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## Transnational Pessoa

Paulo de Medeiros

University of Warwick

As unrepentant ‘moderns’, we believe  
that critique has not ceased to designate  
philosophy’s most characteristic gesture [...].

Étienne Balibar<sup>1</sup>

For far too long the name of Fernando Pessoa was held as a sort of emblem for Portugal, as if through his artistic greatness the nation could redeem itself from its political failures. ‘Minha pátria é a língua portuguesa’ [My fatherland is the Portuguese language], one of the most frequently cited of his lines, would seem to present him as a fervent nationalist.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the passage of *Livro do Desassossego* [The Book of Disquiet] from which it is lifted, when read fully, reveals quite the opposite: ‘Nada me pesaria que invadissem ou tomassem Portugal, desde que me não incomodassem pessoalmente’ [‘It wouldn’t grieve me if someone invaded and took over Portugal as long as they didn’t bother me personally’].<sup>3</sup> More than any other writer in the twentieth century Pessoa has come to embody and represent his nation, in terms of a great culture, genius, verbal virtuosity, a melancholic soul, and proud

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<sup>1</sup> Étienne Balibar, “Critique in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Political economy still, and religion again”, *Radical Philosophy*, 200 (2016), <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/critique-in-the-21st-century>.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando Pessoa, Fragment 333, dated after 18 October 1931, *Livro do Desassossego*. Edição Crítica de Fernando Pessoa, vol. XXII, ed. Jerónimo Pizarro (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 2010), pp. 326. *The Book of Disquiet. The Complete Edition* (ed.) Jerónimo Pizarro, trans. by Margaret Jull Costa (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2017), Fragment 326, pp. 302.

<sup>3</sup> Pessoa, *Livro do Desassossego*, p. 326; *The Book of Disquiet*, p. 302. One of the first critics to call attention to the need to take in Pessoa’s meaning in full was Onésimo Almeida in “Da pátria da língua – de Pessoa e de cada qual”, *Revista da Faculdade de Letras* (Lisboa), 21-22 (1996-1997), pp. 15-21.

self-effacement, all of which are clichés for ready internal consumption and easy export. The view of Pessoa as the great national poet, the undisputed heir to the legend of Camões, as appealing as it might be in some quarters or for facile quotation at political rallies, is losing its sway not just because of a decisively transnational inflection to literary studies at present, but also, perhaps more importantly, because Pessoa's literary achievements are more and more the object of comparative study at the hands of many critics and scholars outside of Portugal. At the same time, as the term transnational has become a sort of trendy label, one should also be wary of using it indiscriminately. If Pessoa is to be regarded properly as a transnational writer this does not mean that the specific, local and national context ceases to be relevant. Quite the contrary, I would suggest: Portugal's stale, provincial backwardness at the beginning (and throughout most) of the twentieth century needs to be kept resolutely in mind, in order to understand better not just Pessoa's conditionings but also how he went against them.

The notion advanced by Mads Rosendhal Thomsen of Pessoa, like Borges, being one of those 'lonely canonicals' is highly suggestive but also deeply inadequate.<sup>4</sup> The neat division he proposes between what he regards as the common practice of international canonization – whereby pairs of writers from the various nations would find their way into the pantheon of a (traditionally conceived) World Literature, say Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky – is appealing at first sight but of course based on a strict dualistic view, separating national from international and great from minor, that does not bear much scrutiny. The process of canonization might indeed produce such skewed views that have the benefit of simplifying cultural processes and thus turning the writers in question more readily into convenient commodities. From

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<sup>4</sup> Mads Rosendhal Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*, (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 48.

that perspective one could, perhaps, see a point in the (pseudo) distinction Thomsen proposes. But, as is becoming clearer with a new generation of scholars becoming interested in the modernist archives, other writers and artists surrounding the figure of Pessoa, such as fellow poet Mário Sá-Carneiro or painter Amadeu de Souza Cardoso, must be considered alongside him, in order to provide a more informed view of Modernism in general. This is so, I would suggest, whether one sticks to a traditional view of literary studies based on national demarcations or, as is becoming more common every day, one applies such knowledge to a comparative, transnational study of Modernism. The question, to my mind, is not so much one of expanding the repertoire of traditional views of Modernism as centred, almost exclusively, on an Anglo-American axis, to which Paris and Berlin would occasionally have contributed. Rather, the point of viewing Pessoa transnationally would be, on the one hand to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Modernity as singular – to follow Fredric Jameson’s well-known and crucial injunction<sup>5</sup> – and on the other to have a less lop-sided view of Pessoa’s own achievements.

There have been comparative studies of Pessoa which either attempt to trace how he developed from the work of other writers who were influential on him such as Walt Whitman, Shakespeare, and Poe, to mention just some of the most prominent. And, of course, there are also studies which show Pessoa’s growing reception outside Portugal, or which draw comparisons between the work of Pessoa and that of other writers without necessarily invoking any direct influence. Among these I would just like to mention three as examples: the seminal study *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa’s Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* by Irene Ramalho Santos (2003); several works by George Monteiro, such as *The Presence of Pessoa: English,*

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<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

*American, and Southern African Literary Responses* (2000); and the volume of collected essays edited by Anna Klobucka and Mark Sabine, *Embodying Pessoa: Corporeality, Gender, Sexuality* (2007).<sup>6</sup> As important as such studies were when first published, and still remain for anyone interested in Pessoa, for the most part they still follow and accept premises inherent to traditional comparative studies and notions of influence and reception that have strong limitations especially as they often – less so in the case of Santos’ work – unwittingly serve to reinforce concepts of culture bounded by nationalism that I consider dubious and problematic.

A first step to bring about a displacement of Pessoa – mythically held to have never left Lisbon in his adult life – is to consider the fact that to all effects he was brought up, and formally schooled, in another country. It is well known that in January 1896 Pessoa was taken by his mother to Durban, South Africa where she was joining the man she had married, by proxy, after becoming a widow. In March of that year Pessoa was enrolled at St. Joseph’s Convent School. In 1899 he started at Durban High School, from where he would graduate in 1901. On the first of August of that year he would again set sail, traveling to Lisbon and Madeira before returning to South Africa, taking university examinations, and actually doing his first year of university-level study still at Durban High. In August of 1905 he would then take the *Herzog* and return definitively to Lisbon, aged 17. There are studies of Pessoa’s time in South Africa – and he had started writing as a child already of course – such as the above-mentioned one by Monteiro, or, more recently, a special issue of *Pessoa Plural*

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<sup>6</sup> Irene Ramalho Santos, *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa’s Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* (Hanover and London: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 2003); George Monteiro, *The Presence of Pessoa: English, American, and Southern African Literary Responses* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998); Anna M. Klobucka and Mark Sabine (eds.), *Embodying Pessoa: Corporeality, Gender, Sexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

(8, 2015),<sup>7</sup> guest-edited by Carlos Pittella-Leite and dedicated to the figure of Hubert D. Jennings, a teacher at Durban High who became a dedicated Pessoa scholar specializing in the young poet's relationship to Durban. In that issue, Margaret Jull Costa, while considering Jennings's work, reflects on how Jennings's views went against those of traditional Pessoa scholar and biographer João Gaspar Simões. Whereas the latter saw the sojourn in South Africa as a family trauma, first the loss of the father first and then “losing” his mother to her new husband and new siblings’, Jennings emphasized how fond Pessoa was of his siblings.<sup>8</sup>

As nice as that might be, it still leaves totally by the wayside the fact that spending nine years in South Africa was a double displacement for Pessoa, removed from the environment he knew in Lisbon and Europe and placed in the African colony of another country with a language he did not know, yet came to master so well that he beat 899 other candidates, to win the School's Queen Victoria Memorial Prize for best English essay. Any question of a possible trauma, family-related or otherwise, is best left to speculation. Instead, I would suggest that one consider the young man's exposure to the contradictions of colonialism, its systemic oppression and violence, as well as its idiosyncrasies. Indeed, a double exposure, since Pessoa would certainly have been confronted not only with the clash between Europeans and the Africans they thought of for the most part simply as subalterns, if not pure commodities, but also at the differences, religious and cultural, between the English and the Portuguese themselves. It would seem odd if someone with the extended sensibility of Pessoa

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<sup>7</sup> *Pessoa Plural*, 8 (2015), Guest Editor, Carlos Pittella-Leite, <<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:698206/>> [accessed 20 August, 2018].

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Jull Costa, 'Pessoa in Durban: The Making of a Poet', *Pessoa Plural* 8 (2015), <[https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese\\_Brazilian\\_Studies/ejph/pessoaplural/Issue8/PDF/I8A15.pdf](https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/pessoaplural/Issue8/PDF/I8A15.pdf)> [accessed 20 August, 2018]. The book referred to is: João Gaspar Simões, *Vida e Obra de Fernando Pessoa—História duma Geração, Vol. I: Infância e Adolescência* (Lisbon: Bertrand, 1951), p. 55.

were to remain indifferent or unaffected by the multiple clashes of identity and nationality certain to have been at stake at such a volatile time as the beginning of the twentieth century. Even if the imposition of British rule over Zulu sovereignty had been some time beforehand and the second Boer war might not have been of immediate relevance in Durban, independence for South Africa was only five years away when Pessoa left. And in Lisbon, well, stability was nowhere to be found: less than three years after Pessoa's return, both the King and his oldest son, the heir apparent, were murdered on the streets of Lisbon. By 5 October 1910, as the royal family fled to England, the Republic was proclaimed.

Irene Ramalho Santos clearly saw the importance of Pessoa's upbringing for his creative process. Drawing a comparison between Pessoa and Hart Crane, particularly Crane's need to deal with America's materialism and rising imperialism, she writes:

Pessoa, who, as a bilingual poet educated in a British school in South Africa to the age of 17, was heir to not one but two empires, the British and the Portuguese, had to come to terms with the Portuguese empire, practically non-existent at the turn of the century under British domination, before he could reinvent Portuguese poetry as cultural imperialism.<sup>9</sup>

This does not mean that one should place all of Pessoa's work and his intense multiplicity, whether in terms of his heteronymic authorship<sup>10</sup> or its generic diversity,

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<sup>9</sup> Santos, *Atlantic Poets*, p. 110

<sup>10</sup> Pessoa's creation of heteronyms is one of his most distinguishing and complex traits. Some critics put the number of these 'other' figures of the author at over a hundred. The main ones, with various important works ascribed to them are Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro Campos, and Ricardo Reis. Bernardo Soares, to whom the *Book of Disquiet* was assigned is even closer to Pessoa himself as to be considered a semi-heteronym. George Steiner provided a very concise and

under the banner of this dual imperial inheritance, which, as Santos also intimates, was as much a negative inheritance as anything else. But, I would suggest, it should be enough to alert us to the need for constantly displacing Pessoa, to refuse the simplistic national identification for the reductive trap that it is. Certainly, such an upbringing, given a different personality, might have yielded precisely the opposite: some sort of avoidance and mistrust of difference. In the case of Pessoa, again, and without forgetting that he remains a highly paradoxical writer, as he could not help but be, one could say that it provided the grounding, or served as the catalyst, for him to flourish, rejecting any form of essential identity and embracing his own rich plurality.

The supreme expression of Pessoa's plurality, of his desire for imagining himself as another, and his actual capacity to take it further than any other writer before or since, was the creation of the heteronyms. The heteronymic quality of Pessoa has long been hailed as one of his outstanding, if not the most idiosyncratic, features. As remarkable as it is, however, this too tends to be exalted along with other clichéd views including the melancholia and the national identification, to the point one could be forgiven for thinking that all three were actually themselves just various facets of the same national genius. Without wanting to contribute to this kind of mythologizing, I would nonetheless like to seize briefly on the heteronyms, and one in particular, as part of reflecting on Pessoa from a transnational perspective. Obviously, the heteronyms in and of themselves do not make Pessoa transnational, just as they do

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elegant definition of heteronymy in his review of the *Book of Disquiet*: "Pseudonymous writing is not rare in literature or philosophy (Kierkegaard provides a celebrated instance). 'Heteronyms', as Pessoa called and defined them, are something different and exceedingly strange. For each of his 'voices', Pessoa conceived a highly distinctive poetic idiom and technique, a complex biography, a context of literary influence and polemics and, most arrestingly of all, subtle interrelations and reciprocities of awareness" ("A Man of Many Parts", *The Observer*, 3 June, 2001, (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jun/03/poetry.features1>), accessed 20 August, 2018. For further exploration of the heteronyms, see the book edited by Fernando Cabral Martins and Richard Zenith (eds.), *Teoria da Heteronímia* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2012).

not make him nationalist either. If anything, I would argue that his radical multiplication of the Self, far more than that envisioned by other modernists, would imply a rejection of any narrow ideology predicated on sameness. For what binds a nation together, supposedly, is the common ascent of an entire ‘people’, united in history through a shared language and (traditionally religious) beliefs and cultural norms. Seen in this way, nationalism is basically a form of hyperidentity that would reduce the individual and the unique to a common denominator. To extend this to a blatant exaggeration, albeit the logical conclusion: in a nation where eccentricity was considered essential, all those who belonged would have to be eccentric, except that then, of course, they would cease to be so. My point is simple: by making it imperative to feel for, and as another, culminating in the heteronymic project, that irrefutably blurs the borders between self and other, Pessoa aligns himself with transnationalism as a refusal to establish solid borders between nations.

The heteronyms, in and of themselves, can be seen as a kind of rhizomatic machine for desire<sup>11</sup>. A Deleuzian approach to Pessoa has long been a hallmark of the work of Portuguese philosopher José Gil, from the early *Fernando Pessoa ou la Métaphysique des sensations* [Fernando Pessoa or the Metaphysics of Feelings] (1984) to *O Devir-Eu de Pessoa* [The Becoming-I of Pessoa] (2010).<sup>12</sup> His perspectives generally distinguish themselves from the rest by both their originality

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<sup>11</sup> Felicity J. Colman in “Rhizome” explains briefly how Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used that concept: “‘Rhizome’ describes the connections that occur between the most disparate and the most similar of objects, places and people; the strange chains of events that link people: the feeling of ‘six degrees of separation’, the sense of ‘having been here before’ and assemblages of bodies. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’ draws from its etymological meaning, where ‘rhizo’ means combining form and the biological term ‘rhizome’ describes a form of plant that can extend itself through its underground horizontal tuber-like root system and develop new plants. In Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term, the rhizome is a concept that ‘maps’ a process of networked, relational and transversal thought, and a way of being without ‘tracing’ the construction of that map as a fixed entity”, in Adrian Parr (ed.) *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Revised Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 232-233.

<sup>12</sup> José Gil, *Fernando Pessoa ou La métaphysique des sensations* (Paris: La Différence, 1998); *O Devir-Eu de Fernando Pessoa* (Lisbon: Relógio d’Água, 2010).

and their force. Adam Morris explores this specific angle in his 2014 article ‘Fernando Pessoa’s Heteronymic Machine’.<sup>13</sup> His extended argument about how Deleuze’s notions often seem to be a development of what Pessoa had already done much earlier is well made – even if it is not, of course, new, but has already been explored by Gil, whose work Morris acknowledges, but does not really engage with. Morris’s argument has the advantage of drawing out some conclusions that, even if latent in other critics, had not quite been fully formulated. In order to try to understand Pessoa transnationally, I would focus specifically on the question of ‘deterritorialization’<sup>14</sup>. When discussing Richard Zenith’s view of the creation of Alberto Caeiro as master<sup>15</sup> as an ‘ironic self-effacement’, Morris states:

The effect of this “effacement” is that the concept of authorship is uprooted by the heteronymic machine, deterritorialized from a creative “subject” or “author” and banished to the nebulous territory of heteronymity and its constantly re-individuating individuals. Creation is deterritorialized from the

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Morris, ‘Fernando Pessoa’s Heteronymic Machine’, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 51.2 (2014), pp. 126-149.

<sup>14</sup> From the many concepts introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, “deterretorialisation” is certainly one of the most complex and any one definition risks simply misrepresenting it. What remains fundamental is its connection with how capitalism operates. A reader wanting to explore this further might want to start with the following observations by Alison Ross in “Psychoanalysis – Family, Freud, and Unconscious”: “Capital operates according to a logic of deterritorialisation in which the flows of capital are no longer extracted from agricultural labour, but, rather than being tied to the produce of the land, are transnational or global. Although capital tends toward a deterritorialisation of geographical, familial and social ties, it defers this limit by reiterating artificial territorialities. In this context psychoanalysis, but particularly its use of the family as an explanatory unit for desire, is criticised as one of the paradigmatic movements by which the family is reiterated and the logic of deterritorialising flows is captured by a function of reterritorialisation”, in Adrian Parr (ed.) *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Revised Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> As Jerónimo Pizarro states, “In 1935, the year of his death, Fernando Pessoa announced, in a famous letter, that in 1914, after a ‘triumphal day’ on which he wrote a great number of poems, he had found his ‘Master’, Alberto Caeiro”. This was part of an elaborate scheme by which Fernando Pessoa set up a frame for interpreting his principal heteronyms. According to the logic of Pessoa’s exposition, even he, himself, would have Caeiro as a Master, in spite of having “created him”. See Jerónimo Pizarro, “How to Construct a Master: Pessoa and Caeiro”, *Portuguese Studies* 33.1 (2017), pp. 56-69, p. 56.

person. The figure of Pessoa-*ele-mesmo* ensures that the paths of creation are always multiple, rhizomatic.<sup>17</sup>

I would like to seize on this point about deterritorialization effected by heteronymy and suggest that it opens the way for understanding the transnational in Pessoa. Even if speaking from a very different enunciatory platform and still subscribing to, or rather, fully participating in, the mythologizing of a sort of ‘spectral Pessoa’ immensely appealing to our imagination – but, as I have tried to show elsewhere,<sup>18</sup> equally pernicious – George Steiner had already adumbrated this. In *Lessons of the Masters* for example, he writes:

The four poets whom Pessoa conjures into being have their perfectly distinct voice, ideologies, rhetorical manners. [...] They interrelate in a cat’s cradle of mutual notice, suspicion or affinity through which Pessoa moves, a ‘secret sharer’ in ‘exile from himself’.<sup>19</sup>

Even leaving aside the Conradian suggestion<sup>20</sup>, itself a hint at transnationality but in the obverse, as it were, as Steiner also states, this game (‘alchemy’ he calls it), of ‘Mastery and discipleship’ is marked, but ultimately causes an estrangement of the Self from itself that, I would suggest, is the mark of the transnational at the individual

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<sup>17</sup> Adam Morris, ‘Fernando Pessoa’s Heteronymic Machine’, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 51.2 (2014), pp. 126-149, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> Paulo de Medeiros, *Pessoa’s Geometry of the Abyss: Modernity and the Book of Disquiet* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> George Steiner, *Lessons of the Masters. The Charles Eliot Norton lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Steiner is here obviously referring to Joseph Conrad’s short story, “The Secret Sharer”, originally published in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1910 and widely available in many subsequent reprints.

level: never ‘at home’ anywhere, least of all in the space of his Self, too confined, and confining, for the expansiveness of his creative force.<sup>21</sup>

How to render concrete such a suite of abstractions, from the deterritorialization of the Self to a transnational condition? Perhaps looking briefly at some of Pessoa’s texts might help. Even if all of the heteronyms in a sense provide for the rhizomatic machine of desire – one of the hallmarks of the rhizome is precisely the multiplicity of its points of entry and exit, something which Pessoa took to its logical limit in the *Livro do Desassossego* – Álvaro de Campos can perhaps be singled out, for the moment, as the one who best embodies Pessoa’s capacity for such a form of othering. For a start, Álvaro de Campos, although Portuguese, would, have been born far from the centre of the country, in Tavira, would be of Jewish extraction, and would have received his university training as a naval engineer in Glasgow. In other words, Pessoa, in creating Campos’ biography is already at pains to maximize the possibilities for personal and cultural deterritorialization of what would be his most profoundly modernist heteronym, not just excessive in his preferences, but a cypher for excess itself. Let us consider for a moment his ‘inaugural’ poem, ‘Opiário’ [‘Opiary’], published, by chance as it were, in the first issue of the modernist journal *Orpheu* in 1915.<sup>22</sup> In many ways, this poem can be seen as emblematic of Pessoa’s deterritorializing strategy in as much as it functions as a sort of ‘original’ meant to show what Campos was like before he came under the influence of Master Caeiro. Pessoa himself, of course, sets this up in the famous letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro

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<sup>21</sup> George Steiner, *Lessons of the Masters. The Charles Eliot Norton lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *Opiário*, *Orpheu* 1 (1915). Reprinted in *Álvaro de Campos: Obra Completa*, eds. Jerónimo Pizarro and Antonio Cardiello (Lisbon: Tinta da china, 2014), pp. 36-43.; Fernando Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*, ed. and trans. by Richard Zenith (London and New York: Penguin, 2006), pp. 147-52.

of 13 January 1935<sup>23</sup>, in which he specifically mentions how *Opiário* came to be: ‘Foi dos poemas que tenho escrito, o que me deu mais que fazer, pelo duplo poder de despersonalização que tive que desenvolver. Mas, enfim, creio que não saiu mau, e que dá o Álvaro [de Campos] em botão...’ [‘Of all the poems I’ve written, this was the one that gave me the most trouble, because of the twofold depersonalization it required. But I don’t think it turned out badly, and it does show us Álvaro in the bud’].<sup>24</sup>

That letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro is many things and obviously critics should keep a healthy distance from some of its claims as it is also a blatant mythologizing device. Be that as it may, what I would like to focus on is how in this myth of the birth of the heteronyms Pessoa is very lucid as to the intended effect of double Othering. One could argue that the letter is, of course, written two decades after the original poem to which it refers. Yet ‘Opiário’ is a poem of such complexity as to render the account of its creation not only perfectly logical but also, in a sense, modest. One could start with the opening stanza in which, beyond the trappings of decadence and aristocratic abandon to an existential ennui that is only temporarily relieved by opium, we read a sort of programmatic statement that goes far beyond the routine camp posturing that also characterizes many of Campos’s provocations, and that is his search for ‘Um Oriente ao oriente do Oriente’ [‘An East to the east of the East’].<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, this elaborate game is a further complication of the depersonalization strategy carried out through the extended heteronymic system. And

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<sup>23</sup> This letter sets out one of Pessoa’s own version of how he came to create the various heteronyms. It is obviously in itself a highly charged and poetic fiction. Fernando Cabral Martins and Richard Zenith provide very detailed considerations of Pessoa’s heteronymic pronouncements in *Teoria da Heteronímia* (Lisbon: Assíro & Alvim, 2012). The letter is also reprinted here, among many other directly relevant texts, pp. 273-282.

<sup>24</sup> Pessoa, *Teoria da Heteronímia*, p. 279; Fernando Pessoa, *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa*, ed. Richard Zenith (New York: Grove Press, , p. 257.

<sup>25</sup> Pessoa, *Álvaro de Campos: Obra Completa*, p.36 ; Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe*, p. 147.

yet I cannot help but sense an enormous fragility under that semblance of the jaded world traveller. Pessoa clearly uses Campos to project certain extreme views and yet, in this opening salvo, the excess would still seem to be fairly contained, were it not announced in that beyond of the Orient just mentioned. Campos of course, also announces himself as an inveterate traveller whose journeys, even when derided as futile in comparison to an inner journey, allow him to make explicit comparisons between himself and others whose national attributes apparently differ considerably from his own. For instance, both the Portuguese and the English are directly evoked, and compared, alongside casual references to Germans and Swedes. This comparison is made on a personal register as well as a national and imperial one as Campos not only studied (or pretended to, as he says) in Glasgow, but lived in England as well. And, obviously, it derives from Pessoa's own colonial upbringing. The double move of depersonalization Pessoa evokes here is maintained throughout, and in this regard as well we get to see how Campos ironically plays down both himself and the Portuguese (conscious of an exhaustion of the imperial dream of the past), while simultaneously ridiculing the supposed mechanical cheerfulness of the English:

Os ingleses são feitos pra existir.

Não há gente como esta pra estar feita

Com a tranqüidade. A gente deita

Um vintém e sai um deles a sorrir.

Pertenço a um género de portugueses

Que depois de estar a Índia descoberta

Ficaram sem trabalho. A morte é certa.

Tenho pensado nisto muitas vezes.

[The English were made for existence  
No people has a closer alliance  
With Tranquillity. Put in a coin  
And out comes an Englishman, all smiles.

I belong to that class of Portuguese  
Who, once India was discovered, were out  
Of work. Death is a sure thing.  
This is something I often think about.]<sup>26</sup>

Richard Zenith's translation into English is, as usual, impeccable. And yet, one might quibble with two slight changes, made certainly for idiomatic ease. The first is the choice of the term 'class' for the Portuguese 'género', which, perhaps more literally, one might render as 'kind'. Surely the poem depends on notions of class since the speaker certainly enjoys leisure and has the financial means for extended travel and drugs, but Pessoa did not choose to draw this connotation out. 'Kind', I find, in a poem very much concerned with identity and differences among peoples, is both less and more charged. For what is at stake, among other things, in these two paired stanzas, is the difference between the English and the Portuguese, or, if we want to be more precise, between the English in general, who are portrayed as a sort of cheerful toy replica of a sentient human being since they are expected to pop out of some automated coin-operated machine once it is activated. In contrast to this Pessoa

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<sup>26</sup> Pessoa, REF; Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe*, p. 150.

has us consider a kind of Portuguese, his kind, who had a historic destiny – the discovery of India – after which it really did not face any task that matched its qualities. Considering that India was then still the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the British empire, this statement by Campos, which claims the primacy of discovering India but rejects the burden of actually colonizing it, is wonderfully tongue in cheek. Its irony, however, is not intended at all either as regards a nostalgic longing for the glorious days of the sixteenth century when Portugal, not England, was the hegemonic imperial power alongside Spain, nor as an expression of some national distinction. The ease with which Pessoa undermines both the historical and the then current pretensions towards imperial glory of both Portugal and England is certainly shrewder than the view of many political and historical commentators. Its implicit refusal of any form of national glorification is markedly transnational.

My second minor quibble with the choice of vocabulary concerns the shift of tense in the concluding remarks. When Campos says that he has often thought about the certainty of death, he uses the past tense (‘tenho pensado’ [I have thought] is translated as ‘I often think’). Rather than a melancholy, possibly morbid, view of life and existence, Campos is simply noting that the topic of death’s inexorability is one which, possibly like the discovery of India, lies in some past that contributes to defining who he is without necessarily being present. Perhaps this is a form of misinterpretation of Campos as well; nonetheless, to my mind the posturing that Campos brings to bear on existential issues depends to a great extent on appearing jaded and wise beyond his years. This at least is how I view the further comments the poem makes concerning the poet’s identity, appearance and sense of belonging. For instance, right after a stanza promising action and high melodrama (a gun and some blood to appear somewhere before the end of the poem), he comments that others

might judge him banal and a mere boy, while reflecting that his monocle, the one accessory meant to render him unique and establish a class affinity, actually merely renders him a ‘universal stereotype’. Campos is at pains both to establish himself as a man of the world and to declare that he is not at home anywhere. One might say that all this amounts to nothing more than posturing, with the poem’s concluding plea for a return to normalcy and faith representing the last pull of the carpet out from under the readers’ feet. And yet, his statement about his complete lack of national identification remains significant for it implies that the national is precisely where the Self is not, and, by way of logical conclusion, the Self is always already an alien, a foreigner: ‘Não posso estar em parte alguma. / A minha Pátria é onde não estou’ [‘I don’t belong anywhere. My country / Is wherever I’m not’].<sup>27</sup>

If one is serious about considering Pessoa transnationally, however, it is not enough to identify possible expressions of Pessoa’s aversion to nationalism in his literary production. Rather, one should also be looking at the ways in which Pessoa has impacted us across national barriers. Even if much of this material could be the subject of several separate research projects – for instance an attempt to understand Pessoa and Africa, a topic which has received very little attention or even Pessoa and Brazil, an area that has attracted a number of studies already – at the moment I would like to consider one in particular, from Brazil, as I consider it symptomatic of both the direction one should be looking in to gain a more diversified view of Pessoa, and also of the invisibility that still often accompanies such projects. One way of doing this would be to examine the official reception of Pessoa in Brazil, whether in historical terms (the various important studies and editions of Pessoa which have been influential in shaping the mainstream view of Pessoa, such as the many authored by

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<sup>27</sup> Pessoa, *Obra Completa: Álvaro de Campos*, p. 39; Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe*, p. 149.

Cleonice Berardinelli, including the recently edited *Antologia Poética* [2012]); or works of criticism, by, for example, Leyla Perrone-Moisés, such as *Fernando Pessoa: alguém do eu, além do outro* (1982); or even, though in a completely different register, the much publicized biography by José Paulo Cavalcanti Filho, *Fernando Pessoa: Uma quase autobiografia* (2012).<sup>28</sup> Another way, to me more telling in this respect, would be to undertake a mapping of Pessoa's transnational reach into other forms of art and into popular culture.

In that regard, one would do well to differentiate between the re-mediation effected by high-brow art, like, say, the work of Portuguese artist Júlio Pomar (1926-2018), who has repeatedly turned to Pessoa at different phases of his artistic career and has produced some of the most stunning visual commentaries on the poet. For the concerns at hand, one in particular warrants a mention: the large painting representing Pessoa and the corpse of the lost king Sebastião<sup>29</sup> entitled 'Fernando Pessoa meets D. Sebastião inside his coffin, harnessed to a donkey the Andalusian way' (1985).<sup>30</sup> For anyone even slightly familiar with Portuguese history, the irony behind Pessoa (who is sometimes charged with wanting to revive the myth of Sebastianism as part of a messianic call for a renewed imperial role for Portugal in the realm of culture), actually coming across the body of the king is a powerful and extremely ironic commentary on the follies of nationalism that leads the viewer to reflect on the poet as an enigmatic figure. In my view Pomar does not simply align Pessoa with blind nationalism but, by depicting him with that famous and never found corpse, Pomar

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<sup>28</sup> Cleonice Berardinelli, (ed.) *Fernando Pessoa: Antologia Poética* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra, 2012); Leyla Perrone-Moisés, *Fernando Pessoa: alguém do eu, além do outro* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1982; 2001); José Paulo Cavalcanti Filho, *Fernando Pessoa: Uma quase autobiografia* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Dom Sebastião I (1557-1578) vanished during a battle in the North of Africa and his disappearance provoked the loss of Portuguese sovereignty to Castille between 1580 and 1640.

<sup>30</sup> Júlio Pomar, 'Fernando Pessoa encontra D. Sebastião num caixão sobre um burro ajaezado à andaluza', acrylic on canvas, 158.5 x 154 cm., 1985. Caixa Geral de Depósitos Collection, Lisbon.

also raises all kinds of questions regarding the spectrality and the haunting power of any such claims.

Important as such work is – in addition to Pomar, many other artists from a variety of countries, in a variety of different media, are constantly re-engaging with the figure of Pessoa and of his heteronyms – at present I am much more interested in looking at what I'd like to call its counterpart: a recent Brazilian comic book entitled *Eu, Fernando Pessoa em quadrinhos* [I, Fernando Pessoa as a comic strip] (2013), by Susana Ventura and Eloar Guazzelli.<sup>31</sup> This is not the only transposition of the figure and work of Pessoa into the medium of the comic book or graphic novel, labels which fail to encompass the complexity of the work in question. Not excluding others I may have missed (and the relative invisibility of these works cannot be ignored) there are at least two other works that deserve a mention. A comparison of the three will enable me better to draw inferences with regard to the work of Ventura and Guazzelli, which, to my mind, does stand out in its ability to transcend the limitations inherent to the adaptation process. The most easily available one – at least in Portugal where one can find it in a number of bookstores – is *As aventuras de Fernando Pessoa, Escritor Universal* [The Adventures of Fernando Pessoa, Universal Writer] (2015), by Miguel Moreira and Catarina Verdier.<sup>32</sup> The other *A Vida Oculta de Fernando Pessoa* [The Occult Life of Fernando Pessoa] (2016), by André F. Morgado and Alexandre Leoni,<sup>33</sup> has been published in Brazil. It is perhaps more visible online than in actual bookstores, but thanks to social media, perhaps easier to get hold of than the Ventura

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<sup>31</sup> Susana Ventura and Guazzelli, *Eu, Fernando Pessoa em quadrinhos* (São Paulo: Peirópolis, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Miguel Moreira and Catarina Verdier, *As aventuras de Fernando Pessoa, Escritor Universal*, (Lisboa: Parceria A.M. Pereira, 2015). The book came out with Parceria A.M Pereira, Pessoa's original publisher.

<sup>33</sup> André F. Morgado and Alexandre Leoni, *A Vida Oculta de Fernando Pessoa* (Lisbon: Bicho Carpinteiro, 2016). Publishing costs were initially crowdfunded via an internet platform. The authors original goal of seven thousand réais was, but THE PROJECT WAS EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL AND they managed to raise over twenty-four thousand réais.

and Guazzelli book, which has gone almost unnoticed in Portugal in spite of the increasing number of collaborations between publishers on both sides of the Atlantic.

At first sight, *As Aventuras de Fernando Pessoa, Escritor Universal* appears to be the most conventional of the three. This is for a number of reasons, starting with the title itself, and the notion of the universality of great writers, to the style chosen to draw the figure of Pessoa: fairly conventional in representational terms with a hint of the comic to it, but still largely realistic. Obviously, the question of the dubious quality of universality is by no means limited to this work. It is a rather diffuse view that permeates the critical appreciation of Pessoa and which could easily be taken for yet another form of transnationality, which it is not. Whereas transnationality, at its core, refuses any primacy to the concept of the national, and even tries to undo it, the ‘universal’, more often than not leaves the ‘national’ intact as a category to which it would be the (greater) counterpart. Another aspect that tends to create the impression of conventionality in this work is the decision to recount Pessoa’s life story, which, when coupled with the mostly straightforward and seemingly realistic drawing style, makes for a much easier entry point for a large number of readers than that of the other two works.

Nonetheless, this remains a complex work, with an intricate structure, that took a long time to produce (in an interview in 2011, the authors mentioned that they had been working on it for nine years). Arguably, this book is at its weakest from the point of view of language. By both literally reproducing some of Pessoa’s texts and relying on very prosaic and colloquial writing to provide narrative flow and unity, the overall effect is at odds with the beauty and power of Pessoa’s own writing so that in this case, remaining faithful to the original is actually the opposite of what might have been intended. Granted, one key goal of such a publication is to render Pessoa

accessible to a wide range of readers who might be expected to be put off by Pessoa's intricate language games and erudition. There is no doubt that this tactic removes any such obstacle. Still, there are moments when the book manages to surpass such an aspiration and, in what could be termed a radical departure from the original, actually by eliding any and all text including Pessoa's, it is most successful when it comes to transforming the seductive strangeness of Pessoa to the medium at hand. Curiously, this section, which goes against the grain of the rest of the book, is a depiction of one day in the life not of Fernando Pessoa, but of his heteronym Bernardo Soares. As Miguel Moreira states, what distinguishes that episode from the rest of the book is the lack of any text.<sup>34</sup> Not only that, but the sequence of images, in their almost complete repetition and banality, go a long way towards actually allowing readers to enter into that special world of 'Pessoa as Soares'. The concluding image of the episode, a duplication in reverse of the opening image, is a good example of a moment when the book transcends the otherwise conventional nature of the images. In the first image, we see Pessoa/Soares standing in a downtown Lisbon street (presumably the Rua dos Douradores, where he worked), not only center stage but much larger than life, since he dwarfs all the other people walking by. In the last image, it is night time and the street is completely deserted, so that absence, nothing but absence, is what the reader is left with, in a move that, in my view, represents much better the theoretical importance of the *Livro do Desassossego* than if Moreira and Verdier had included some 'poetic' or 'paradoxical' fragments from Pessoa's masterpiece.

Interestingly enough, *A Vida Oculta de Fernando Pessoa* also focuses on the biographical even if, as its title also reveals, one of its main concerns is Pessoa's involvement with the esoteric. Written by the Portuguese André F. Morgado and

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<sup>34</sup> Miguel Moreira, 'As Aventuras de Fernando Pessoa, Escritor Universal', *Pessoa Plural* 2 (2012), pp. 317-331, p. 319.

illustrated by the Brazilian Alexandre Leoni, this book demonstrates not only transnational cooperation when it comes to generating innovative work on Pessoa, but also the ever more prominent role played by the internet and social media nowadays. Whereas Moreira and Verdier's book was initially a blog, *A Vida Oculta* went one step further since by using crowdfunding, it (in a sense), gave potential readers a direct stake in the project. The images, in comparison to those in *As Aventuras*, are edgier, definitely drawing on a *noir* aesthetic and casting Pessoa – and his heteronyms – as heroes fighting to help save the Portuguese people. For the purpose at hand, what I want to signal is how this attempt at dislocating Pessoa from the hallowed grounds of Portuguese (and European) high modernism to the realm of popular (and Brazilian?) culture, fits in well between Moreira and Verdier's more conventional approach and the last of the three, which, in my view, goes even further towards radically 'adapting' Pessoa to the present.

*Fernando Pessoa em quadrinhos* has a much more modest, though direct, title without the pretension of either the 'universal' or the 'adventurous'. Yet, of the three 'adaptations' of Pessoa into the medium of 'quadrinhos' [literally 'little squares'] (both this Brazilian term and the Portuguese version, 'banda desenhada' [comic strip], appear more inclusive than the English 'comic' or 'graphic novel'), Ventura's and Guazzelli's is the most successful in transposing Pessoa's haunting textuality into a new medium and reaching a new audience. The book appears to originally have been targeted, by the publisher, at children and young adults. However, in its conception and execution, its fusion and contrast between image and text, even the disappearance, or illegibility of a 'text' that becomes a purely visual representation of what we recognize as 'words', the book erases any supposed border between adult and child audiences. Interestingly enough, the life of Pessoa is yet again the point of

departure for the narrative, though here very much concentrated at the beginning and end and actually used as a mere 'pretext' to the narrative, which depends much more on the his poetics and heteronymy for its own development.

The Pessoa that surfaces in these pages is haunting but not melancholy. The images make use of text but do not depend on it. By focusing on the account Pessoa provided for the genesis of the heteronyms in the letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, the text directly links with the metanarrativity of Pessoa's texts in a way that evokes them but also transposes them. One of the advantages of this book over the other two lies in the extent to which it reproduces Pessoa's intensity without ever merely copying it. It is as if Ventura and Guazzelli had produced another version of the text rather than an interpretation of it. A version, moreover, that lays bare the dialectical tension between Pessoa's original text and their re-working of it; and which in so doing further deterritorializes Pessoa. Some of the images can be seen as harking back to surrealism as Pessoa is variously portrayed as a familiar silhouette, but also as a deep-sea diver in an old-fashioned diving suit, travelling through what is sometimes space, sometimes Lisbon. And as a caterpillar that turns into a butterfly, and even as an amoeba, and an octopus. At one point he is shown becoming a cat at the window of his room, then in the next image one sees whales flying above Lisbon's streets. Towards the book's conclusion, Pessoa is portrayed as himself, reading his own obituary, before a crow assumes the narrative voice to list a few milestones of the poet's life and then flies off silently in a full page spread.

In his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* Alain Badiou had reflected on the belated reception of Pessoa in France.<sup>35</sup> Yet Badiou goes further than simply registering a critical failing to declare that Pessoa should be viewed as 'a possible condition for

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<sup>35</sup> Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Philosophy’ and that ‘[w]e must therefore conclude that philosophy is not – at least not *yet* – under the condition of Pessoa. Its thought is not yet *worthy of Pessoa*.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps, defamiliarizing Pessoa, dislocating him to other media, disciplines, fields, audiences, and worlds, as Ventura and Guazelli’s *Eu, Fernando Pessoa em quadrinhos*, does so seductively is a way of starting to answer Badiou’s injunction.

‘Unrepentant moderns’, perhaps if we can transnationalize Pessoa we can then hope to start becoming his contemporaries.

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<sup>36</sup> Badiou, *Handbook*, p.36.