

## FERNANDO PESSOA

(Lisbon, 13th June, 1888 – Lisbon, 30th November, 1935)

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa is one of the major authors of 20<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese literature, whose work presents various facets, some of which are still relatively unexplored, such as his dramatic writing. During his short life, Pessoa published only one play, *O marinheiro*, in 1915, in the first issue of the magazine *Orpheu*. After his death in 1935, and with the first editions of his work in *Ática*, some fragments of another hitherto unpublished play emerged, in 1952, edited by Eduardo Freitas da Costa: *Fausto*. However, it took until the decades of the '70s and '80s to learn that these two plays, the first completed, the second fragmented, were not the only testament to his dramatic vein. This was through the investigations of Teresa Rita Lopes, who edited five unpublished plays – *Sakyamuni*, *Salomé*, *Diálogo no jardim do palácio*, *A morte do príncipe* and *Calvário* – and revealed the existence of several titles and small fragments of text still to be edited within the Pessoa archives.

Nevertheless, the theatre of Fernando Pessoa elicited little interest in the context of Pessoa studies, not only in relation to critical studies about his plays, which had mostly focused on *O marinheiro* and, occasionally, on *Fausto*, but also in relation to critical editions of his texts. Only Duílio Colombini, in 1986, Teresa Sobral Cunha, in 1988, and Carlos Pittella, in 2018, published new editions of *Fausto*. As regards his other plays, (excluding *O marinheiro*, which had been the most published from the *Orpheu text*), the few editions that have appeared in the last decades were based on the text established by T. Rita Lopes. Exceptions to this have come from Luísa Monteiro, who published the play *Inércia* in 2014, and F. Freitas and P. Ferrari, who published fourteen plays in 2017, some already partially published or entirely unpublished, belonging to «Static Theatre» (the name given by Pessoa): *O marinheiro*, *Diálogo no jardim do palácio*, *A morte do príncipe*, *As cousas*, *Diálogo na sombra*, *Os emigrantes*, *Inércia*, *A cadela*, *Os estrangeiros*, *Sakyamuni*, *Salomé*, *A casa dos mortos*, *Calvário* and *Intervenção cirúrgica*. Finally, another hitherto unpublished play has come to light, entitled *O amor*, published in the magazine *Pessoa Plural*, in 2017. Notwithstanding these investigations, a considerable number of Pessoa's dramatic texts have yet to be studied and disseminated.

Pessoa's interest in theatre and his experimentation with dramatic writing can be traced back to at least 1907-1908, according to the date of some of the fragments of *Fausto*. This play, as the title suggests, is a result of the influence of a literary tradition based on the myth of Faust, with the works of Marlowe and Goethe discernable as Pessoa's principal sources. The mystery of the world is one of the themes Pessoa used most throughout his work. In his «Static Theatre», which encompasses two phases, the first between the end of 1913 and 1918, and the second between 1932 and 1934, this theme is also markedly present, along with others, such as the subject's uncertainty about who they are, love as an illusion and the blurred frontier between dream and reality. «Static Theatre» was influenced by the 19<sup>th</sup> century French Symbolist movement, one of whose principal references was Maurice Maeterlinck, but also by other important writers such as Aeschylus, Euripides, Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde and William Shakespeare. However, Pessoa's sources reach beyond any particular authors or texts: knowledge of different philosophical and religious trends, both Western and Oriental, contributed

decisively to the plays of «Static Theatre», in which he explored historical and biblical figures, such as Salomé, Christ and Buddha. One should also add that Pessoa's best known play – *O marinheiro* – is not just the Portuguese version published in *Orpheu*, there being eight partial French versions from the end of 1913, which probably precede the Portuguese version of c. 1914, besides three small fragments in English, of around 1918. Both the French version and the English version remained incomplete.

The «Static Theatre» texts are one of the most important nuclei of Pessoa's dramaturgical production, but they are not the only ones in prose. Although many plays remain unpublished and undated, there is at least one more, besides *Fausto*, which precedes the timeline of «Static Theatre». *O amor* is a play written between 1909-1910 (coinciding with the date of the publishing house *Íbis* founded by Pessoa). It centres on the theme of unhappy love, but its style is distinct from that of «Static Theatre», in which plays with no place or time predominate, marked by an absence of action, by a language that is, to a greater or lesser extent, obscure and by the revelation of «states of soul»; in the fragmented play *O amor*, focus is also given to character definition, but there is room for a plot with action and a clearer and more colloquial language.

Pessoa's dramatic production, however, doesn't end here: it also includes several untitled dialogues in prose and in Portuguese that are still unpublished, as well as some fragments of plays identified by the author, namely *A sessão dos deuses*, *O circo de Schildroth* and *O burguês*. However, the texts in prose are just a portion of Pessoa's theatre, since there are also plays in verse within his archives. *Fausto*, which was incomplete, was one of his first plays in verse, but others exist, partially or totally unpublished: *Auto da morte*, *Auto das bacantes*, *Inês de Castro* and *Trilogia dos gigantes*. Finally, his dramatic production in English should also be mentioned, which includes the plays *Marino*, *Duke of Parma*, *Prometheus Revictus* and *Candida and Mary*.

It is also worth pointing out that Pessoa's interest in theatre extends beyond his own production: the poet left several critical texts about playwrights and their respective works, and a visit to his own library reveals a considerable collection of theatre works (including authors such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Marlowe, Goethe, Racine, Molière, Claudel, Shaw, Vitoriano Braga, Alfredo Cortez, Afonso Gaio, among others) as well as a substantial section on critical bibliography.

When taken within the context of his complete works, Fernando Pessoa's dramatic production is not insignificant, nor is the fact that the author referred to himself as a dramatist, to the extent that he described his heteronomy as « a drama in people» without importance. The dating of his plays allows us to establish that this was not just a passing phase, but on the contrary, the creation of dramatic texts continued through much of his life. Future studies on this creative dimension and editions of his hitherto unpublished works could contribute to an analysis of its true place within the author's works.

\* Besides these editions, Pina Coelho published a fragment of *Diálogo na sombra* (1968), and Richard Zenith, the fragment of *As cousas* (2003). However, these fragments were not identified as belonging to Pessoa's theatre.

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