

ary genre. But the novel may also be read as a political parable about the dangers and necessities of conflict. For example, Peka, an artist who believes in art for art's sake, wants to decorate the tower. Lesabéndio, on the other hand, wants to use the tower to aid and transform Pallas. Peka loses to Lesabéndio, who absorbs Peka through his pores, nonviolently making Peka a part of himself. This highlights Scheerbart's idea that technology must be integrated into the natural world and subordinated to values greater than itself in order for humans to live in a world that is at once harmonious and worthwhile. Rather than a tool for altering and reconfiguring both nature and the surface of Pallas, technology alters its users and their ecological and cosmic niche.

But, far from programmatic, Scheerbart is unsettling, quirky and ironic in his humor and parody. The fact that pain and injuries are so rare on Pallas that they are remembered by only the oldest living beings might be an echo of a Neo-Darwinist understanding of nature not so brutally based on one species exterminating another. The mystical union Lesabéndio undergoes with the star Pallas might echo Nietzsche's superman. The cooperative consensus among Pallasians might echo thoughts on applied art, where art and technology should serve the spiritual needs of the people. Finally, the novel might be read as a pastiche of scientific texts, even while it questions the ability of such texts to summarize and objectify knowledge.

And so, yet another way to approach *Lesabéndio*: as part science, part art, part humor. Scheerbart's odd humor, with its ability to estrange so much of our usual experience, makes the novel *Lesabéndio* both a challenge and delight to read, wreaking havoc as it does with assumptions about fiction and expectations about physical reality. This is, however, offset by the double star (two stars orbiting around a common center of mass) nature of the novel. The other, equally offsetting yet attractive result is that *Lesabéndio* becomes a novel about the future that we can read in the present. The dangers of ecological crisis and the opportunity for planetary transformative renewal portrayed in the novel are very much real today. A reconfiguration of one's relationship with the planet one inhabits and its relation to other stars, as portrayed in

the novel, speaks to the strand of current/future posthumanism celebrating disembodied information. In the end, *Lesabéndio* provides a surprising look at future alternative visions that is as fresh today as it was in the past when originally written.

*Lesabéndio* is often considered Scheerbart's master work—his other works include *The Development of Aerial Militarism* and *The Perpetual Motion Machine*—but, published in German, in 1913, on the eve of World War I, its ability to wield wider influence was, arguably, cut short. This first English translation by Christina Svendsen and publication is especially welcome.

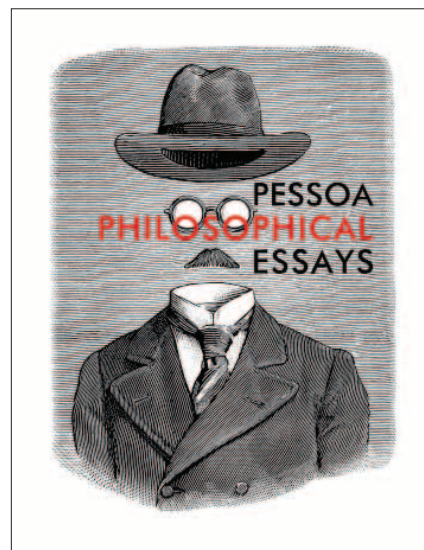
### PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS: A CRITICAL EDITION— FERNANDO PESSOA

edited by Nuno Ribeiro. Contra Mundum Press, New York, U.S.A., 2012. 190 pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-983-697-268.

*Reviewed by Allan Graubard. E-mail: <graubarda@gmail.com>.*

Nominally considered the most significant poet of 20th-century Portugal, Fernando Pessoa also holds the distinction of writing himself out of much of his works systematically—something unique in European literature as a whole. This is all the more curious for his having published just four books during his life and many other poems and texts in literary journals and magazines. While a known figure in his locale and time, the broader international acclaim he has more recently gained during the last several decades plays well into the game he established as his overall method. He wrote the majority of his work under several heteronyms, each composing an *oeuvre* relatable to the name, not the author. But then, who was the author and whom do we read—Pessoa or the heteronym? And what difference does it make if we confound the two? Where does the one appear and the other fade? Or are they twins or something else that entices and eludes us?

There is certainly playfulness here, and it can grow infectious. Play has a tendency to do that. And what a breath of fresh air it is to find a poet who found, in fully embodied masks, a kind of multiplicity of character, if you wish to take it that way, and relative anonymity for the author behind, within or in front of the mask. At least in my read-



ing of "his" poems and essays before the publication of the present book, it kept me attuned not only to their brilliance but also to the way that Pessoa set the stage for our encounter with them.

Not being a scholar in things Pessoa, I am not the one to comment in any authoritative fashion on the histories, complexities or parallelisms that his masks—that is, his heteronyms—and writings involve. Perhaps his upbringing was a factor. It seems to have been. Born in Lisbon in 1888, thereafter relocated to Durban, South Africa, in 1896, he learns English, and the effect of this linguistic and spatial disjunction on the young sensibility of the future poet must have been significant. In 1906 he returned to Lisbon for good but did not give up writing in English. He only gave up writing in his name in English, adopting two droll "pre-heteronyms," as Pessoa calls them—Charles Robert Anon and Alexander Search—in which to compose most of the brief philosophical essays that comprise the book at hand.

Make no mistake: These essays, discovered recently and published as written for the first time, are not in any sense methodical or complete. They can be read as commentary on a host of issues—rationality, atheism, belief, freedom, the will, the soul, sensation, consciousness, etc.—and seem at once serious in their intent and ludic in their results.

This is not an unknown for poets who grapple with philosophical concepts. Nor are flashes of insight unknown, particularly in regard to a fundamental origin for the poetic: the

encounter with the Other, whether real or imagined, or partaking of something of both. The recounting of Baudelaire's exclamation to a friend, who was just about to throw an African mask into the corner in disgust, to stop because the mask might be "the true god" is striking in this respect, especially for us, ever drained of the kind of heterogeneity between peoples and cultures that gives meaning to who and what we are. Striking, too, is this perhaps involuntary couplet at the end of a paragraph on "introspective psychology," which of course can also be taken as two unconnected jottings:

Psychological arguments.  
Walking in the street, too quickly.

Nor can I really say what the author meant with the following depiction though I have an inkling that it responds more to a poetic than to a philosophical desire:

Objective classifications made according [to] a process are Subjective, Objective or Subjective-Objective.

Subjective classifications as processes are of exaltation of degrees and of degree-exaltation.

The relationship of poetry to philosophy, and vice versa, which to my mind at least is one theme of these musings, however seemingly couched in the discourse of argument, is an exceptionally rich area. In one sense it returns to language a resolution not to foreclose too quickly on meaning, significance and resonance. In another sense it can open a reciprocal current that enlivens the concept that seeks clarity in its expression and the expression that seeks clarity in its embodiment.

I cannot help but believe that behind Pessoa's "pre-heteronyms," which feed the current volume, and his "heteronyms," which feed the books for which he is celebrated, play carried the day, and that all else to follow for their author would come because of his mastery in playing. Pessoa's *Philosophical Essays* are part and parcel of this sensibility, which left me wanting more from the aforesaid Charles Robert Anon and Alexander Search, however much those two last names, when placed contiguously, transform my want into something entirely else: Anon Search.

## WARTIME KISS: VISIONS OF THE MOMENT IN THE 1940S

by Alexander Nemerov. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, U.S.A., 2012. 184 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN: 978-0-69-114578-5.

Reviewed by Jan Baetens. E-mail: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>.

*Wartime Kiss* is a book on the interpretation and meaning of time, analyzed from the viewpoint of a historian and focusing on medium history, photography, film studies, and cultural history in general. It is, however, in the first place a very personal and exceptionally well-written book, and throughout its reading the word that is constantly popping up in the reader's mind is: *poetry*. Not just in the sense of beautiful language, strong emotional involvement and originality of insights, but in the sense of what makes poetry poetry: the capacity to bring together two ideas, two words, two events that only existed as independent, unlinked realities in the mind and the heart of the reader. At the same time, the book is also a seminal example of new ways of writing history, for real poetry and great, demanding scholarship are not incompatible under the pen of Alexander Nemerov.

The initial corpus of *Wartime Kiss* is a collection of images, both photographic and cinematographic, some fictional and others documentary, most more or less known (some even so well known that we no longer question their meaning) but more than one totally unknown (if not discussed for the very first time). All of the images have to do with the dialectical relationship between moment and history, be it real history or mythic history (for in quite some cases moments tilt over in bits and pieces of eternity, and vice versa of course). In this book, the moment, the time and the history under scrutiny are those of the 1940s, the heydays of photojournalism as well as of the Hollywood studio system. However, the ways in which moment and history interact in order to construct original and complex, yet also very familiar and deeply shared, experiences of time cannot be reduced to either of these two dominating models—the documentary modus of *Life* magazine on the one hand, the dream factory of the culture industry on the other hand. What Alexander Nemerov unearths in the five chapters of his highly personal inquiry

into some of the most iconic and most obscure representations of exceptional moments of the 1940s is the existence of a hidden relationship between the visual language of the decade and the issue of being at war.

The book starts with a chapter that deserves to become a classic in all future readers of visual cultural studies: a rereading of Alfred Eisenstaedt's image of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square on V-J Day. However, to reread here signifies much more than to read anew: It is really to read in an unseen and unexpected manner, so that overlooked meanings and relationships become suddenly clear, as in a "flash." The whole reinterpretation of the picture is based on the notion of flash (the atomic blast) and its implicit and explicit continuations, first in the picture itself (which Nemerov shows to be a picture of a violent collide, representative of the violence produced by the celebrations of victory at the home front), second in the picture's surroundings (such as, for instance, the cover illustration of the *Life* issue in which Eisenstaedt's photograph appeared: the picture of an underwater ballet swimmer, whose career proves to have crossed in countless ways the violence of war). Nemerov, however, never simply lists or enumerates the items of the files and archives that his research has gathered on the life (and sometimes death) of the characters represented in front of the camera or working behind them. He weaves

