

pensable is her referencing and interpretation of those allusions, a strong characteristic of her monograph.

The other work, besides those already mentioned, on which she focuses is Wanda Ramos's *Percursos*, offering an insightful reading of the text as a narrative of female development and liberation, in which resistance to subalternity is shared by both women and colonial subjects.

Moutinho's introduction contextualizes both the theoretical framework on which she ably draws and its relevance to what she carefully terms the postimperial novels she studies. For Moutinho, it is important to understand the "violence of the colonial fact" (11), a violence often elided in the references of postcolonial studies. Moutinho sees "an all-pervasive pessimism" in the novels she considers. They are "gloomy narratives of the end of empire" (12) that counteract the optimistic premises of much of the postcolonial endeavor. Yet, despite their gloom, Moutinho's book shows us why they continue to be important and powerful commentaries on the brutal reality of a deluded regime.

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Simon, Robert. *Understanding the Portuguese Poet Joaquim Pessoa, 1942-2007: A Study in Iberian Cultural Hybridity*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.

In the United States, the release of a book devoted exclusively to a Portuguese poet is always an infrequent, if welcome, event. The publication of a study on a marginally canonical poet—such as Joaquim Pessoa—constitutes an even more unusual occurrence.

For reasons that have intrigued me for years, some contemporary Portuguese poets are famous, paradoxically, for being "invisible." Such authors are widely recognized for being shunned (often unfairly) by both academic and non-academic communities of critics, although not necessarily by the general public: for example, Fernando Grade (a productive and notoriously eccentric author), as well as Pedro

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Homem de Mello and José Carlos Ary dos Santos, two poets who are better known as lyricists and often excluded from the higher rungs of literary respectability. Joaquim Pessoa also belongs to this group and Robert Simon's book is the first in any language devoted exclusively to his work. In Portugal, as Simon states, critical reception of Pessoa's work has been practically nonexistent, with the exception of "some reviews," a "few prefaces" and "interviews" (17). However, just as Homem de Mello and Ary dos Santos, Pessoa—a frequent guest on Portuguese TV and radio—is familiar to the general public, i.e., to non-readers of poetry. Some of the songs for which he wrote lyrics are among the most recognizable in Portuguese popular music, made famous by such performers as Manuel Freire, Fernando Tordo, Paco Bandeira, Carlos do Carmo, Tonicha, Rui Veloso and Vitorino.

In the late 1970s, on a rare occasion when a respected critic, David Mourão-Ferreira, wrote about a "blacklisted" author (in Pessoa's *125 Poemas*), he stated that among his generation Pessoa was the poet most naturally able to communicate with a large readership, thus explaining the reasons for the critical silence that Mourão-Ferreira was then, exceptionally, breaking. (However, a few other prominent critics have also written about Pessoa's work, among them Maria Lúcia Lepecki, José Jorge Letria, António José Saraiva, Fernando Guimarães, Manuel Frias Martins, João Barrento, and José do Carmo Francisco.) Pessoa appears to have paid the price demanded in Portugal of those who are either associated with the music industry or authors of politically oriented poetry. When, during the 1980s and 1990s, he published what were thematically very different and significant texts dealing with more traditional subjects, it was too late to reverse the stigma of the "political," "popular" or shamelessly "non-elitist" poet.

It thus took an American-born scholar to engage in a very improbable and meritorious project: a book in English, published in an English-speaking country and for an English-speaking audience, on an unjustly obscure (or rather obscured) Portuguese author. Refreshingly, Simon, as an Ame-

rican academic, appears to lack the professional inhibitions that are deeply ingrained in Portuguese criticism. One curious symptom of his being a non-Portuguese scholar of Portuguese literature that I find particularly encouraging is the ease with which he often refers to Joaquim Pessoa as simply “Pessoa,” as if the work of the *other* “Pessoa” (Fernando) were so familiar to American readers that no confusion could possibly be generated by Simon’s omission of the poet’s given name.

In his book, Simon proceeds from several ambitious—although legitimate—premises. He claims that since the 1970s postmodernism has been one of the most defining (and unchanging) traits of the lyrical tradition of Portugal and Spain and, most interestingly, that both during the Portuguese and the Spanish dictatorships these postmodern characteristics constituted deconstructive and self-referential symptoms of subversive intentions behind apparently esoteric writings. A preference for the hermetic, according to Simon, can also be attributed to a loss of confidence in the power of words to effect social change (or to produce actual mimesis) amidst a politically harsh reality.

Simon states that during the 1980s and 1990s Pessoa’s poetry developed a tendency towards mysticism, particularly Sufi mysticism. In what is, according to Simon, a characteristically Iberian manner, this poetry resorts to an idealized and eroticized feminine figure as a means to achieve mystical illumination. This tendency has contradictory traits: on the one hand, Sufi mysticism is an obvious anachronism in a postmodern age, when language supposedly conveys no absolutes except perhaps the absolute of its own uncertainty; on the other, the “Sufi way” possesses an “anti-hegemonic nature” (132), which, as Simon contends, matches the deconstructive, anti-hegemonic tone of Pessoa’s “anti-censorship” work (123). The stronger aspects of Simon’s book reside, in my opinion, in the recognition of this mystical perspective, apparently incompatible with postmodernism, in a poet whose work has been the object of undeservedly few critical studies that never mentioned any such dimensions. This idea is particularly relevant in chapters III and IV, where mystical

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importance of love in Pessoa's *Os Olhos de Isa, Amor Infinito* and *O Livro da Noite* is considered. Here Simon refers to a hypothetically intense Iberian affiliation with Islamic traditions by reminding the reader that "Isa" in *Os Olhos de Isa* is the Arabic word for Jesus: "I posit that, rather than loading the work with a Christian semiotic, the title *Os Olhos de Isa* refers to the search for a truth which is both Iberian and Arabic-speaking, thus non-Christian" (92).

The close readings Simon undertakes are often insightful and suggest new research directions that the author himself or others might pursue in future studies. (One such study could address, for example, the engagement with religion and the sublime in other Portuguese poets, such as Herberto Helder, Ruy Belo, António Ramos Rosa or José Tolentino Mendonça.) The most visible fragility of Simon's text resides in his association of Portugal's alleged semi-peripherality (a concept famously developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos) with the surprisingly postmodern combination of the Christian and Sufi traditions in a poetic context. Simon's presentation of this stimulating but challenging argument is not (yet?) extensive enough or sufficiently convincing.

The book displays some non-negligible errors for which the author is not necessarily to blame: the misspelling of "Portuguese" (as "Portugese") in the title and the incorrect dates given for both Pessoa's birth (1942 instead of 1948) and his death. The latter can be explained by a rumor that has been circulating for some time in Portugal and in cyberspace. I understand that Simon attempted—vigorously if unsuccessfully—to contact Pessoa and his family as he sought this (not unimportant) clarification. I am happy to report that the poet Joaquim Pessoa is alive and well, and grateful that the publication of Simon's book compensates for some of the unjust silence to which his work has been subjected.

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