as a comparative study that places the Fernando Pessoa's poetics in the wider historical context of Portuguese poetry. As a poet in Portuguese language, Pessoa can comfortably be joined with this group of illustrious poets of embryonic modernity, two of whom immediately preceded him and one whom he met, who was two decades older and lived in Macau. Pessoa's works gain by being read in the historical context of his contemporaries, and *Pessoa and the Masters* emphasizes their ties by reproducing the index of a poetry anthology that Pessoa planned, but never completed, featuring multiple titles by these three poets, along with many of their contemporaries in Portugal, and three of Pessoa's heteronyms. Doubtless, he had very high regard for the three, even placing them alongside his own heteronyms as if to promote them.

The most important piece of evidence reproduced in the volume, and a crucial support for the overall project, is an undated one-page typescript (page 34) in which Pessoa names the three poets as masters: "Houve em Portugal, no seculo dezanove, trez poetas, e trez somente, a quem legitimamente compete a designação de mestres." He attributes to them the stylistic rubrics of "metaphysical" (Antero), "objective" (Cesário), and "vague and impressive" (Camilo), used in the anthology. Beyond the individual poets, Pessoa's focus in this document is the fate of masters and the nature of celebrity, of which these three are examples, and he notes that all three suffer "a sorte normal dos mestres – a incompreensão em vida." Pessoa's final paragraph reveals that his main concern goes much beyond celebrity to immortality, when he makes this comparison: "A celebridade consiste numa adaptação ao meio; a imortalidade de adaptação a todos os meios." Here, Pessoa makes a crucial distinction which, at least in his long-range literary plans, distinguishes, or will distinguish him as a thinker and poet from the other three "who can be considered masters." They are celebrities, yet we may read, mere celebrities, far from immortal, since they adapted, and exceptionally well, to the literary forms in which they were writing; whereas Pessoa's literary plan, as he proclaimed, was to be all literatures, for which by implication he would deserve to be called immortal.

While Pessoa distinguishes Antero, Cesário, and Camilo as masterful Portuguese poets on his typed comments about each, his concern in the one-page document is philosophical, even sociological, about the nature of celebrity and immortality in literature. Notwithstanding the admiring separate descriptions he penned on Antero and Cesário—some dating from his last decade—and the admiring letter addressing Camilo, whom he met in Lisbon before *Orpheu*, he could not properly be considered their disciple. If they are masters, he is something more.

Here arise other considerations when placing Pessoa in the sequence of these master poets in Portuguese language: Pessoa implies a difference from them, in this same document, by commenting on other poets also deserving to be called masters, when he names Byron, Wordsworth, Milton, and Shakespeare. As pertinent as the three Portuguese poets may be for Pessoa, he only read them attentively, eventually translating parts of their works, after returning to Portugal in 1905, long after his literary education in English to the age of 17 in Durban, Natal Province, in Durban High School. Were not his primary masters the authors of volumes of poetry that he studied there and available in his library? Add Keats, Tennyson, and Coleridge to the names cited in the document, among the primary masters, as evidenced by their influence on more than 100 early poems from 1905-1909 signed “Alexander Search.” On his return voyage from Durban, he is said to have carried with him only the complete works of Shakespeare. To place Pessoa in the line-up of masterful Portuguese poets is a necessary and useful addition to our understanding of his literary world and background, yet to cast him as the fourth poet in this grouping may have the effect of confining Pessoa to the historical context of Portuguese language poetry, whereas his poetic education was in English, and he continued to be a bilingual poet at least until 1920. Here again, after his return to Portugal, Pessoa was something more, perhaps even a young English Victorian poet in exile in Lisbon. Such condition would support comparison with Camilo, who abandoned Portugal earlier, in 1896, to spend the last thirty years of his life in Macau.

The presentation of the bi-lingual poems in the anthology is unusual. It intentionally divides all the poems by page: one page in Portuguese followed by a page of its translation, thereby dividing all of the poems by every other page in each language. While this arrangement certainly aids immediate comparison between the original and the translation, for some readers subdivision of the poetry may distract from unity and coherence of reading each poem.

The anthology features new rhymed translations by Jamie Rising and Jeffrey Childs. While the obligation to rhyme often works very successfully, at times it must rely on some unusual English vocabulary, such as “pernickety,” “sooth,” “bedewment,” and “dayspring.” More intrusive for the Antero translations is the imposition of an English style seemingly more appropriate to Shakespearean or renaissance poetry than to Antero, being full of second person—“ye,” “splitteth,” “showeth”—and with added expressions not in the original to fill out the meter. Antero’s use of lan-

guage, as Pessoa's, is simpler and more direct in Portuguese than this style of English verse. To maintain rhyme and rhythm at times also requires further complicating the original: Pessoa's "maresia" becomes "salt perfume," while Cesário's line, "Meu velho professor nas aulas de latim!" is translated "my old schoolteacher, who instructed me in Latin!"

Some of the rhymes pop out in English, altering the rhythmic effect, such as the use of the rhyme "sag / drag" in Pessoa's "Opiário" for "estiola / consola" in the first stanza, reducing the number of syllables from three to one to strident effect. Some of the solutions are stretches ("I olfact" for the noun "o olfato"), while use of italicized French words (*foison, jalousies*) does emphasize Antero's Victorian atmosphere. Notwithstanding these challenges, the impressive amount of poetry newly translated is itself testimony to the attention, labor, and talents of the translators, whose work will certainly be read favorably alongside other recent translations of these poets, adding to the surge of interest that this volume represents.

All of the poems have previous translations. Books dedicated exclusively to Antero's poems in English include *Sixty-four Sonnets*, trans. Edgar Prestage (London: David Nutt, 1894); *Sonnets and Poems of Anthero de Quental*, trans. S. Griswold Morley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1922); *Sixty-four Sonnets Englished*, intro. Queirós Mattoso (Legare Street Press, 2023); and *Sonnets and Selected Poems*, ed. Onésimo Almeida and Marco Pereira (University of Massachusetts Press, Series Bellis Azorica, 2023), the latter featuring eight translators, including Pessoa. Previous translations of poems by Cesário and Camilo are listed in the bibliography on pages 366-367.

Pessoa and the Masters features some striking original illustrations by artist André Carrilho. The documents from the Pessoa archive presented in this attractive volume establish a line of modernity in Portuguese poetry acknowledged by the master of masters.