

Searching for the Corpus of Alexander

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PESSOA, Fernando (1997). *Poemas Ingleses: Poemas de Alexander Search*. Edited by João Dionísio. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional–Casa da Moeda. Critical Edition of Fernando Pessoa, Major Series, Volume V, Tome II, 574 pp.

Like most critical editions of Pessoa's work, João Dionísio's pioneer edition of Alexander Search's poetry inevitably constitutes a twofold book: (I) it introduces the poems of he who became Pessoa's most prolific fictional author in English; (II) by telling the story behind the selection and organization criteria, the book is also a testimony of its own making. Unsurprisingly, Search did not escape the philological ambivalence pervasive to Pessoa's entire work, and thus it seems coherent that Dionísio would not forfeit keeping track of the poems' chain of custody by trying to determine the traceability of their authorship. The extent to which the editor necessarily or excessively relies on this philological backbone is among the main questions derived from the book's overall structure.

The corpus selection of this edition is carried out under the notion that, in terms of attributed authorship, Search lies between Charles Robert Anon and Fernando Pessoa himself. Dionísio establishes a sequence of mutability, identifying poems that passed from Anon to Search, and from the latter to Pessoa, yet his aspiration to determine a chronology does not translate into an all too clear elucidation of Search's origin. On the one hand, he disagrees with the dates previously suggested by Gaspar Simões and José Augusto Seabra—some time around 1898 (when Pessoa was 10 years old) and 1899, respectively. On the other hand, the editor both accepts Search's early appearance in poems dated from 1903, which were part of the *Early fragments*, and at the same time insists that Yvette Centeno's hypothetical date—26 or 27 May 1906—could be slightly sooner than Search's real advent. Overall, Dionísio seems unable to either refute or vindicate these dates, although it is worth noticing that, in accordance to more recent studies, he considers the 1903 version of Search an immature occurrence while agreeing that his full emergence must have happened some time during 1906 (see PESSOA, 2016, p. 230 and SEARCH, 2014, p. 221).

The editor is less ambiguous when dismissing potential end dates to Search's work, although he remains ambivalent about identifying one himself. He is critical of three previous hypotheses: 1911, year of a poem written in Portuguese, with a crossed-out signature of Search (p. 11); 1914, year based on Search's alleged

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collaboration in the magazine *Europa* (p. 16); and 1916, year of the poem “There is no peace save where I am not,” (p. 16) which according to Teresa Rita Lopes would prove that by then Search was still alive. Dionísio dismisses the first date based on the knowledge that, besides the evident implications of a crossed-out signature, it is odd that Pessoa would attribute an isolated poem in Portuguese to Search after a systematic work in English. He is also skeptical of the second year, after not finding any document, signed by Search, indicating he was directly involved with the collaboration in *Europa*. As for the 1916 attribution, he adheres to previous scholarly work that considered this a non-Search English poem.

Dionísio’s work made an unprecedented contribution to the analysis of the papers where Pessoa rewrote or typed subsequent drafts of Search’s poetry. In terms of dating, Dionísio is once more consistently aware of his limitations, but again he provides strong arguments to narrow down the array of hypotheses. By the time of its publication, this edition was the first that addressed the dating of the graph paper manuscripts with some of Search’s rewritten work. Although the editor is unable to provide an exact answer, he does establish May 1907 as the earliest potential date, an approximation that has been used in subsequent analyses of Search’s work. In terms of corpus selection, Dionísio provides a strong argument for the inclusion of some typewritten poems whose attribution to Search has been problematic due to a lack of signature on a given document. Dionísio insists on Pessoa’s tendency to not only group poems but also write the attribution of authorship once, on the cover of the folder he would group them in. In fact, the editor’s guess is that Pessoa was considering mailing the folder, although no further evidence of this seems to be available. Besides, Dionísio stresses how these poems do not appear in the oronym’s projects, an additional evidence of the immutability of Search’s authorship.

The extensive analysis of the editor’s own selection methodology indicates how, besides the obvious need to establish the content of the book amidst philological uncertainty, he aimed for a structure that would closely reflect Pessoa’s projects. As a result, the editor introduces poems from ten lists that were chosen according to a specific procedure. These are either (I) lists *with* poems by Search (among poems from other attributed authors), most of which are signed; (II) lists *of* poems exclusively by Search, which do not always necessarily have the attribution in the poem, but rather belong to a list of common authorship; (III) one extra list, “Delirium,” that was attributed to Search (prior to Dionísio’s edition) based on mentions in his editorial projects (and despite the lack of an explicit attribution in the title page). It is worth noticing that although the editor conditions the selection of lists to their quantitative relevance, he does not further explain which ones were discarded for this reason alone—that is, for having a reduced number of poems.

The organization of the material is perhaps the most debated aspect of this edition, also problematic because Dionísio seemed to be fully aware of the editorial risk involved. Instead of following a chronological sequence, the editor pays heed to Pessoa's instructions, that is, to the various testimonies in which the poet organized the volumes of Search's poetry. The editor himself affirms that Pessoa's plans are mostly contradictory and incomplete, yet he chooses this method anyways. In fact, it is not always clear which projects are to be preferred. Nonetheless, Dionísio proposes a chronology of the lists of projects rather than the poems themselves. He begins by the latest one, and goes backwards in what he considers an advantageous approach that allows readers to filter out Search's poetic production while quickly identifying the poem's level of authorship. In other words, the progression of the book comes to represent the eroding attribution of the poems, and readers are able to recognize which poems are 'truly' Search's, having stood the test of time and Pessoa's volatile authorships.

With his different approach, Dionísio intends to be as faithful as possible to Pessoa's plans and he applies the principles of genetic transcription annotation to the overall structure of the book—following the idea that readers must have immediate access to philological traceability. Nonetheless, he also affects readability by choosing a structure that is, inevitably, based on redundancy. Although Dionísio only transcribes poems in their latest occurrences, many of them appear more than once, across several lists and several years, forcing him to mention the occurrences separately and making it difficult for readers to centralize information of each poem in a single section. Moreover, this adherence to Pessoa's projects forces Dionísio to open the edition with incomplete poems that would have normally been placed in the end, either for the sake of readability or the appearance of the corpus itself.

This book introduces a higher number of texts attributed to Search, compared to Lind's estimation of 115-117 poetic writings and F.E.G Quintanilha's 125 poems and 40 fragments. Dionísio comes up with a total of 174 texts, a number that he considers insufficient based on his conviction that there are more poems, probably untitled in other sections of the archive. He also accepts—though not as the main cause of incompleteness—Lind's theory that Pessoa might have destroyed part of the material. In any case, Dionísio theorizes based on the debatable premise that Pessoa's lists must be entirely believed: that a title mentioned on a list but unfound in the archive does not necessarily prove the inexistence of the text.

Although we cannot cast exact doubt on Dionísio's number, mainly because it is he who is questioning it first, we can corroborate the case of one text that does not belong to Search's own poetry (see p. 316 of Dionísio's edition). The transcription and the original manuscript are reproduced below:

'Twas more than the hour of midnight,
 As is told by ancient stories,
 When all in sleep and in silence
 Enwrappèd is earth and gloomy
 When the □

[← Alexander Search]

Alexander Search
 A. Search
 Alexander Search

[→ A. Search.]

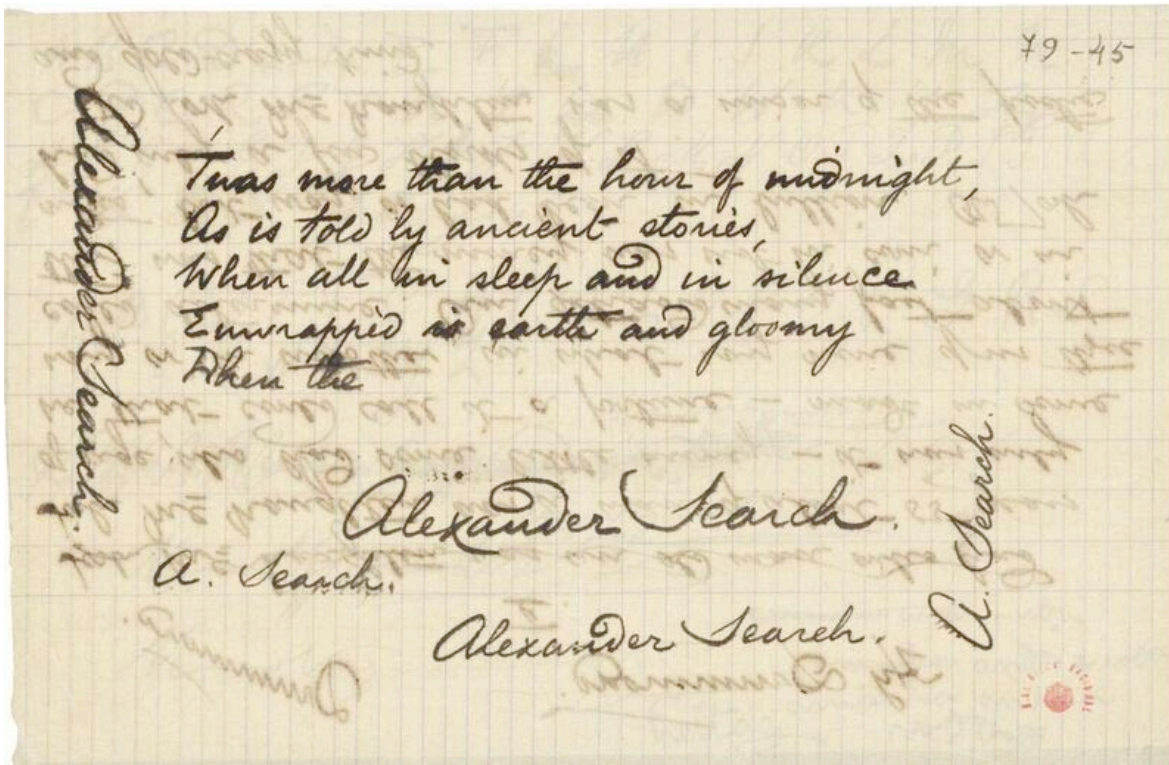


Fig. 1. Ms. (BNP / E3, 79-45^r).

This text corresponds not to one of Search's poems but to the English translation of lines 1-5, Part I, of *El estudiante de Salamanca* [*The Student of Salamanca*], a Spanish poem written by José de Espronceda. The English project was actually carried through (see "*The Student of Salamanca: an English translation*," in this same issue), and Pessoa initially attributed the translation to Alexander Search before Charles James Search inherited it in 1908. The lapse is more than understandable given that, unlike other manuscripts related to this project, Search's signature does not appear next to the word "Translation" (see article by Jorge Wiese included in this issue).

As Dionísio himself points out, his work is pioneering for various reasons: its exclusive focus on Search's poetry, the ambition of collecting his entire poetic production, and the fact that it was the first autonomous volume to do so. The editor also credits the tradition of cumulative efforts around Search's legacy, and is especially keen on acknowledging the work of Georg Lind, whose transcriptions constituted one of his starting points. Such awareness of the collaborative progression of Alexander Search studies begs calling, almost 20 years after this critical edition, for the necessity of publishing Search's complete works. Such an edition would (I) review the organization of the poetry corpus as well as the illegible words in some of the poems; (II) include Alexander Search's complete prose, an attempt that was partially started by Natalia Jerez Quintero in 2014.

Bibliography

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