



Centro de Investigação  
para Estudos Luso-Asiáticos

**Professor Roberto Francavilla (University of Genoa, Italy)**

## NOTES ON EUROPEAN IDENTITY

**When? 29/11 – 19h00**

**Where? E21 – G037**

### Abstract:

What I would like to present is merely a series of notes based on a concept which could, epistemologically, characterize our age: ambiguity. The subject of the conference takes to the stranger as an archetypal *topos* in all the histories of literature, to the problem of language and identity, to a very ambiguous transition: *stranger, outsider*. The stranger, in turn, normally inhabits a *topos*. This *topos* is simply called "Outside". The biography of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa written by the French scholar Robert Bréchon has an original title: *Etrange, étranger*. All of Pessoa's poetry reflects this dual existential condition: a strange reflection of itself, a metaphysical mirror which reflects not only one personality but a whole multitude of conflicting voices. Furthermore, Pessoa is a stranger in his own land. He spent his childhood in South Africa: he was educated in English. However, at a certain point in his life, Pessoa made a choice: "My homeland lies with the Portuguese language". Evidently it was in Portuguese that the poet felt less strange, less of a stranger. There are other European writers who have made a choice of languages and homelands: Samuel Beckett moved from English to French; Elias Canetti, a Bulgarian Jew of Spanish descent, was educated in French and English and ended up writing in German. I have often pondered this problem: what characteristics define my European cultural identity, assuming that it exists? Under what circumstances have I had the need (or simple desire) to affirm myself as an European? Perhaps the fundamental problem lies in another issue: not "who" feels European, but "where", in what context. As everyone knows, identity functions by means of opposition. This gives rise to the immediate question: "who is the 'other' for the European?" How many "Europes" coexist, in other words: are we sure that the 'other' for the European only really exists outside Europe? When does a European feel a stranger in Europe? What is the real chance that those we designate as "strangers" today may also come to feel European on account of reconstructing a better life in Europe? In conclusion, I can say that European cultural identity is a kind of invisible ghost which manifests itself according to situations and whose co-ordinates are insufficient for any kind of definition.

**Roberto Francavilla** is Associate Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at the University of Genoa (Department of Languages and Cultures, School of Human Sciences). Previously, he has been developing his work as a Grant Researcher for the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Gulbenkian Foundation. He is a translator and teaches PHD courses in "Comparative Literatures" at the University of Genoa. His main research interests lay in three areas of Lusitanistic studies and focus on a comparative theoretical perspective. As regards the Portuguese area, he has been carrying out research on theatre in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, picaresque literature, modern and contemporary literature. He has been devoting a particular attention to Fernando Pessoa and the fiction of José Cardoso Pires, focussing his analysis on the relationship between literature and political power and on colonial war. As far as the Brazilianist studies are concerned, he has published several articles on the relationship between Brazilian and European avant-garde. He has been among the first scholars to promote poetry and fiction from Lusophone Africa in Italy. He has written a history of Capoverdean literature and several essays on African literatures as well as on postcolonial studies.



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