

Pessoa's Voluptuous Skepticism

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Keywords

Alexander Search, Imitation, Pessoa, Skepticism, Solitude, "The Mad Fiddler," English Poetry.

Abstract

Fernando Pessoa devoured English literature in his early education in South Africa, and his early fictitious author Alexander Search wrote around 115 poems in imitation of poets from Wyatt to Byron, before and after Pessoa's return to Lisbon in 1905. Search's reading of English poetry across time, his imitation of variable styles in English, and his search for an aesthetic ideal characterize a youthful period of voluptuous reading and skeptical despair that may be compared to FitzGerald's pursuit of classical translation through poetic imagination.

Resumo

Fernando Pessoa estudou avidamente a literatura inglesa durante a sua formação na África do Sul, e o seu autor fictício Alexander Search escreveu cerca de 115 poemas, imitando o estilo de poetas ingleses — de Wyatt a Byron —, antes e depois da volta de Pessoa a Lisboa em 1905. A relação de Search com a poesia inglesa, a sua imitação de estilos variados e a busca do jovem Pessoa por um ideal estético caracterizam um período juvenil, de intensa leitura e de desespero cético, comparável à busca de FitzGerald por uma tradução clássica através da imaginação poética.

Palavras-chave

Alexander Search, Ceticismo, Imitação, Pessoa, Solidão, "The Mad Fiddler", Poesia Inglesa.

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In an essay on literary translation, the Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos examined the case of Edward FitzGerald's (1809-1883) translation of Omar Khayyám's (1048-1131) *Rubáiyát*, a text in a language for which the translator had only an amateur interest, and imagined that, at the moment of translation of the Persian text, FitzGerald would find the work archaic, part of a poetic tradition that one would have to know by heart to feel its meaning fully (CAMPOS, 1983: 62). FitzGerald worked on the *Rubáiyát* from a French translation, according to his own resourcefulness and his particular distance, filtered through a classical ideal. Campos perceives that FitzGerald translates Khayyám "in the light of Greek Epicureanism, which reflects as much of his classical education as a certain 'mood' of the time, which tends to voluptuous skepticism."¹ The phrase seems appropriate to describe the young Pessoa's relationship with English poetry, which he read voraciously as the language of his education and imagination,² and it captures Bernardo Soares' comment on FitzGerald's work in the *Livro do Desassossego* [*The Book of Disquiet*]:³ "Charity for all, intimacy with none" (PESSOA, 2003: 367).⁴ Khayyám's poetry comes from an unknown place, and for a moment, in his clerk's ledger lines, Soares sees exotic unrhymed quatrains: "In the very act of entering the name of an unfamiliar cloth, the doors of the Indus and of Samarkand open up,

¹ Cf. "à luz do epicurismo grego, e que responde tanto à sua formação clássica, quanto a um certo 'mood' do tempo, propenso ao ceticismo voluptuário" (CAMPOS, 1983: 63).

² Bernardo Soares' appraisal of Khayyám suggests that the Pessoa's reading of the *Rubáiyát* around 1910 was central to the origin of Ricardo Reis: "A philosophia practica de Khayyam reduz-se pois a um epicurismo suave, esbatido até ao mínimo do desejo de prazer. Basta-lhe ver rosas e beber vinho. Uma brisa leve, uma conversa sem intuito nem proposito, um pucaro de vinho, flores, em isso, e em não mais do que isso, põe o sabia persa o seu desejo maximo. O amor agita e cansa, a acção dispersa e falha, ninguém sabe saber e pensar embacia tudo. Mais vale pois cessar em nós de desejar ou de esperar, de ter a pretensão futil de explicar o mundo, ou o proposito estulto de o emendar ou governar. Tudo é nada, ou, como se diz na Anthologia Grega, 'tudo vem da sem-razão', e é um grego, e portanto um racional, que o diz" (PESSOA, 2008: 78) ["Khayyam's practical philosophy can be reduced to a smooth Epicureanism, with the desire for pleasure reduced to a minimum. It is enough for him to see roses and drink wine. A light breeze, a conversation without a purpose, a pitcher of wine, flowers, that and no more than that is the maximum that the Persian sage desires. Love agitates and tires, its action weakens and fails, no one knows how to think and thinking obscures everything. It is best to stop desiring or hoping, of having the futile pretension of explaining the world, or the foolish aim of changing or governing it"] (PESSOA, 2002: 366-367). Pessoa's copy also contains extensive draft translations of quatrains of the poem, published in *Rubaiyat* (Pessoa, 2008). Editor's note: Following Pizarro's critical edition (PESSOA, 2010: II, 534) this text along with others on the Persian poet are no longer considered part of the corpus that make the *Livro do Desassossego* [*The Book of Disquiet*].

³ On Pessoa and Khayyám, see PIZARRO (2013) and BOSCALLIA (2016).

⁴ "Caridade para com todos, intimidade com nenhum. Assim interpreta FitzGerald em um passo de uma sua nota, qualquer coisa da etihca de Khayyam" (PESSOA, 2008: 77). Editor's note: Following Pizarro's critical edition (PESSOA, 2010: II, 534) this text along with others on the Persian poet are no longer considered part of the corpus that make the *Livro do Desassossego* [*The Book of Disquiet*].

and Persian poetry (which is yet from another place), with its quatrains whose third lines don't rhyme, is a distant anchor for me in my disquiet" (PESSOA, 2003: 18).⁵ The *Rubáiyát* opens a vision of the voluptuous orientalist dream of empire and domination: "Nearly all men dream, deep down, of their own mighty imperialism: the subjection of all men, the surrender of all women, the adoration of all peoples and – for the noblest dreamers – of all eras" (PESSOA, 2002: 53).⁶ Soares acknowledges the imperialist orientalism of his failure to be: "I know I've failed. I enjoy the vague voluptuosity of failure like one who, in his exhaustion, appreciates the fever that laid him up" (PESSOA, 2003: 270).⁷

Contact with English literature formed Pessoa's early intellectual foundation with Milton, Shakespeare, the Elizabethans, Romantics and the Victorians, read in the colonial setting of Durban High School in British South Africa, where a literary education was considered essential for the development of a Victorian gentleman. English poetry was the first of Pessoa's "adverse genres," by which I mean imitation of form filled with incongruent content, and it was adverse in multiple dimensions. Pessoa assigned this first large body of creative work in English to the fictitious author Alexander Search,⁸ and much of Search's poetry was written in the first four years after Pessoa had returned to Lisbon in August of 1905. In notes concerning Alexander Search, Pessoa assigns him the same birthdate as his own (13 June 1888) and produces short biographical sketches in which Search analyzes his own childhood, character, and personality. Search tells of early readings of novels of mystery and adventure; an inclination towards the spiritual, mysterious, and obscure; his loneliness; a loving and kind soul hindered by selfishness; a fear of insanity and criminal impulses; and an unbalanced susceptibility to suffering and pain (see PESSOA, 2016a: 227-248). In her study of Pessoa as a bilingual poet, scholar Anne Terlinden concludes that Pessoa wanted Search to be a complete heteronym:

⁵ "No proprio registro de um tecido que não sei o que seja se me abrem as portas do Indo e de Samarcanda, e a poesia da Persia, que não é de um lugar nem de outro, faz das suas quadras, desrimadas no terceiro verso, um apoio longinquo para o meu desasocego" (PESSOA, 2010: I, 191).

⁶ "Quasi todos os homens sonham, nos secretos do seu ser, um grande imperialismo seu, a sujeição de todos os homens, a entrega de todas as mulheres, a adoração dos povos, e, nos mais pobres, de todas [as] eras..." (PESSOA, 2010: I, 191).

⁷ "Sei que falhei. Goso a volupia indeterminada da fallencia como quem dá um apreço exausto a uma febre que o enclausura" (PESSOA, 2010: I, 84).

⁸ Editor's note: From approximately 1903 to 1906 Charles Robert Anon was the young Pessoa's most prolific literary figure in English, who wrote critical essays, short stories, sonnets, epitaphs, satires odes and elegies. Anon published in *The Natal Mercury* in 1904, and his name appears in Pessoa's personal library in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton* (1885), *The Philosophy of Herbert Spenser* (1904), and *A Practical Introduction to Latin Prose Composition* (1899) (see PESSOA, 2016a: 139-156). In 1906 Pessoa passes over some of Anon's poetry to Alexander Search (see PESSOA, 2016a: 227-248). For a complete list of Search's private library, see FERRARI (2009: 193-197).

He [Pessoa] builds his own library [...] including Byron, Coleridge, Shelley, and Whitman; collaborates in an intersectionist review with Pessoa, Sá-Carneiro, Guisado and Côrtes-Rodrigues; reads Portuguese, French, and Spanish; possesses a wide cultural background; and is influenced in his early poetry by the style and theme of the English Romantics

(TERLINDEN, 1990: 134-137)

Search's strange, uneven use of English often has the sense of a translation from multiple authors, perhaps a compilation of all the poets he had read, admired, and emulated in verse. Search's English was thus both synthetic and archaic, compiled and synthesized in his imagination through authors from Wyatt to Keats,⁹ from whose voices Pessoa drew to create his first major literary persona. At the same time, the English verses of Alexander Search explore and predict traces of his author's character, introducing themes that will continue to be prominent in the later work, for which Search can be thought of as the first major fictitious author before the creation of the heteronyms in 1914.¹⁰ Search's anguished personal and philosophical quest leads directly to Pessoa's later poems in English.

There is intensely dramatic self-analysis in this poetry with a voluptuous tone in the persona of a romantic wanderer on a quest for knowledge. Its skepticism lies in doubts about the impossibility of knowing anything about the nature of existence and reality, accompanied by self-doubts whether the author will ever fulfill his frightening literary potential under the burden of an almost perverse and hyperactive imagination. On surveying the poems attributed to Search, which at the time of her study were available only in Pessoa's literary archive,¹¹ Terlinden considered them to express the anguished thoughts of the young poet, even though the poems are often obsessive imitations of his most admired writers. She gives credence to the importance of thematic continuity and affirms "[...] the young poet A[lexander] Search might well be considered as a coarse melting-pot of the essential ontological intuitions of the later poetic genius [...] [and] could serve as the foundation of the mature heteronymic work of Pessoa" (1990: 91). Although Pessoa's English poems have been treated as a separate category,¹² represented mainly in the three chapbooks self-published in Lisbon in 1918 and 1921, the large body of work by Alexander Search now available supports the thesis of continuity in the bilingual poet and argues against the separation of poems in English from the poetry in Portuguese. Jorge de Sena and Terlinden were among the first scholars to view the English and Portuguese

⁹ Editor's note: for the presence of Thomas Wyatt, see Stephen M. Foley's article in this issue.

¹⁰ Search could be said to rest on revisiting the diaspora and dilution found among Victorian writers and artists of classical ideals, depicted aesthetically in paintings from the Pre-Raphaelites to the noble decorative figures of the English classical revivalist artist Frederick Leighton (1830-1896).

¹¹ Editor's note: Held at the National Library of Portugal since 1979. The first critical edition of Alexander Search's poetry was published by João Dionísio in 1997.

¹² For an overview of Pessoa's English poetry see FERRARI and PITTELLA (2015).

works as a unified whole, even at a time when the only English poetry available was what Pessoa had subsequently published more than a decade after Search's poems had been penned.¹³

In his essay "Alexander Search, entre o Sono e o Sonho," Yale scholar Stephen Reckert notices the artificiality of verses that he finds "excessively literary and even archaic," written for psychological, ideological, or esoteric purposes, worked through the antitheses inside/outside, self/others, light/darkness, madness/normalcy (1978: 81-102). Reckert analyzes the poem "In the Street," discovered in 1978 by Yvette K. Centeno, with its theme of the passer-by who unrolls a searching self-analysis of the artist and a critique of his powers as he is passing down a residential street in the evening. The poet is cold and alone, distant from the shadows of families he glimpses in the houses. He carries the burdens of the world and the curse of his restless imagination: "Happy were I but to have then | The usual life of men. || But oh! I have within my heart | Things that cannot keep still." He is the eternally excluded and condemned, calling himself "[a] wearied Sisyphus [...] | Against the world's ironic stone." (1997: 112).

As much as the wandering poet may wish to live the normal joys glimpsed in one of the homes, he exults at the same time in his difference: "For aught like madness is in me. [...] I dread to think my life might pass | Like that of men." (1997: 113-114). Being condemned to be forever a ceaseless wanderer against all norms, never to know the normal desires of men ("I know not to what I aspire | Yet know *this* I cannot desire") (1997: 114). Search nevertheless exults in his "delirious smart [...] restlessness" (1997: 112), and in the power of his mind to "perceive | Something none other can conceive" (1997: 115). Through the figure of the pensive, introspective passer-by, the poet revisits the interior of the self, passing not only through the street but also through the whole of life as a dramatic allegory. The allegorical structure of the intellectual journey of "In the Street" will be refigured in much of the later poetry, for which Caetano's *O Guardador de Rebanhos* [*The Keeper of Sheep*] (PESSOA, 2016b) serves as a principal example.

The epigraph preceding the poem "In the Street" taken from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* ("But I, mein Werther, sit above it all; I am alone with the stars")¹⁴ references Goethe's romantic hero, Werther from whose tragic destiny Pessoa is

¹³ Jorge de Sena had previously suggested in his preface to *Poemas Ingleses* (1974) that the English poems were a mask through which Pessoa revealed more about himself than he later did in Portuguese—although, speaking of the eroticism and obscenity of *Antinous* and *Epithalamium*, Pessoa demurs in a letter to João Gaspar Simões dated 18 November 1930: "Não sei porque escrevi qualquer dos poemas em inglez" ["I don't know why I wrote any of those poems in English"] (PESSOA, 1998: 137-139).

¹⁴ Pessoa's heavily annotated copy of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1903) is dated "February, 1904, Durban High School." Among the noted phrases (p. 36) is "Which of your Philosophical Systems is other than a dream-theorem [...]" For other marginalia in this book, see *Escritos sobre Génio e Loucura* (PESSOA, 2006: II, 690-691).

protected by the force of his quest for the absolute, by humor and detachment, and by externalizing himself in his use of persona.

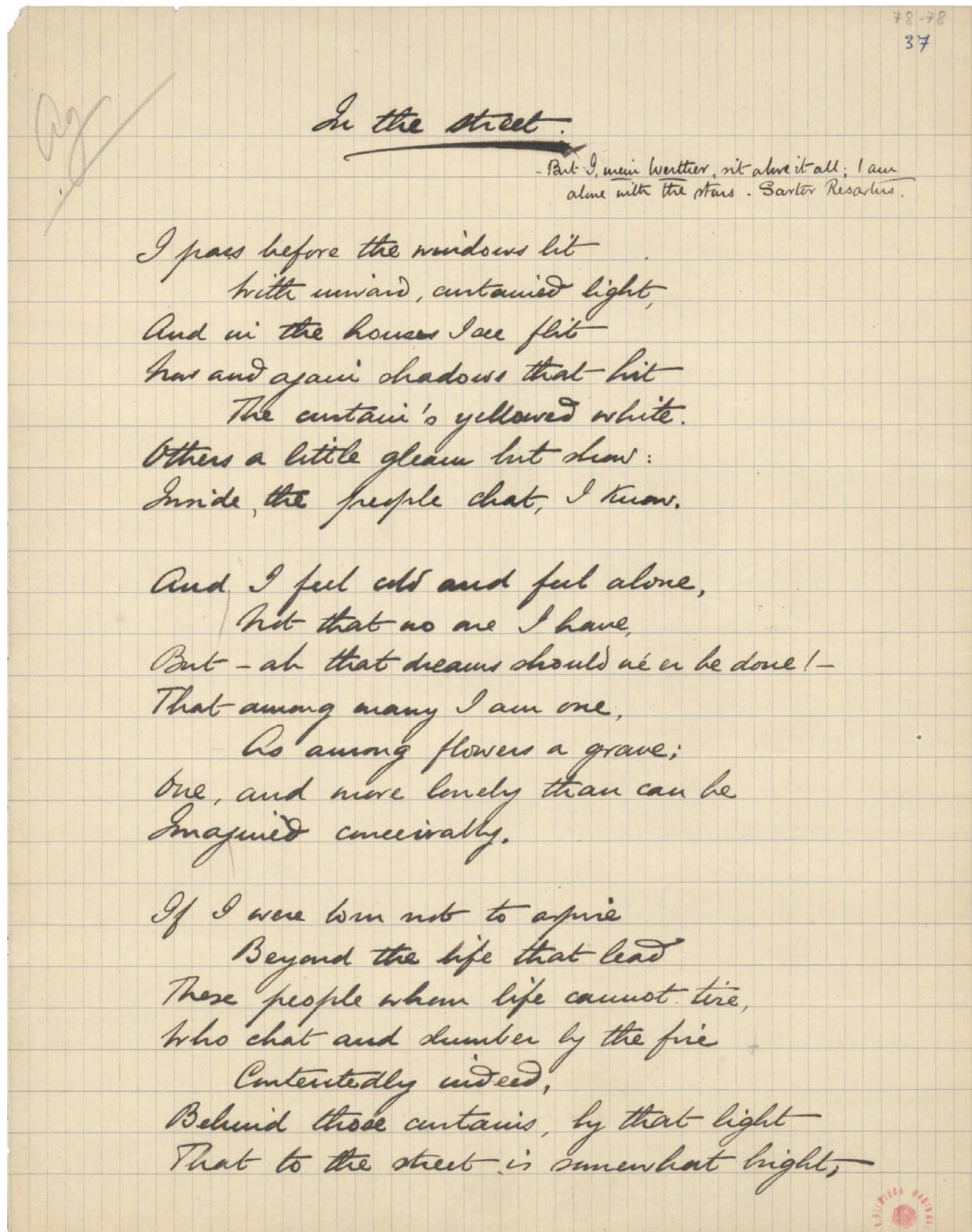


Fig. 1. Opening ms. page of "In the Street." (BNP / E3, 78-78).

The distance that protected Pessoa from Search's despair and solitude can be felt in his dismissive critique of Frederick Wyatt, one of the fictitious authors dating from 1913 (see PESSOA, 2016a: 359-370). The madness that Search feared in himself is cynically recommended to improve the image and reception of Wyatt: "It is a pity he is not mad; it would have been better like that. It is perhaps the best casual word-portrait of him, in all its indirectness. It stung him, as I easily perceived,

because it hit his character off so justly and yet showed how terribly evident even to casual & uninterested dreamers was the suffering he thought he hid in himself from all eyes" (PESSOA, 2016a: 365).¹⁵ Pessoa's penetrating self-objectification by an almost omniscient and external consciousness also served to separate pure intellect from emotion.

In the bilingual volume *Poesia Inglesa* (PESSOA, 1995) editor Luísa Freire publishes 115 poems by Search written in the period 1904-1909 (sixteen written before his return to Portugal in 1905) plus "The Mad Fiddler" complete, followed by 31 dispersed poems, in the first full publication of texts by Alexander Search, which anticipated João Dionísio's critical edition (PESSOA, 1997). In the early poetry one finds a recapitulation of the reflections of the passer-by of "In the Street," expressed in diverse poetic forms and styles. University scholars may identify with the initial quatrain of "Death in Life":

Another day is past, and while it past,
What have I pondered or conceived or read?
Nothing! Another day has gone to waste.
Nothing! Each hour as it is born is dead.

(PESSOA, 1997: 127)

Search writes as a Wordsworth in "Regret" ("I would that I were again a child | And a child you sweet and pure" (1997: 125); delivers a Shakespearean soliloquy in "Resolution" (I'll to my work then, so God make me strong | To bring the Demons of mine own self to | Their knees, and take the Devil by the throat") (1997: 127); floats in the clouds with Shelley in "Thought" ("How great a thing is thought! as through the gloom | Of stormy skies the sudden lightning curls, | As slow the storm in patience grim unfurls | Its mighty volume of resounding boom") (1997: 145); a Byron in "Perfection" ("Perfection comes to me in fevered dreams, | Beauty diving by earthly senses bound, | And lulls mine ear with slow, forgetful sound [...] Then day invades, and all is gone away; | I to myself return, and feel such woe | As when a ship-wrecked sailor waked from sleep –") (1997: 289-290); a Coleridge in "The Maiden" ("Then I asked a madman who had no home, | And he said: 'Alas for thee who dost roam! | Thou must become as I am now | For her thou seekest none can know") (1997: 139); and a Marvell in "Epigram" ("Ah, foolish girl, with many a fancy fraught, | Seek not the dreary path of solemn thought. | The man who thinks is he that suffers worst, | By nature blest, by everything accurst.") (1997: 308).¹⁶

¹⁵ Editor's note: twenty of the twenty-one poems that make up Frederick Wyatt's book of poetry had been originally attributed to Alexander Search. For a full transcription of all the documents in *The Poems of Frederick Wyatt* project, see the Documents section in this issue.

¹⁶ Pessoa's library contained *The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley* (1904), *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (1905), *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* [n.d.], *Poems of Robert Browning* (1907),

Self-analysis is often indistinguishable from autobiography: "My tale is simple, sad and brief – [...] Too soon I learned to see too clear, [...] I was not born to joy or love. [...] Like a tremendous, mystic sea | In lands where dreams alone can be" ("The Woman in Black") (1997: 99-102). The theme of madness figures prominently: "Oh God, let me not fall insane! | I know that half-mad I am now;" he exclaims in "Prayer," (1997: 119) and he surveys his life before 1907 in "My Life" ("Youth? Life? Twelve years I had of happiness; [...] Twelve years of sleep and seven of distress") (1997: 118). His constant old friends, companions, and colleagues are disappointment, despair, and solitude ("Familiar Conversation") (1997: 75). Venturing into the street once more in "A Winter Day" the poet finds it a crucible of the painful emptiness of his existence: "How deep my thoughts in pain and sadness are! | How wreck'd my soul in its intense despair! [...] As if life or the world were anything!" (1997: 77-80).

Currents of self-analysis are dominated by the skepticism and fatalism of one who laments his alienation from the normal lives he observes on the street in passing: "Oh joy! oh height of happiness! | To wish no more than life, | To feel of pleasure, of distress, | A normal more, a normal less" (1997: 113). The poet is by his nature "eternally excluded," (1997: 112) and complains in "Sonnet of a Sceptic": "When I in pain my troubled eyelids close | And look upon the world that in me lies. [...] I am like the night, | And yet in me no star, serenely bright, | The clouds of mind and soul so purely clears. [...] Unheard, unseen, I sit in heatless cold, | Enwrapped in my doubts and in my fears" (1997: 143-144). Constant disturbing questioning on "the sense of the sense of the universe" or "the sense of the mystery of all" ("Horror") (1997: 76) takes over his mind in "Mania of Doubt": "All things unto me are queries | That from normalness depart [...] Things are and seem, and nothing bears | The secret of the life it wears" (1997: 67). The poet by his compulsive nature must live the mystery of the unknown or empty nature of things: "A curtain hides the mystery | That in the world is known to be [...] From eyes unsensual that would see [...] That Nothingness pains more the heart" (1997: 68); and feel, in "Rage", perhaps with Burns, "[...] a rage – ay a rage! [...] A thirst of life nought can assuage [...] A cynic before dirt, | A revolt before God" (1997: 126-127).

The plaintive portrait of the poet's condition can turn from melancholic to stoic to euphoric pride in his superior mind as he continues on his allegorical road: "On an infinite road, at an unknown pace, | With endless and free commotion, | [...] | A freshness whose soul is motion!" ("On the Road") (1997: 210). The poet divines that his journey promises to lead his errant thoughts to "traverse impossible infinities" ("To a Hand") (1997: 64) in verses that foreshadow the revelatory "Ascensão de Vasco da Gama" ["Ascension of Vasco da Gama"] in

The Works of Alfred Tennyson (1902), *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (1898), and Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1910).

Mensagem (1934), the only full-length book Pessoa published during his lifetime: "By a sudden portal in the Visible | I have a glimpse of the Absolute" ("To a Hand") (1997: 63). His esoteric quest for mystical and divine truths both condemns and elevates the poet to an interminable search beyond the everyday world and firmly establishes the theme of mystery and the absolute in his poetry.

The early poems contain glimpses of subsequent works that have been observed by many readers. Reckert asks if it would not seem too fanciful to see in references to solitude, dream, and shipwreck in the poetry of Alexander Search the origin of the 1913 play, *O Marinheiro* [*The Sailor*]:¹⁷ "Then day invades, and all is gone away; [...] As when a ship-wrecked sailor waked from sleep—" ("Perfection") (1997: 290); "It is an island out of human track, | Mysterious, old within the sea and full | Of caves and grottoes unexplored and black [...] Woven in a labyrinth and scarce of light" ("Soul-Symbols") (1997: 121-122). Could the failure of Pessoa's love letters to Ophelia be predicted by the anguished decision posed to the reader in the poem "A Question"? In the opening stanza we read: "If you had to choose between seeing dead— | Your wife whom you do love so well— | And the loss complete, irreparable, | Of your verses all, instead—" (1997: 73).

Humorous and even apparently meaningless poems¹⁸ in Search bring to mind short poems by Álvaro de Campos or Pessoa, as in "The World Offended": "I said unto the World one day: 'I suspect thee of existence!'" (1997: 72). Or play with language in "The Lip": "I saw in a dream, by no light's gleam, | A man with only one lip – | Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, | Absolutely with only one lip!" (1997: 93) or in "The Story of Solomon Waste": "[...] two clear facts, he lived and died | This is *all* the story of Solomon Waste" (1997: 211). Playful eroticism with a baroque tone makes a brief appearance in the satirical poem "On An Ankle: A Sonnet Bearing the Imprimatur of the Inquisitor-General and of Other People of Distinction and of Decency":

I had a revelation not from high
But from below, when thy skirt awhile lifted
Betrayed such *promise* that I am not gifted
With words that may that view well signify.

And even if my verse that thing would try,
Hard were it, if my task came to be sifted,
To find a word that rude would not have shifted
Therefrom the cold hand of Morality.

¹⁷ On the origins of *O Marinheiro* [*The Sailor*] see K. David JACKSON (2010: 37-58) and Claudia J. FISCHER (2012).

¹⁸ Editor's note: This category could include poems in English that were left unpublished/unattributed. See previously unpublished English poem "Envoi" included in *No Matter What We Dream: Selected English Poems* (PESSOA, 2015).

To gaze is nought; mere sight no mind hath wrecked.
 But oh, sweet lady, beyond what is seen
 What things may guess or hint at Disrespect!

Sacred is not the beauty of a queen...
 I from thine ankle did as much suspect
 As you from this may suspect what I mean.

(PESSOA, 1997: 53)

By August of 1907, however, Pessoa has exhausted the poetic and psychological possibilities of Alexander Search, who becomes a victim of the heteronymic game.¹⁹ That year Search penned a “Farewell” (“Farewell, farewell for ever! | ’Tis time this thing were done”) (1997: 40), before the two epitaphs that would put an end to this phase of his life and writing and cast out the suffering Search to make a place for the major heteronyms.²⁰ The first epitaph critiques his madness, powerless egotism, disorder, grief and fears, and his weak and execrable mind: “[L]et him lie in peace for ever [...] || [...] to the sin of having lived | He joined the crime of having thought” (1997: 110). In the second, it is Pessoa who expels the poet who aspired to last beyond his time: “Here the accursèd poet lies, | Hid far from the pure blue skies; [...] Vain was his thought. | He would be loved and he was not. [...] Down to him no light can go. | Damn’d be he for ever! (1997: 74). The final end, separating Pessoa definitively from Search, comes in an irreverent and theatrical epitaph composed after the definitive demise of the persona: “Here lieth Alexander Search | Whom God & man left in the lurch [...] He believed not in state or church | Nor in God, woman, man or love [...] This was his last sentiment: | Accurst be Nature, Man and God” (1997: 37-38).

¹⁹ Editor’s note: Pessoa did not employ the term “heteronímia” [“heteronymy”]. He explained the difference between “duas categorias de obras” (i.e., “orthónymas” and “heterónymas”) in his “Tábua bibliográfica” [“Bibliographical Table”] published in the Coimbra-based magazine *presença* in December 1928. These categories as such only appeared in 1928.

²⁰ “Farewell” is dated 23 August 1907.

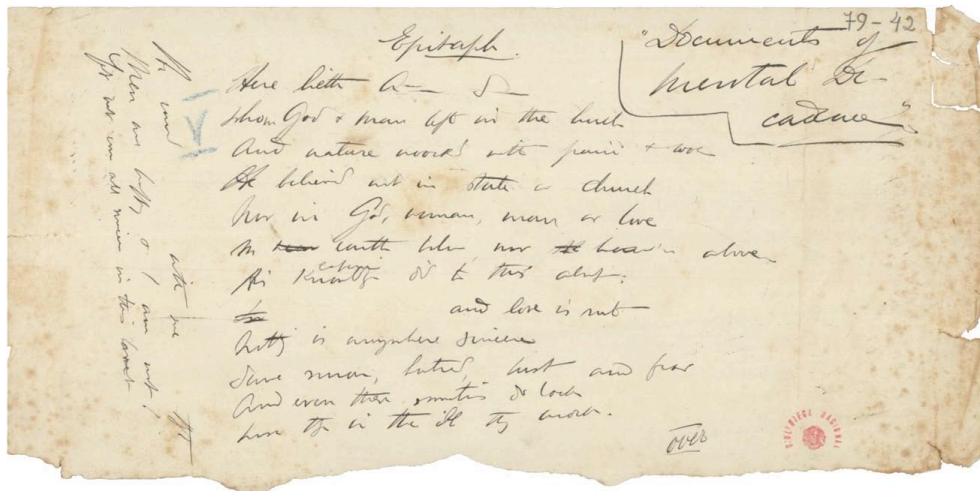


Fig. 2. Front of "Epigraph." (BNP / E3, 79-42r).

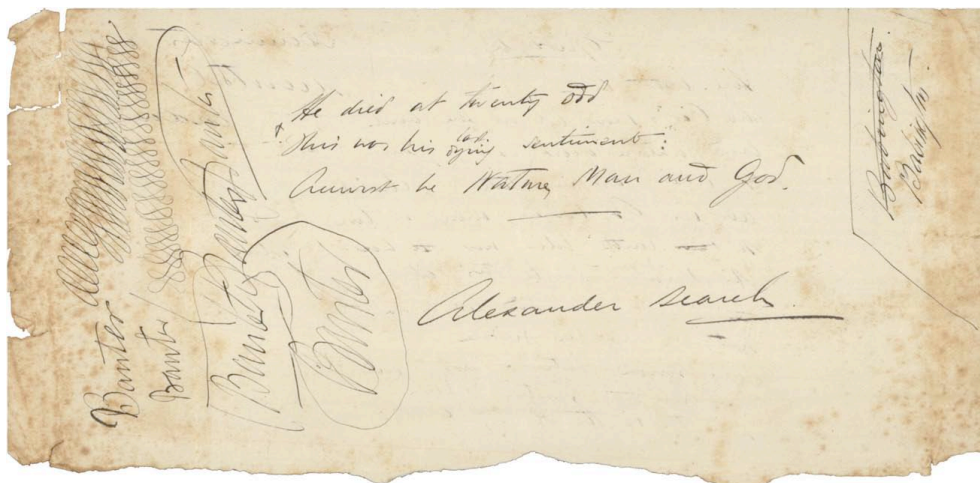


Fig. 3. Verso of "Epigraph." (BNP / E3, 79-42v).

English poems that Pessoa chose to translate into Portuguese may be useful to explain the development of the English poetry after Alexander Search. In 1990 the Brazilian researcher José Luiz Garaldi discovered previously unknown translations of English language poets into Portuguese by Fernando Pessoa that closely followed the poetry of Search, whose last poems were dated 1909 (see CAMPOS, 2015). In 1910-1911 the English editor Warren F. Kellogg was in Lisbon to organize a massive anthology in Portuguese language of the world's great poets, the *Biblioteca Internacional de Obras Célebres*, published in 24 volumes, for which Pessoa translated at least five poems: "Godiva" by Alfred Tennyson (1819-1891), "On a portrait of Dante by Giotto" by James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), "Lucy" by William Wordsworth (1770-1850), "The last rose of summer" by Thomas Moore (1779-1852), and "Barbara Frietchie" by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892).²¹ Although these translations were taken as commercial employment, they

²¹ Published respectively in VI (pp. 2807-2809), VII (pp. 3534-3535), XVII (pp. 8272-8273 and 8330) and XX (pp. 10215-10218).

attest to Pessoa's broad reading of English poetry and mirror the variety of imitative styles found in Search's poems in the preceding years.²² Brazilian poet Augusto de Campos finds common stylistic features in Pessoa's translations—comparable to other celebrated Pessoa translations from the 1920s, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning's (1806-1861) "Catarina to Camões" and Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) "The Raven," "Ulalume," and "Annabel Lee"—to extend to subsequent poetry of the heteronyms (CAMPOS, 2015). Campos finds similarities in rhythm, stress-syllabic stress meters, colloquial alliteration, interrupted lines, and semantic patterns. He compares the diction and rhythm of the translation of Whittier's "Barbara Frietchie" to "O Mostrengo" of *Mensagem* [Message], the alliterations of Tennyson's "Godiva" with the "Autopsychographia" ["Autopsychography"], and the short verses of Moore's "The Last Rose of Summer" to Pessoa's "Leve, Breve, Suave" ["Lightly, Shortly, Softly"].²³ Pessoa's heightened attention to the original produces some striking solutions that Campos considers to reveal a preference for concision through short and simple verses. Diction and rhythm are paramount, as Pessoa merges attention to the original with creative freedom in his solutions.²⁴ In a prose fragment that amounts to a brief theory of translation, "A poem is an intellectualized impression" (PESSOA, 1967: 74), Pessoa posits a double rhythm, verbal or musical and visual or imagistic, as a guide for translators, where the verbal rhythm is the more essential to be observed and maintained.²⁵ The translations discovered in the *Biblioteca Internacional* are further testimony of the technical role of English language poetry of the 19th century on the rhythm, imagery, and themes to be developed by Pessoa after 1910.

²² Portuguese scholar Arnaldo Saraiva identified other non-signed translations as by Pessoa, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Caterina to Camões," Shelley's "To a Skylark" and Robert Browning's "Love Among the Ruins" for the *Biblioteca Internacional de Obras Célebres*. See SARAIVA (1996). For other translations of English poetry by Pessoa, see FISCHER (2015).

²³ Claudia J. Fischer documents the importance of translation in Pessoa's literary (2015). Fischer reveals fragments prepared by Pessoa for João Castro Osório, for whom Pessoa proposed a massive plan of translation in June 1923. The manuscript translations include lines from Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther," Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break," and Browning's "The Pied Piper of Hamelin: A Child's Story."

²⁴ For Pessoa's metrics, see FERRARI (2012).

²⁵ In the essay "A arte de traduzir poesia" ["The art of translating poetry"] Pessoa explains double rhythm as encompassing the concave and the convex: "A tradução de um poema deve, portanto, conformar-se absolutamente (1) à idéia ou emoção que o constitui, (2) ao ritmo verbal em que essa idéia ou emoção é expressa; deve conformar-se em relação ao ritmo interno ou visual, aderindo às próprias imagens quando possa mas aderindo sempre ao tipo de imagem" ["The translation of a poem should, therefore, conform totally to (1) the idea of emotion that constitutes it, (2) to the verbal rhythm in which this idea or emotion is expressed; it should conform to the relation of the internal or visual rhythm, adhering to the images whenever possible but always to the type of image"]. He offers as an example his translations of Poe's "Annabel Lee" and "Ulalume" (PESSOA, 1967: 74).

The influence of Fitzgerald's translation can also be documented through Pessoa's translations to Portuguese of multiple stanzas of the *Rubiáyát* written in the margins of his edition.

Pessoa's work for Kellogg allowed him to continue Search's excursion through English poetry. The announced demise of Search was perhaps not the end but rather a transfiguration of Pessoa's English poetry leading to "The Mad Fiddler," a second large collection of English verse and the first major complete, organic work that Pessoa considered ready for publication. A dramatic allegory, the 83 typewritten pages of "The Mad Fiddler" were signed "Fernando Pessoa" on the title page, with relatively few corrections or variant texts. In this sequence of 53 poems written from 1911-1917, a wandering poet embarks on a symbolic quest for the absolute that revisits some themes found in Search's poems. The narrator's quest for knowledge in "The Mad Fiddler" is more purely philosophical and abstract than Search's, yet continues the wandering motif found in Search, as if to suggest this collection to be a continuation or culmination of the earlier aimless, solitary, and dreamlike journey. Pessoa elaborates on themes first broached by Search. While Search's poem "In the Street" took the strolling poet on an anguished although linear course, for example ("I pass before the windows lit") (1997: 111), "The Mad Fiddler" leads the poet into a circular labyrinth of incantation. The poet's wandering is a "Great river so | Quiet and true," a metaphor of nature that he seeks to emulate, "Teach me to go | Through life like you!" ("Summer Moments") (1999: 92).

Terlinden notes the continuity between Search and Pessoa's "The Mad Fiddler" by locating similar themes, while considering "The Mad Fiddler" to be a more mature work poetically (1990: 138). Panic in facing death is a main theme that Terlinden documents in the two works. In Search's poetry the fear of death is prominent in the poems "On Death" (1904), "Flashes of Madness" (1905), "What Death Doth Take for Wife Is" (1906), "The Story of Solomon Waste" (1907), "My Life II" (1908), and "To my Dearest Friend" (1909) (TERLINDEN, 1990: 90-91). If in these poems death is a final departure from life, in Pessoa's "Mad Fiddler," since "everything has Another Meaning" (1999: 67), there is a suggestion that death can be set aside: "Cold unfelt hand in cold dead hand, | Let us set out for mere Somewhere" (1990: 67-68). In "When the Lamp is Broken" (1906), Search observes sadly that one remembers its breaking more than the its light: "When the lamp is broken and the shaking | Light is for ever fled, | There is more memory of its breaking | Than of the light it shed" (PESSOA, 1997: 301); while in "The Broken Window" from "The Mad Fiddler," the home and heart where the poet dwelled is like the window broken forever: "The whole room is buried alive" (1999: 61).

The anguish and loneliness felt by Search is intensified in "The Mad Fiddler." In the interior sections of the "Mad Fiddler," the poet continues the

wanderings of Search, yet in a forest of estrangement in a state of imagined bliss between sleep and dream ("The Poem"):

There sleeps a poem in my mind
That shall my entire soul express.
I feel it vague as sound and wind
Yet sculptured in full definiteness.

(PESSOA, 1999: 41)

The fiddler is possessed by undreamed dreams, by ghosts of dead selves (1999: 43), and like the three watchers in *O Marinheiro* [*The Sailor*] imagines returning to a time that never was: "[...] I could return to that | Happy time that was never mine"; "And false bliss, although false, is bliss" (1999: 49 and 41). Finally he arrives at the great river that will be his guide: "Great river so | Quiet and true | Teach me to go | Through life like you!" (1999: 92); and a mirror for reflecting his many existential questions: "Where is my home?"... "What should have been"... "Why made I dreams | My only life?" (1999: 93-94). The mad fiddler first appears because the villagers call to him; his strange music replied to their "Lost sense belonging | To forgotten quests" (1999: 31). The sounds of violin, viol, flute, and bassoon transport them to a magical island, perhaps that of the absent Mariner in Pessoa's 1913 play ("That isle that knows no hours | Nor needeth hours to know") (1999: 33), which is like a dream where their whole lives enter a musical, sensual state of veiled spirituality: "O dream-pressed spirit-wine!" (1999: 35). The villagers are transformed into other beings, "the elusive selves | We never can obtain" (1999: 37). They wish the music to play on, as it soothes the "[...] ache somehow of living" (1999: 38).

"The Foreself" reminds the poet that he "had a self and life | Before this life and self" (1999: 42), and that there exist "mazes of I" (1999: 73). His very consciousness of being inhibits any individual agency: "Between me and my consciousness | Is an abyss" ("The Abyss") (1999: 77). Meaning is invisible, unknown, abstract, and hollow. The idea of deep identity of all things, the mysterious presence of God in all matter, however, leads the poet to affirm the infinite circularity and variety of existence: "One day, Time having ceased, | Our lives shall meet again" (1999: 85); "All is more strange than that | Small glimpse of it we get" (1999: 87). The poet enters a transcendent trance of prescience and presentiment: "A trembling sense of being | More than my sense can hold | A bird of feeling seeing | The great earth-hidden gold [...] Of the approaching dawn"; "I faint, I fade. I seem | Myself to be my dream" (1999: 88). And unwilling to give up his own conceit, he makes a final effort to force it into being: "And if this be not so, | Oh, God, make it now be!" (1999: 88). Yet he will reaffirm that life does not fit with living, and humanity requires soothing by the mad fiddler's tunes.

Terlinden further notes thematic similarities connecting “The Mad Fiddler” to the major heteronyms, positing a connection with both Reis and Caeiro as poets of existence and destiny, identifiable in the stoic inner freedom of the former and the natural process of seeing of the latter. These poems evidence a strong similarity in structure and design with later collections in the use of the poetic sequence, a recurring pattern that ties the 53 poems of “The Mad Fiddler” to the 35 *Sonnets* (written from 1910-12), the 49 poems of *O Guardador de Rebanhos*, and the 44 poems of *Mensagem*. These are each allegorical, intellectual journeys that dramatize philosophical concepts in symbolic scenarios in poems of diverse rhyme and meter. Terlinden specifies the themes as the suffering of living, solitude, the mystery of existence, the *além* [beyond], and poetic knowledge.

The poem’s anticipation of the metaphysics of Alberto Caeiro is unmistakable in claiming pre-existence of matter over form and positing the fundamental unity of all phenomena: “Before light was, light’s bright idea lit | God’s thought of it, | And, because through God’s thought light’s thought did pass, | Light ever was” (1999: 102). As will Caeiro, “The Mad Fiddler” presents these perceptions as challenges to common currents of Western metaphysics. Looking at a sunflower (“The Sunflower”), as would Caeiro, he sees a metaphysical synesthesia:

All things that shine are God’s eyes.
 All things that move are God’s speech.
 Every thing has all to teach
 To our awakening surmise.

Green are God’s thoughts when they are leaves,
 Yellow when sunflowers they are.

(PESSOA, 1999: 66)

The poet-philosopher can immediately perceive depth of being in the natural world without the need of inner meaning:

There was no difference between a tree
 And an idea. Seeing a river be
 And the exterior river were one thing.
 The bird’s soul and the motion of its wing
 Were an inextricable oneness made.

(PESSOA, 1999: 79)

Just as Caeiro wrote “Pensar em Deus é desobedecer a Deus” [“To think of God is to disobey God”] (PESSOA, 2016b: 40), the fiddler reduces theological defiance to tautology: “I shall not come when thou wilt call, | For when thou call’st I am with thee. | When I think of thee, within me | Thyself art, and thy thought self’s all” (1999: 75). The fiddler’s naturalist philosophy is more than an insight capable of

changing his ideas and place in the world; it is for the poet a revelation that is atemporal and transformational, a flash of greater understanding of the nature of things that exalts the mind and spirit. Caeiro is a teacher, whereas the fiddler exults in the eternal moment of the transforming idea. Entering into an ecstatic vision whereby "I was borne | To see, through mysteries, | How God everything is" (1999: 81) the fiddler is pure music, "[...] a lost tune, a mood | Of the finger-tips of God" (1999: 82). His moment of perception is both sufficient and divine for human limitations: "An hour in God shall be | Enough eternity" (1999: 88).

Pessoa's voluptuous reading of English poetry across time as an aesthetic ideal, his translation of its poetic language to give voice to the disappointment, despair, and solitude felt by Alexander Search are consonant with the highest aesthetic ideals of the love lyric that Fitzgerald imagined to exist in the impenetrable Persian of the *Rubáiyát*. In the case of Search, not one writer or style but multiple authors contributed to the adverse genre of his composite and variable English poetry. This variability is what scholars have called "immature."²⁶ One could say rather that the variable styles and forms of Search's early poetry are a dress rehearsal for Pessoa's heteronymism. The voluptuous decadence of the English poems as genre lies both in Search's translation into his own sentiments of diverse Englishes, for which the author had only an amateur interest at the time, and in his skepticism that anything could be known, that any perception of an absolute or ultimate reality could have a place in this world. Pessoa's "The Mad Fiddler" extends for another decade the esthetic and philosophic decadence of Search's existential quest ("The End"): "God knows. And an He knew not | And were not, what of it?" (1999: 88).

²⁶ Terlinden, for example, states that Search's poems "might be not as good as anything the mature poet wrote in Portuguese" and describes his English as overly influenced by the Romantics in its "dated rhetoric" and "stylistic and thematic imitation of the English Romantics" (1990: 137).

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