



# **An Introduction to Fernando Pessoa: Modernism and the Paradoxes of Authorship**

*Darlene J. Sadlier*

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Darlene Sadlier's detailed commentary on Pessoa's work explores some of the cultural, political, and personal implications of the artistic impersonation that made him one of the major figures in modern literature. He created a large gallery of authors, each with his own history, who also wrote essays commenting on one another—including Fernando Pessoa "himself." Sadlier's study demonstrates the scope of Pessoa's writing, ranging in style from "artless" simplicity to subtle, almost Borgesian irony, and it also traces the ways in which Pessoa's four major "authors" (which he called "heteronyms") are related to one another.

Sadlier shows that the four poets engage in a dialogue, enabling Pessoa to dramatize the contradictions in his attitudes toward language, history, and society. And she demonstrates that, while distinct in attitude and style, they nevertheless share a preoccupation with the nature of poetry and are responsible for some of the most unusual and skillfully composed verse in the twentieth century. In striking fashion, they anticipate the postmodern deconstruction of the idea of authorship.

Sadlier offers a historical context for Pessoa's work, grounding his poetry in Portuguese culture and the major political and artistic concerns of his day. She presents an especially important commentary on his childhood verse and on the early, formative stages of his writing. Finally, she discusses his posthumous reputation, showing how he has been ironically transformed into a single, apparently unified figure who has become, for many, a symbol of Portugal's national identity.

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