**Pessoa, Fernando António Nogueira de Seabra (1888-1935)**

Fernando Pessoa was Portugal’s most important literary figure of the first half of the twentieth century, a major contributor to European modernism and one of the 26 fundamental authors of the Western tradition in Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon* (1994). An incisive critic and thinker, he created a literary project that erased personal authorship, producing not individual works but an entire literature, and fragmenting his writing into multiple heteronyms, or authors, who recast genres taken from throughout Western literature. After Pessoa’s death in 1935, relatives found 25,000 manuscript pages in a wooden trunk in his small apartment; these are now the object of an editorial team at Lisbon’s National Library. He considered himself to be a dramatist of being. Among the writings of his lifetime project are several masterworks of modern literature. Pessoa in the 21st century has reached the status of a literary cult figure.

**Timeline of Life**

**1888 1895 1905 1915 1919-29 1935**

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born in Lisbon Moves to South Returns to Lisbon Publishes Courts Ophelia Dies in

Africa in ORPHEU Queiroz Lisbon

**Timeline of Works Published During Lifetime**

**1915 1917 1922 1924-5 1934**

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*The Mariner ULTIMATUM Anarchist Odes of Ricardo Reis Message*

*Maritime Ode Banker The Keeper of Sheep*

After his father Joaquim de Seabra Pessoa died in 1893 and his mother, Maria Madalena Pinheiro Nogueira, remarried in 1895, Pessoa spent his childhood through high school education in Durban, South Africa. Pessoa gained an education and daily life in English, studying the major authors of English literature throughout high school. After visiting Portugal and the Azores in 1901-02, he returned to South Africa where he received the "Queen Victoria Memorial Prize" for literary composition and applied unsuccessfully for a university scholarship in England. Returning to Lisbon alone in 1905, the young and brilliant anglophile became an exile in his own country and city. There, he began a bilingual literary life that he would lead unaltered and almost without leaving the city (among his works is a guide to Lisbon, *Lisbon: What the Tourist Should See*). He bought a printing press and unsuccessfully tried to start the Empresa Ibis; he took partial employment as translator of commercial correspondence while living with relatives or in rented rooms; and he prepared his first important literary works.

It was during this period that Pessoa had the illumination of full-fledged heteronyms in what he called his “triumphal day.” These were literary personalities complete with biographical backgrounds, interpersonal rivalries, and styles selected from contrasting periods in Western literatures. They included his closest heteronym, the “engineer” Álvaro de Campos, who sought publication and reviews in England, Alberto Caeiro, author of the metaphysical sequence of poems titled “Guardador de Rebanhos” [Keeper of Sheep], Ricardo Reis, who penned hundreds of Horatian odes, and Bernardo Soares, the purported author of the biographical *Livro de Desassossego* [*Book of Disquietude*]. Pessoa also prepared three books of poetry in English: *Antinous: A Poem* and *35 Sonnets* (Lisbon, Monteiro, 1918) and *English Poems I-II* and English Poems *III* *Epithalamium* (Lisbon, Olisipo, 1921) containing poems that could not have been published in Portuguese at that time. There is ample evidence that he was reading widely, adding Whitman and Poe to his major influences as well as criticism and ethnography, classical and European literatures, and Greek and German philosophers. He lived a simple life, working as a commercial translator when necessary and planning his literary project with colleagues in the cafés of Lisbon. At his death, he left more than 25,000 pages of writing in a wooden trunk.

His major works include his only play, “O Marinheiro” [The Mariner] (1913), Álvaro de Campos’s “Ode Marítima” [Maritime Ode] and manifesto, ULTIMATUM (1917), the 24 odes of Ricardo Reis published in ATHENA (1924), Alberto Caeiro’s “O Guardador de Rebanhos” [The Keeper of Sheep], also published in ATHENA (1925), and his single book of poetry in Portuguese, *Mensagem* [Message] (1934). His most influential prose work is *O Livro do Desassossego* [Book of Disquietude]. Assembled and published for the first time in 1982, it now rivals Kafka’s works as emblem of the modern condition. No two editions of the book are the same.

**Key Biographies of Fernando Pessoa:**

Simões, João Gaspar. *Vida e Obra de Fernando Pessoa: História duma Geração*. Lisboa: Livraria Bertrand, 1950.

Severino, Alexandrino. *Fernando Pessoa na África do Sul : a formação inglesa de Fernando Pessoa*. Lisboa : Dom Quixote, 1983.

Crespo. Angel. *Vida plural de Fernando Pessoa*. Barcelona : Seix Barral, 1988.

Bréchon, Robert. *Étrange Étranger*. Paris: C. Bourgois, 1996.

Ferreira, Francisco Manuel da Fonseca. *Fernando Pessoa: a penumbra do génio*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 2002.

**Chronology of All Works:**

Pessoa’s works are numerous and dispersed. Readers may consult several editions of collected prose and poetry, none complete. Editora Ática began to publish Pessoa’s works in 1942, and their editions established parameters for what was taken to be Pessoa’s oeuvre, until further research into the trove of manuscripts began to produce much larger collections, changing the perception, reading, and understanding of Pessoa. Numerous new editions after 1990 are the work of distinguished specialists and of a “Pessoa team” appointed to examine the contents of the trunk now deposited at Lisbon’s National Library.

*Poesia de Fernando Pessoa*. 2 vols. Adolfo Casais Monteiro, ed. Lisbon: Editora Confluência, 1942.

*Obra Poética*. Maria Aliete Galhoz, org. Reprint of 8th ed. (1981). Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Aguilar, 1983 [1960].

*Obras em Prosa*. Cleonice Berardinelle, org., intro., notes. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1982 [1974].

*Obra Poética e em Prosa*. 3 vols. António Quadros & Dalila Pereira da Costa, eds. Oporto: Lello & Irmãos, 1986.