

The Incomplete English Poems of Fernando Pessoa

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PESSOA, Fernando (2000). *Poesia Inglesa II*. Edited and translated into Portuguese by Luisa Freire. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim.

As it now stands, the largest collection of Pessoa's posthumous English poems written under his own name—96 of them, in fact—was published in Portugal, by editor and translator Luisa Freire, in a bilingual volume titled *Poesia Inglesa II*, in 2000.¹ Freire's pioneer undertaking presents a selection of Pessoa's poems in English, unattributed to any fictitious author—which is to say, by default, attributed to Pessoa *himself*. As any rudimentary knowledge of his criticism reveals, Pessoa was no stranger to the English language or its poetic traditions. Winning the Queen Victoria Prize when he was just 15 and then, in 1917, assembling a volume of primarily standard English verse, which he titled *The Mad Fiddler*, are two facts that remind us of Pessoa's comfort in English. As the years pass and scholars are allowed time to trace and retrace all sorts of heteronym bloodlines—and as new documents are constantly being discovered (those in the Hubert Jennings estate,² for example, some of which I assisted Patrício Ferrari in editing)—the scope of Pessoa's English output continues to expand and render more complex our understanding of the one-or-many poets we call Fernando Pessoa.

It is at this juncture that a close look at Freire's edition reveals its limitations, in spite of the pioneering aspects of the enterprise. Additionally, this closer look (in conjunction with recent English-Pessoa scholarship) affords us with the critical facility to notice the editorial shortcomings: labeling some published poems unpublished, not to mention the implication that the collection was far from being complete. As Freire herself articulates in the postface:

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¹ Richard Zenith recently published close to 150 English poems by Fernando Pessoa (though there are more poems than in Freire's edition, Zenith's does not include as many loose poems). The volume includes poems attributed to Alexander Search, as well as a selection from *35 Sonnets*, "Antinous," "Inscriptions," *The Mad Fiddler*, and poems posthumously published. See Fernando PESSOA. *English Poetry*. Selected and introduced by Richard Zenith, Lisbon, Assírio & Alvim, 2016.

² In October 2015, the Hubert Jennings literary estate was donated to the John Hay Collection of Brown University. For a special issue recently devoted to this archive see Carlos Pittella, editor, *People of the Archive: the Contribution of Hubert Jennings to Pessoan Studies*, Providence, Gávea Brown, 2016. [A printed edition of *Pessoa Plural—A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, n.º 8].

Neste terceiro volume de poesia inglesa foram reunidos, como foi dito previamente, poemas escritos dispersamente por Fernando Pessoa, que vão de 1901 até 1935, data da morte do poeta. Embora tenha havido (como se pode verificar pela datação respectiva) períodos mais férteis de escrita em língua inglesa – 1915, 1916, 1917 e 1920 – Pessoa nunca abandonou, até ao final da sua vida, a língua que aprendeu na infância e na adolescência na África do Sul e dentro da qual, de certa maneira, moldou o pensamento, através da sua formação britânica e das literaturas nela expressas, que o poeta atentamente estudou e assimilou.

No entanto, perdido o contacto directo com a língua falada a partir de 1905, data do seu regresso definitivo a Lisboa, o seu inglês tornou-se essencialmente literário e foi nessa versão muito pessoal que redigiu toda a sua obra neste idioma.

[This third volume of English poetry combines, as previously said, poems dispersedly written by Fernando Pessoa, from 1901 to 1935, when the poet died. Even though there have been (as one may see from the dates of poems) more fertile periods of creation in English language—1915, 1916, 1917 and 1920—Pessoa never abandoned, up to the end of his life, the language he learned in his childhood and adolescence in South Africa, and in which, in a way, he molded his thought, through his British education and its literatures, which the poet attentively studied and assimilated.

Nevertheless, once lost the direct contact with the spoken language as from 1905, when Pessoa definitively returned to Lisbon, his English became essentially literary, and it was in this very personal mode that he composed all his work in that language.]

(PESSOA, 2000: 259)

It is very possible this passage inadequately capture the translucent opacity of a poet Patrício Ferrari calls “the poet-between-languages—the outlandish Pessoa,”³ but it also omits the existence of English poems still lying outside of the corpus presented. As shown in the recent publications below, many English poems remained unpublished—varying between lyrical, stylistic, and cultural registers:

FERRARI, Patrício and Carlos PITTELLA (2016). “Twenty-one Haikus by Fernando Pessoa.” Fabrizio Boscaglia and Duarte Drumond Braga, guest editors, *Pessoa Plural—A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, nº. 9, Brown University, Warwick University, University of Los Andes, pp. 184-229. [16 unpublished English poems].

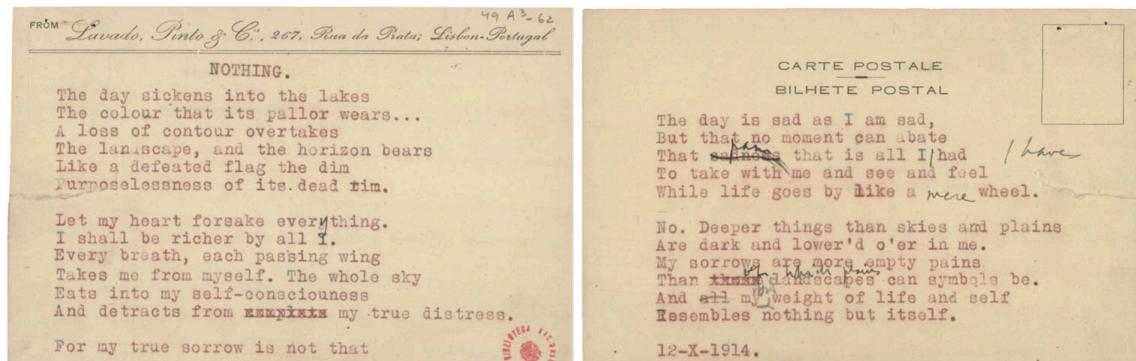
FERRARI, Patrício and Carlos PITTELLA (2015). “Four Unpublished English Sonnets (and the Editorial Status of Pessoa’s English Poetry.” Patrício Ferrari and Jerónimo PIZARRO, guest editors. *Fernando Pessoa as English Reader and Writer. Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies*, nº. 28, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, Tagus Press, Spring, pp. 227-246. [4 unpublished English poems].

FERRARI, Patrício (2015). “Bridging Archives: Twenty-five Unpublished English Poems by Fernando Pessoa.” Carlos Pittella, guest editor. *Pessoa Plural – A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, nº. 8, Brown University, Warwick University, University of Los Andes, Fall, pp. 365-431. [25 unpublished English poems].

³ Patrício FERRARI, “Bridging Archives: Twenty-five Unpublished English Poems by Fernando Pessoa.” *Pessoa Plural—A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, nº. 8, 2015, p. 373.

PESSOA, Fernando (2015). *No Matter What We Dream: Selected English Poems*. Edited and selected by Patrício Ferrari and Jerónimo Pizarro. Lisbon: Tell-a-story. Second edition. [First edition 2014]. [8 unpublished English poems].

Freire's edition also includes some inaccuracies, which—now that Pessoa scholarship is beginning to embrace the English poems—require reparative attention. For example, "The Day is Sad as I am Sad," previously published by Teresa Rita Lopes in *Pessoa Inédito*, Lisbon, Horizonte (1994: 194) had been, as Ferrari showed (2012: 270-271), only partially published. The typewritten poem occupied both sides of the sheet (BNP / E3, 49A³-62^r and 49A³-62^v; cf. Figs. 1-2). What is more, "The Day is Sad as I am Sad," (titled "Nothing"), seems to have been an earlier draft of "Emptiness" (BNP / E3, 31-34; PESSOA, 1999: 52 and 155; cf. Fig. 3), which, with a few minor differences, became part of the third section of the *The Mad Fiddler*.⁴



Figs. 1 and 2. "Nothing" (BNP / E3, 49A³-62^r and 49A³-62^v).

⁴ Fernando PESSOA, *Poemas Ingleses, The Mad Fiddler*, Edited by Marcus Angioni and Fernando Gomes, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, Major Series, volume V, tome III, 1999.

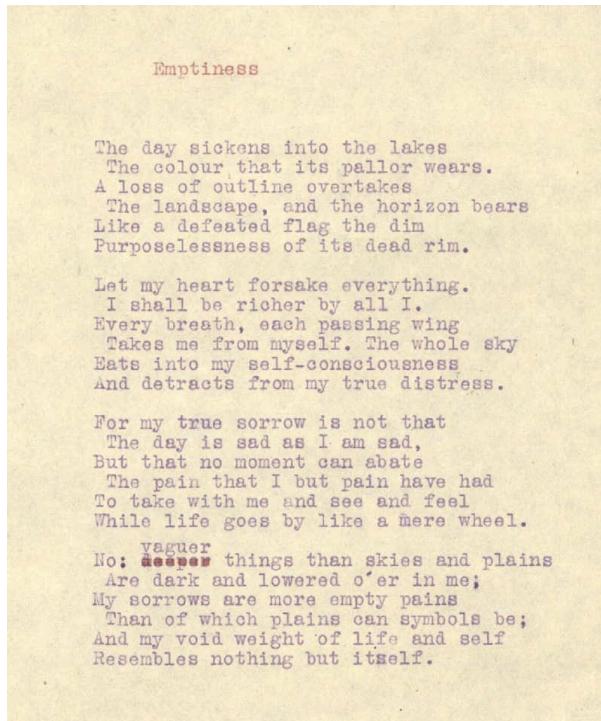
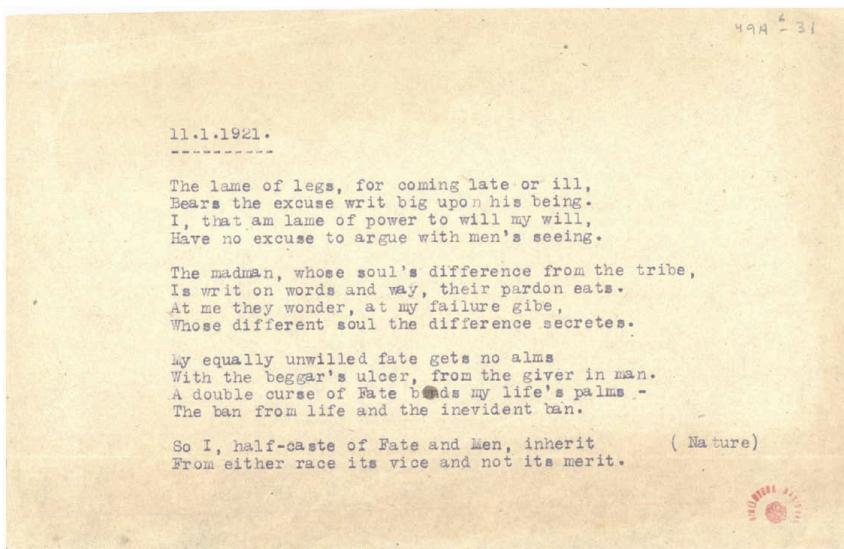


Fig. 3. "Emptiness" (BNP / E3, 31-34r).

Also needing rectification are two poems wrongly attributed as unpublished. "The Lame of Legs, for Coming Late or Ill," given as "inédito" [unpublished] (PESSOA, 2000: 251), had been previously published by Georg Lind in "9 unbekannte englische Gedichte F[ernando] P[essoas], Diskussion und Kommentar von Ulrich Suerbaum und vf." *Poetica*, n.^o 2, vol. 2, Munich, April 1968, p. 232.

Fig. 4. "The Lame of Legs, for Coming Late or Ill" (BNP / E3, 49A⁶-31^r).

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Fernando Pessoa

God made my shivering nerves His human lyre,
A lyre whose curves in angels' faces end.
When God doth sing the song's invisible fire
And half-visible wings over it bend.

Fountain of incorruptible desire!
Gold-misted green isle where my bark doth tend!
My soul, rich with electedness, doth tire
My sense of me with aches with God to blend.

But lo! to live is to be blent with God
Already. We need nought but life, all life.
Pain, evil, hate, lust, treachery, the rod
Of custom, the bypath of dreams, the knife

Grief hideth till it cut her, the delight
Of death – all these are God's willed spite.

(undatiert)

The lame of legs, for coming late or ill,
Bears the excuse writ big upon his being.
I, that am late of power to will my will,
Have no excuse to argue with men's seeing.

The madman, whose soul's difference from the tribe
Is writ on words and way, their pardon eats.
At me they wonder, at my failure gibe,
Whose different soul the difference secretes.

My equally unwilling fate gets no alms
With the beggar's ulcer, from the giver in man.
A double curse of Fate binds my life's palms –
The ban from life and the inevident ban.

So I, half-caste of Fate and Men, inherit
From either race its vice and not its merit.

11.1.1921

Second Sight

Whene'er thou dost undo
Thy dark, strange hair before the wind
And the wind takes it up and makes it woo
Tumult and violence in the way it sweeps

English Poems

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Along the air, mingling, unmingle, undefined
In the snake-like madness it keeps,

Then I do know
That somewhere whence dreams come
And passions go,
Somewhere in that world contrary to this
Yet landscaped, peopled as this is,
In a great southern sea
There is a storm and a hurled wreck
On rising rocks that cannotreck
For human misery.

The two things are but one.
Thy floating hair is that great ship undone
In a tossed, turbulent, dashed ocean.
Neither precedeth nor doth cause the other
Nor are the two as brother and brother,
But absolutely one, samely the same,
They have somehow an equal name
Where speech is of the essence of what is.

A real sight, like God's, should see the kiss
Of the wind through thy hair and the far storm
One thing, – yet two things because we see two
When we conceive them one, the double form
Coming to oneness in what we construe.

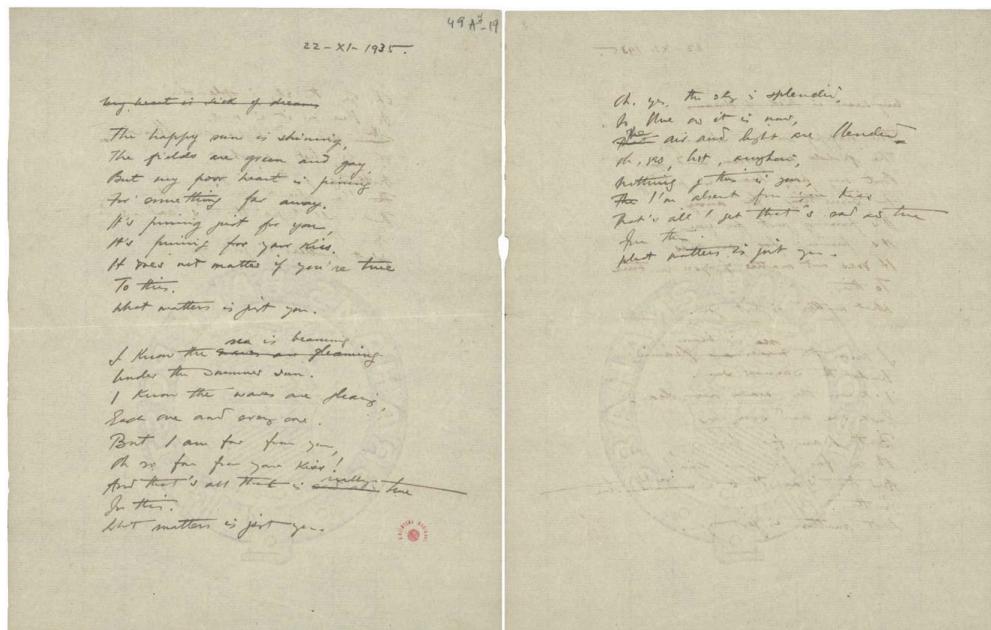
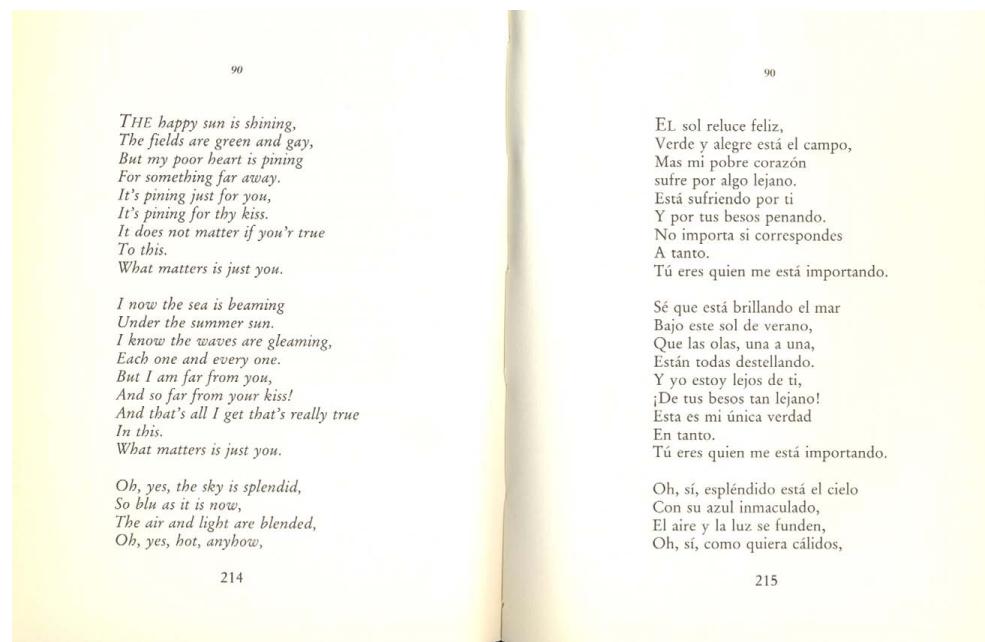
Therefore I grieve when thou letst thy hair take
The wind upon its long, thin, changing fingers,
For that sight of me that translates that to
The sterner meaning in what world I know
Only through what in me is not here awake, –
That sight of that mad wreck visibly lingers
And does in my imagination ache.

Alas! all things are linked, and we know not
Half the contents of our each casual thought.
We never see save one little dreamed bit
Of each feeling we have; we pass through it
Like rapid travellers that scarce can see
What they pass by and what they see see erringly.

What is the meaning of my writing this?
Nothing, save that this is,
I know not why, something I know and must
Utter, the purpose of it being with

Fig. 5. Georg Rudolf Lind. "9 unbekannte englische Gedichte [Fernando] Pessoas." *Poetica*, n.º 2, vol. 2, Munich, April 1968, pp. 232-233. British Library.

The last of the dated poems in the edition, "The Happy Sun is Shining" (BNP / E3, 49A⁷-19), dated 22 November 22 1935, given as "inédito" [unpublished] (PESSOA, 2000: 253), had been initially published by Ángel Crespo in Fernando Pessoa, *Noventa poemas últimos* (1930-1935), Hiperión, Madrid, 1993, p. 214.

Figs. 6 and 7. "The Happy Sun is Shining" (BNP / E3, 49A⁷-19^r and 49A⁷-19^v).Fig. 8. Fernando Pessoa, *Noventa poemas últimos* (1930-1935), translation and preface by Ángel Crespo, bilingual edition, Hiperión, Madrid, 1993, pp. 214-215.

For such a prolific author who left so many writings not only unpublished, but also undated, it is not surprising that a relevant aspect in Pessoan scholarship is the date-range within which those poems were written. The heteronyms, of course, were also contingent in nature to time, as much a factor of where the poet lived as when he was living. Therefore, it poses quite a question why Freire did not organize the book in any way to highlight this contingency. One must, in reading this edition, continually flip to the index in order to synthesize their reading experience within the context of the poet's life. The poems appear to be gathered

with little differentiation—simply two sections: poems dated and undated poems. Though it reflects a certain economy on behalf of Freire's contribution, one desires a little more organizational guidance.

The truth of the matter is clear, however: not only did Pessoa write in English, he wrote more than originally imagined in his own name. This revelation surely was not lost on Freire, whose efforts on display were not, in the least, small, and very important to the now burgeoning study of the English poems. Somewhat more surprising, however, was that more than several of the poems recently transcribed attain a level of beauty and complexity akin to those written under such heteronyms as the inimitable Caeiro, Reis, and Campos. "What is hidden from me that is everything?" asks this author of authors, reaching for his unique metaphysics, as singularly mystical as it is pessimistic. The previous quote is found in an English poem dated 7 February 1915, recently revealed in *Pessoa Plural—A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*.⁵ But there is much merit to be unearthed in Pessoa's seemingly bottomless trunk: haikus and sonnets, for instance, which makes it the more unfortunate to have been left out of Freire's anthology. Jerónimo Pizarro, the most knowledgeable scholar today regarding Pessoa's archive, tells of over 1,300 documents including English writings, that may or may not all include poems, which need to be thoroughly scrutinized (cf. FERRARI and PITTELLA, 2015: 230). The critical edition of Fernando Pessoa's complete English poems is yet to come.

⁵ Patrício FERRARI, "Bridging Archives: Twenty-five Unpublished English Poems by Fernando Pessoa." *Pessoa Plural—A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, n.º 8, 2015, p. 399.