

TEACHING PESSOA'S PLURALITY

Medeiros, Paulo de, and Jerónimo Pizarro, editors. *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Fernando Pessoa*. The Modern Language Association of America, 2025. 246 pp. \$37 (paperback)/\$88 (hardcover).

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This recent volume on Fernando Pessoa from the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* is an invaluable contribution to the study of Pessoa's writings. Edited by Paulo de Medeiros, who has dedicated his career to situating Portuguese literature and culture within postcolonial studies and world-literature systems, and Jerónimo Pizarro, who has expertly studied and edited Pessoa's work, this volume is a welcome addition to the MLA's publications as the first volume dedicated to a Portuguese-language writer. Pessoa's work appears on syllabi for courses in Portuguese, Romance languages, comparative literature, and philosophy given his literary prominence, his metaphysical interests, the vast critical bibliography dedicated to his work, and the accomplished translations of his texts into English. This volume recognizes Pessoa's unique position by bringing together carefully researched and well-argued essays on his corpus to enhance the teaching of his work in a variety of environments.

The volume is organized into an introduction and two parts: "Materials" and "Approaches." In the introduction "Teaching Pessoa's Infinite Plurality," Medeiros and Pizarro acknowledge the challenges posed by teaching Pessoa's work. By addressing various components of Pessoa's plurality, including his heteronyms, personal life, and writing in distinct genres, the editors underscore the distinctiveness of the Portuguese writer and his literary importance. The introduction astutely situates Pessoa as confronting modernity based on the historical situations and political instability that he experienced living in Lisbon and Durban. Apropos for a volume in this MLA series, the editors consider Pessoa's place within Portuguese and world letters as well as his relationship to the idea of the canon and of tradition. They address the immensity of Pessoa's unpublished archives, which adds to the plurality, complexity, and instability of his *oeuvre*. In the first part on materials, the editors compile pertinent information about editions in Portuguese and translations into English, resources for students, and relevant bibliography for

instructors. Differentiating between materials appropriate for students and more detailed resources for instructors helps to parse the immense bibliography in Portuguese, English, French, and other languages on Pessoa's life and work. The editors usefully suggest how instructors could incorporate film, digitized archival materials, and other audiovisual or electronic resources into their classrooms.

The second part, "Approaches" consists of subsections beginning with studies of historical and cultural context, which feature essays by Steffen Dix, António Ladeira, and Ellen W. Sapega, all prominent scholars of Pessoa, modernism, and Portuguese literature. Dix's piece provides insight into Pessoa's contributions to *Orpheu*, a short-lived Portuguese-language literary magazine, in a contextualized manner that allows for reflections on modernism, modernity, and modernization in Portugal in relation to other parts of Europe. Ladeira's focuses on expressions of subverted and subversive gender and sexuality in Pessoa's work builds on the earlier volume *Embodying Pessoa*, edited by Anna Klobucka and Mark Sabine, by proposing a more capacious concept of gender. Sapega turns her attention to Pessoa and popular culture by analyzing how contemporary film, television, literature, ad campaigns, and other forms of popular culture allude to, adapt, or appropriate Pessoa's work and image. Together, these essays situate Pessoa's writings within the historical and cultural milieu of their creation while also underscoring the poet's continued prominence in Portuguese culture.

The next section features two essays on *The Book of Disquiet*, Pessoa's most rich and complex text. Paulo de Medeiros reflects on his experiences teaching *The Book of Disquiet* in undergraduate seminars on literature and philosophy and graduate seminars on world literature that paired Pessoa with Kafka, Benjamin, and Proust, before positing that this "antibook" is one of the best works to understand modernism and modernity. Bernat Padró Nieto dialogues with David Jackson's study of Pessoa's "adverse genres" to examine how *The Book of Disquiet* both affirms and transgresses definitions of the traditional genres (lyric, narrative, and theater) most associated with Pessoa by approximating the autobiographical and the fragmentary essay. Rather than attempt to classify the text, Nieto suggests that the problem of genre should be included when discussing the unity and the diversity of *The Book of Disquiet*.

The following subdivision considers Pessoa's other works with pieces on *Mensagem* by Onésimo T. Almeida, his poetic theory by Irene Ramalho-Santos, and his heteronym Álvaro de Campos by Sofia de Sousa Silva. Almeida reevaluates *Mensagem*, the only work published during Pessoa's lifetime, by addressing how it has been misappropriated and misunderstood since its

publication and offering a possible correction of reading the poem as a myth rather than as a nationalist political declaration. Ramalho-Santos situates *The Book of Disquiet* as a “great book” where Pessoa emerges as a theorist of poetic practice through its fragments with their oblique allusions to his major heteronyms. However, as Ramalho-Santos perceptively argues, Alberto Caiero enjoys a distinct status among these heteronyms as *The Book of Disquiet* explicitly invokes him and cites verses from his *O guardador de rebanhos* to frame him as a “poetry poet.” Silva focuses on another heteronym, Álvaro de Campos, by analyzing the political dimension in his poetic exaltations of freedom and disenchantment with modernity.

The next section on curriculum opens with an essay by Jonardon Ganeri advocating for the inclusion of Pessoa in teaching the philosophy the self and topics of subjectivity in undergraduate and graduate courses. Meghan P. Nolan addresses another path for teaching Pessoa’s work by comparing his multifaceted and multilingual writerly identity to the works of other modernist writers like William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. The final section addresses editing as a key to understanding Pessoa’s work. Manuel Portela examines how the online *LdoD Archive* offers computer-assisted editorial practices that could innovate experiences of reading and analyzing *The Book of Disquiet* by visualizing textual variations in the unfinished book project. In the final essay in this section and the volume, John Pedro Schwartz and Jerónimo Pizarro cite the manuscript studies of works by Jorge Luis Borges, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson and their engagement with digital tools as useful models for scholars of Pessoa’s fragmentary texts. For Schwartz and Pizarro, these tools enable scholars to establish constellations of fragments, marginalia, and other documents to better understand the traces, echoes, and connections across Pessoa’s immense corpus and unpublished archive.

Overall, the volume balances the need to introduce Fernando Pessoa to students and instructors without expertise in Portuguese literature or modernist studies with a desire to synthesize the rich and diverse scholarly approaches to his work. The bibliographic materials included in part one, as well as the sources cited across the subsequent essays, provide necessary resources to effectively teach Pessoa’s writings in a range of undergraduate and graduate courses. The essays succinctly gloss existing scholarship while adding their own interpretations of Pessoa’s vast body of work. In doing so, they suggest possible directions for future research that could further enrich the curriculum. The volume is an essential addition to the criticism on Fernando Pessoa in English and will be an invaluable resource for students and scholars of modernist studies, Portuguese literature, poetics, and philosophy.