

# Notes on Mysticism and Poetry in Fernando Pessoa

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## Keywords

Mysticism, esotericism, modernism, poetry, Fernando Pessoa.

## Abstract

There are several documents in Fernando Pessoa's legacy which may give us an insight as to the place the mystic and esoteric matters occupy in Pessoa's poetry. Pessoa acknowledged the occultist influence in the literature of his time, and in his own, and made an effort to explain his particular path, which followed, as he insisted, the mystic and not the symbolist tradition – poetry of thought and not poetry of imagination.

## Palavras-chave

Misticismo, esoterismo, modernismo, poesia, Fernando Pessoa.

## Resumo

Existem vários documentos, no legado de Fernando Pessoa, que podem ajudar a compreender o lugar que os conteúdos de índole mística e esotérica ocupam na poesia pessoana. Pessoa recebeu a influência ocultista na literatura do seu tempo, e na sua própria obra, e esforçou-se por explicar o seu caminho particular direccionado para a tradição mística, mas não para a simbolista, como o próprio autor reiterou – poesia do pensamento em vez de poesia da imaginação.

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Und aus den Sallust floß in jenen glücklichen, belebten Tagen wie durch nie verstopfte Röhren die Erkenntnis der Form in mich herüber, jener tiefen, wahren, inneren Form, die jenseits des Geheges der rhetorischen Kunststücke erst geahnt werden kann, die, von welcher man nicht mehr sagen kann, daß sie das Stoffliche anordne, denn sie durchdringt es, sie hebt es auf und schafft Dichtung und Wahrheit zugleich, ein Widerspiel ewiger Kräfte, ein Ding, herrlich wie Musik und Algebra.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Brief des Lord Chandos*<sup>1</sup>

It is not a dismissible coincidence that more and more critics of modernist poetry pursue its esoteric vein. This approach started very early in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was not taken too seriously, and has only encountered its readers and critics quite recently among scholars, being, as the study of esoteric matters is, a relatively novel academic endeavor.

Salvador Elizondo, a Mexican writer and literary critic, speaking (back in 1973) about *Muerte sin fin* (1939), a major Mexican poem by José Gorostiza, stated:

But the main virtue of the critic is to dare into the *selva selvaggia* of poetry trying to conform every product of magic – the most rigorous of methods – or of reasoning, to a general figure of the spirit by which poetry is transformed into a symbolic construction. The sentiment of the adventure forms part of its premises, because, who would dare to formulate a general judgment about something when its essence is that of remaining unknown? It is possible to “adventure” a hypothesis about its meaning or its nature, but it is not possible to say what it is and it is known more by its movement than by the substance it is made of.

The vision we have of the movement through which that substance manifests itself in the poem is conditioned by the meaning we already attributed to the sign the poem has proposed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “And out of Sallust, in those happy and animated days, there flowed into myself, as through never blocked conduits, the knowledge of form, some deep, true, inner form, hardly suspected beyond the rhetorical hedge of the work of art, that form of which one may no longer say that it pertains the domain of the material, because it goes beyond it, it elevates it and achieves poetry and truth at once, an interplay of eternal forces, a thing, beautiful as music and algebra”. Hofmannsthal (2002: 22). All translations in this article are mine.

<sup>2</sup> “Pero la virtud principal de la crítica es la de osar adelantarse en la *selva selvaggia* de la poesía tratando de conformar todo lo que es producto de la magia – método de los más rigurosos – o del raciocinio, a una figura general del espíritu por la que la poesía se convierte en una construcción simbólica. El sentimiento de la aventura forma parte de sus premisas, pues, ¿quién se atrevería a formular un juicio general acerca de algo cuya esencia es la de permanecer desconocido? Se puede “aventurar” una hipótesis acerca de su significado o acerca de su naturaleza, pero no se puede decir qué es y se la conoce más por su movimiento que por la sustancia de que está hecha. La visión que tenemos del movimiento mediante la que esa sustancia se manifiesta en el poema está condicionada por el significado que hayamos atribuido de antemano al signo que el poema ha propuesto” (1973: 40).

This is a very accurate observation, not exempt of occult content in itself. The idea of presenting the poet as a magician, this is, as an “initiate” in secret laws of some occult order to approach the so called *selva selvaggia* of poetry, is quite in communion with symbolist, and later on, with modernist poetics. These words of Elizondo could well be applied not only to *Muerte sin fin*, but to several modernist poems which have received attention with regard to their occultist content<sup>3</sup>, like Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duisneser Elegien*, and even, I would like to venture, Fernando Pessoa’s *Ode Marítima*.

Pessoa translated several books during 1915 and 1916 for a collection called “Theosophic and Esoteric” (“Theosophica e Esoterica”)<sup>4</sup>, and read several others, as his library<sup>5</sup> witnesses, which gave him a general knowledge of the matter, and most likely prompted him to writing about esotericism and the occult himself, as has already been suggested, among others, by Pedro Teixeira da Mota (quoted in França, 1987: 208). Pessoa actually planned several essays and studies that form part of his unpublished written legacy – that “work in progress” that is still surprising us –, and even published a text with the title *Secret Associations* (*Associações Secretas*) in a widely read newspaper, the *Diário de Lisboa*, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1935, defending Freemasonry in Portugal.

Yvette Centeno, who in the 1970’s revealed Pessoa’s link to esotericism and in the 1980’s edited several of his texts on the matter, noticed there is an overlapping of Pessoa’s occultist interests and knowledge, with his literary interests and practice: “Literary creation is, for Fernando Pessoa, one of the faces of initiation’s mystery. Mystery underlies *Mensagem*, and all the heteronymic play, in

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Surette, for instance, in *The Birth of Modernism*, written in the 1990’s, shows an interest, as he reveals it, towards the “relation between occult speculation and mainstream aesthetic theory and practice” Surett (1993: 6). Surette argues that: “Occultism has a ready answer to the problem of art’s status within the epistemological tradition, where it has been under assault since Plato. It simply stands Plato on his head and asserts that art is revelatory of a higher reality and truth than mere science of Philosophy. Art – like mystical vision – is a gnosis, and the world it ‘knows’ is the noumenal realm, not the mere phenomenal appearance that epistemological philosophy and science ‘know’. Literary symbolism adopted this doctrine with little modification, retaining the essential occultist or esoteric principle that the expression of such a gnosis must be obscure to the uninitiated”. Moreover he asserts that: “Literary modernism cleverly altered this formula. It retained the obscurity of the symbolists but justified it on grounds of philosophical relativism, of philosophical perspectivism, rather than on the esoteric grounds of ineffability as *Symbolisme* had done.” (1993: 81).

<sup>4</sup> 1. *Compendio de Theosophia*, by C. W. Leadbeater, 1915; 2. *Os Ideaes da Theosophia*, by Annie Besant, 1915; 3. *A Clarividencia*, by C. W. Leadbeater, 1916; 4) *Auxiliares Invisíveis*, by C. W. Leadbeater, 1916; 5) *A Voz do Silencio*; 6) *Luz sobre o Caminho e o Karma*, 1916. Other Portuguese translated titles in this collection are *O Mundo Oculto*, by A. P. Sinnett, 1916, and *Budismo Esoterico*, by A. P. Sinnett, 1916, but these were not translated by Pessoa.

<sup>5</sup> See: Pizarro, Ferrari and Cardello (2010), *A Biblioteca Particular de Fernando Pessoa*. See also the website of the House of Fernando Pessoa in Lisbon: <http://casafernandopessoa.cm-lisboa.pt/bdigital/index/index.htm>

the profound dialog that takes place between all the poets that conform this play"<sup>6</sup>. This seems to be no secret; at most, it is a fact that has been selectively ignored. Several of Pessoa's fragments on occultism make this link evident. For example, in this short undated note we find Pessoa inquiring about the nature of his creative ability: "What are the mystic, magic and alchemic grades? || What is the sub-grade Dominus liminis? (The psychic confusion in Cagliostro, Blavatsky, Crowley, is that it? || Is the use of magic a temptation to be avoided? or a force? || Is Caeiro a magic act? And others so? || Is the artistic (or philosophic) creation an alchemic (or magic) act?"<sup>7</sup>. Here Pessoa hesitates to call his literary creation an act of magic. In another moment, this hesitation is not present; for instance, in this undated fragment, quoted by Teresa Rita Lopes (one of the first of Pessoa's critics to attempt a broad presentation of his interests):

The creation of Caeiro and of the discipleship of Reis and Campos seems, at first sight, an elaborate joke of the imagination. But it is not. It [is] a great act of intellectual magic, a magnum opus of the impersonal creative power.

I need all the concentration I can have for the preparation of what may be called, figuratively as an act of intellectual magic – that is to say, for the preparation of a literary creation in a, so to speak, fourth dimension of the mind.

(in Lopes, 1990: II, 248)

Pessoa will actually suggest, in a widely known fragment of an unfinished essay entitled *Essay on Initiation*, published by Yvette Centeno, that the reading of his work may be seen as an occult path:

Let us suppose that the writing of great poetry is the end of initiation. The Neophyte stage will be the acquisition of the cultural elements which the poet will have to deal with when writing poetry – being, grade by grade and in what seems to me to be an exact analogy:

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<sup>6</sup> "A criação literária é, para Fernando Pessoa, uma das faces do mistério iniciático. Mistério que se encontra subjacente na *Mensagem*, bem como em todo o jogo da heteronímia, no diálogo profundo entre os vários poetas: [...]" Centeno (1985: 11).

<sup>7</sup> "O que são os graus místicos, mágicos e alquímicos? || O que é o sub-grau de Senhor do Limiar? (A confusão psychica em Cagliostro, Blavatsky, Crowley, é isso?) || É o uso da magia uma tentação a evitar? ou uma força? || Caeiro é um acto mágico? E outros assim? || A criação artística (ou philosophica) é um acto alquímico (ou mágico?)". I will be quoting several unpublished texts of Fernando Pessoa. Some of these texts were originally written in English, but others were written in Portuguese, and in this second case I will present, for an easier reading, the English translation in the text and the original Portuguese in a footnote. I will always reproduce Pessoa's spelling. The location will be indicated following the descriptive system of the Portuguese National Library where the papers are to be found. BNP, stands for Portugal's National Library; E3, accounts for Pessoa's Literary Estate Archive; then follow the number of the envelope and the number of the single page ("r" indicating the front of the page, and "v" indicating the back). In this particular case the text quoted has been published already, but the original text may be found at: BNP/E3: 53-99r. When no publication of the text exists I will be quoting directly from the Portuguese National Library.

(0) grammar, (1) general culture, (2) particular literary culture, (3) [... *Blank space in original document*] The adept stage will be, drawing out the analogy in the same manner: (5) the writing of simple lyrical poetry, as in common lyric, (6) the writing of complex lyrical poetry, as in [... *Blank space in original document*] (7) the writing of ordered or philosophical lyrical poetry, as in the ode. The master stage will be, in the same manner: (8) the writing of epic poetry, (9) the writing of dramatic poetry, (10) the fusing of all poetry, lyric, epic and dramatic, into something beyond all these.

(Pessoa, 1985: 80-82; BNP/E3, 54B-17<sup>v</sup> e 18<sup>r</sup>)<sup>8</sup>

We draw attention to point number seven, where he explicitly mentions the ode, which reminds us of the *Ode Marítima*. Or to point number eight, which brings to mind *Mensagem*. And finally to the last point in which we may picture the whole of Pessoa's heteronymic production. As Pessoa declares elsewhere, art and life follow the same rule: "For all those who want more in life than the nothing life is in itself, the rule is that which, in one of its ways, the three masonic grades symbolize. We enter apprentices by suffering, we pass companions by purpose, we are raised Masters by sacrifice. In no other way, in art as in life, is the Chair, that is Solomon's Throne, attainable"<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding mysticism, Pessoa explains that among the several steps of the occult path:

The mystic has, in his scale of initiation, a higher place than the magician. Someone like the Count of Saint-Germain, or Cagliostro, supposing they are what we were told they are, are less initiated than a S. Francis of Assis or a Saint Therese of Jesus. Magic is the highest point of low initiation; mysticism the lowest of high initiation. Magic is the highest grade of the force of man as a man; mysticism is the lowest grade of force of man as an angel, this is, /united/ to God. /Above this only what is one with God, the occultist/.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Yvette Centeno notes this on page 11: "In the *Essay on Initiation* Pessoa writes that the grade of Master is comparable to that in which epic poetry, dramatic poetry and the fusion of all poetry, lyric, epic and dramatic, is written in something superior that transcends them" ("No *Essay on Initiation*, Fernando Pessoa escreve que o grau de Mestre é comparável àquele em que se escreve poesia épica, poesia dramática, e a fusão de toda a poesia, lírica, épica e dramática, em algo de superior que as transcenda").

<sup>9</sup> "Para todos, quantos queiram mais da vida que o nada que ella é em si mesma, a regra é aquella que, em um dos seus modos, os trez graus maçonicos symbolizam. Entramos apprendizes pelo soffrimento, passamos companheiros pelo proposito, somos levantados Mestres pelo sacrificio. De outro modo se não chega, na arte como na vida, á Cadeira, que é o Throno, de Salomão." Fernando Pessoa (1988: 143; BNP/E3, 53A-26<sup>r</sup>; c. 1931?).

<sup>10</sup> "O mystico tem, na sua escala da iniciação, um lugar mais alto que o mago. Um Conde de Saint-Germain, ou um Cagliosto, suppondo que fosse o que se diz que foram, são menos iniciados que um S. Francisco de Asis ou uma Santa Thereza de Jesus. A magia é o maximo da baixa iniciação; o mystico o minimo da alta iniciação. A magia é o mais alto grau da força do homem como homem; o mysticismo o mais baixo grau da força do homem como anjo, isto é, /unido/ a Deus. /Acima d'isso só o que é aunado a Deus, o occultista/" (BNP/E3, 54B-7<sup>r</sup>; cf. Fig. 1). The words marked between forward slashes indicate Pessoa's hesitation.

This means that it takes a mystic to achieve the beginning of real initiation. If Alberto Caeiro, and hence the other heteronyms, are the result of an act of magic, their works are intended to reach further. Pessoa, as we will see ahead, refers to himself as a mystic poet, but this is when he is seen separately, as if he were one more of his heteronyms. But when we think of Pessoa as the creator of a whole poetic world, we understand the author in a broader context. Pessoa's Poetry, in this sense, looks more like a means to transcend the transitory moment of life, a means to reach into the still point of existence around which everything moves; or as Borges named it: the Aleph.

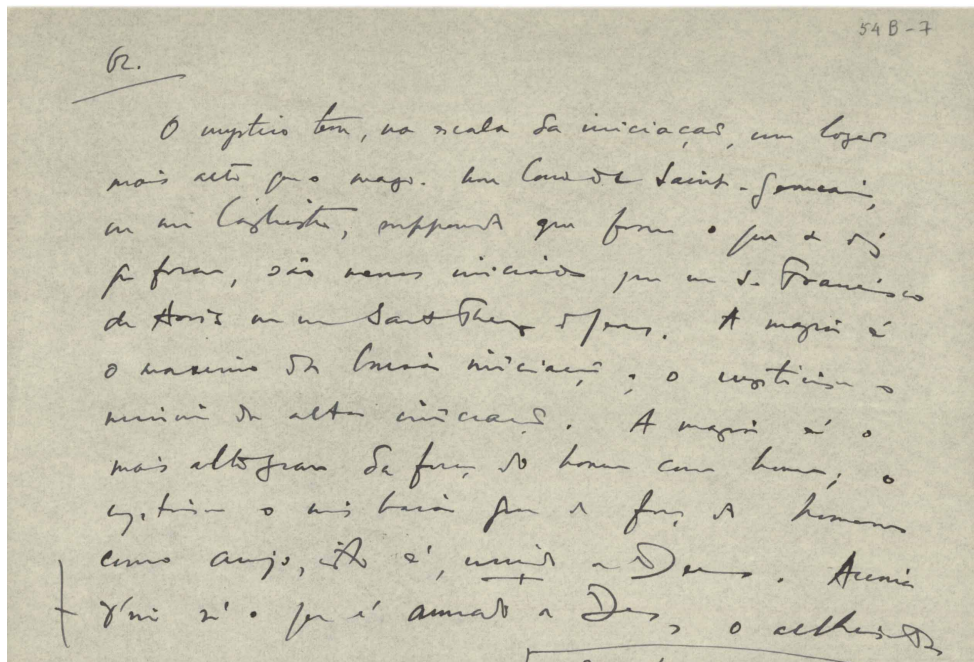


Fig. 1. BNP/E3, 54B-7.

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Pessoa also seems to draw an analogy between the occult path and the history of literature up to his moment, as if literary history itself should be growing into something more sophisticated, mapping a tradition which guides us to his own poetic practice – in which he highlights romanticism as a mystic period.

In one of his notebooks (144D<sup>2</sup>) Pessoa describes romanticism as having three elements: 1) egotism; 2) naturalism and 3) abstraction (cf. BNP/E3, 144D<sup>2</sup>-57<sup>r</sup>). The element he calls “egotism”, further on in the same note, will be related to music: “When “egotism” appears, not only does music appear, but also a musical preoccupation, the musical rhythm in verse, even in prose. Shelley, Heine, Chateaubriand. – Eugenio de Castro. – Verlaine – symbolism is essentially musical” (BNP/E3, 144D<sup>2</sup>-62<sup>v</sup>). And further on yet, to mysticism: “Antique ‘egotism’ was religiousness, mysticism. Egotism is modern mysticism. Egotists are

religious, in general, tending to aggregate to themselves that which is analogous to them"<sup>11</sup>. These statements are important, especially if we are to understand the fundamental change operating in literature during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the egotist period was a previous and fundamental step for important poetic innovations, and particularly in poetry: the appearance of hybrid and free forms, and the appearance of free verse. The poems I mentioned at the beginning of this reflection are all examples of modernist long poems, and all share a certain mystic trait in the above exposed sense: music being the path to achieve Poetry – when poetry itself is understood as a transcendental means.

Mysticism, Pessoa mentions, above all, is in the nature of poetry – as is music, by the way –, as he expresses in the following fragment (c. 1909) of Alexander Search, one of his early heteronyms:

But whereas the philosophic nature of mysticism inclines us to consider it as a defect of critical cerebration, the same modality of corruption, observed from the standpoint of aesthetical corruptivity has fit another character. Mysticism abides in literature, in poetic literature especially. This depends on the nature of poetry. Poetry is essentially mystical. Its essence is an abnormality by deficiency of critical and excess of emotional activity, contained, withheld by its own laws, and by no other laws.

Mysticism, in its turn, involves poetry, it is a species of poetry – itself, though really the essence of it.

A[lexander] S[earch]

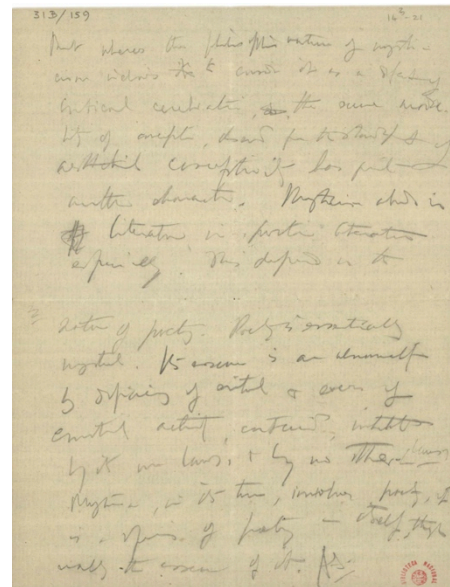


Fig. 2. BNP/E3, 14<sup>3</sup>-21<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, if according to Pessoa's Search all poetry is essentially mystical, that does not necessarily imply that every poet is essentially a mystic poet. What does Pessoa understand when he says "mystic poet"?

In an unfinished essay on António Correia d'Oliveira, a notable Portuguese poet, contemporary to Pessoa, he writes:

<sup>11</sup> "Quando aparece o 'egotismo', não só aparece a musica, mas aparece a preocupação musical, o ritmo musical no verso, na prosa mesmo. Shelley, Heine, Chateaubriand. – Eugenio de Castro. – Verlaine – o simbolismo essencialmente musical". And further on yet, to mysticism: "O 'egotismo' antigo era religiosidade, misticismo. O egotismo é o misticismo moderno. Os egotistas são religiosos, em geral, tendendo a agregar-se aquillo do passado que lhes é analogo" (BNP/E3, 144D<sup>2</sup>-64<sup>r</sup>).

Mysticism is easy to define: it is a sentimental metaphysic. It is not simply a M[etaphysic] because the true metaphysic, any system of m[etaphysic] truly such is, or a product of reason only (of the corrupt and limited reason of a man) or of a combination of sentiment and reason, reason working and altering the intellectualized impulses of the sentiment.

In mysticism this is not so. Its reason does not work the intellectualized impulses that the feeling sends. There is only this intellectualization and nothing more.<sup>12</sup>

And in another fragment he more specifically points out: “All kind of mystic poets have a certain quality and a defect – they are always profound (even though, the most humble, only occasionally) and are always lesser artists. They have the art they deserve. When what they feel attains a certain grade of lucidity and [... *blank space in original document*] they attain art spontaneously. They always compose *from within*, never looking at themselves, looking from outside”<sup>13</sup>. Now, Pessoa’s poetry, as most modernist manifestations of poetry, is impersonal, which means looking from *the outside*; looking *from within* is, according to Pessoa, a romantic trait. In the same document Pessoa continues: “But let us understand each other well. I call a poet mystic if he is a poet of ideas who gives the things we call real a merely symbolic value and finds among them *occult and intimate relations* of a different order as those that science recognizes. I do not use ‘mysticism’ /here/ in its *psychological* sense, in the sense in which Nordau used the word”.<sup>14</sup> “Occult and intimate relations” being almost a definition of what happens in symbolist poetry.

Moreover, according to Pessoa’s writings, there would be several types of mystic poets: 1) poets like Blake and António Correia d’Oliveira in which he distinguishes the mystic from the poet: “Blake – a mystic and poet – the pure type of mystic-poet or mystic-artist”<sup>15</sup>; “A[ntónio] C[orreia] d’O[liveira] is not a poet but a mystic that is a poet – not a /mystic/poet like T[eixeira] de P[ascoaes]”;<sup>16</sup> or 2)

<sup>12</sup> “O misticismo é facil de definir: é uma metaphysica sentimental. Não é simplesmente uma m[etaphysica] porque a verdadeira metaphysica, qualquer systema de m[etaphysica] verdadeiramente tal é, ou um producto da razão só (do raciocinio corrupto e limitado de um homem) ou de uma combinação de sentimento e raciocinio, o raciocinio trabalhando e alterando os impulsos intellectualizados do sentimento. No misticismo isto não é assim. O seu raciocinio não trabalha os impulsos que o sentimento lhe envia intellectualizados. Ha esta intelectualização e nada mais” (BNP/E3, 14C-61r).

<sup>13</sup> “Todos os generos de poetas misticos teem uma qualidade e um defeito certos – são sempre profundos (ainda que, os mais humildes, occasional[mente] apenas) e são sempre pouco artistas. Teem a arte que calha terem. Quando o que sentem attinge certo grau de lucidez e [... *Blank space in original document*] attingem arte espontaneamente. Compõem sempre *de dentro*, nunca vendo-se, olhando-se de fôra” (BNP/E3, 14<sup>2</sup>-15r; cf. Fig. 3).

<sup>14</sup> “Entendamo’-nos bem. Eu chamo poeta místico ao poeta de idéas que dá as cousas a que chamamos reaes um valôr de meramente simbolicas e encontra entre ellas *relações occultas e intimas* de ordem diversa d’aquellas que a sciencia constata. Eu não emprego ‘misticismo’ /aqui/ no sentido *psychologico*, no sentido em que Nordau empregou a palavra” (BNP/E3, 14<sup>2</sup>-15r; cf. Fig. 3).

<sup>15</sup> “Blake – um místico poeta – o typo puro do místico-poeta ou místico-artista” (BNP/E3, 14A-68r).

<sup>16</sup> “A[ntónio] C[orreia] d’O[liveira] não é um poeta mas um místico que é poeta – não um poeta /místico/, como T[eixeira] de P[ascoaes]” (BNP/E3, 14C-57r).



poets like Teixeira de Pascoaes and Robert Browning: "Pascoaes and Robert Browning. Likenesses. || One is a mystic-poet, the other a thinking-poet, in his most rigid way also a mystic-poet".<sup>17</sup>

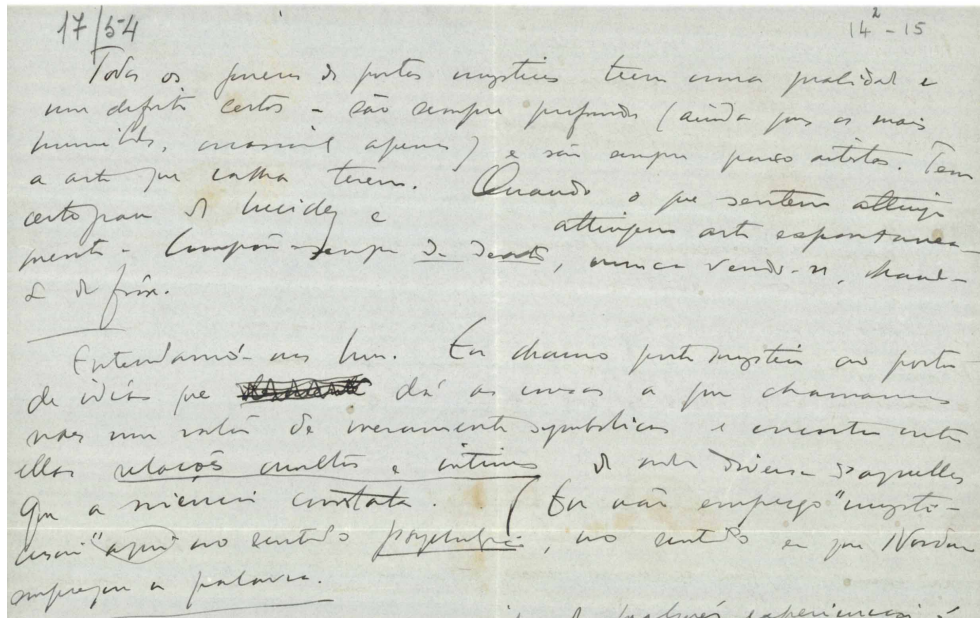


Fig. 3. BNP/E3, 14<sup>2</sup>-15<sup>1</sup>.

These mystic poets should be distinguished from the symbolist poets: "The vagueness of the symbolists is not the vagueness of the mystics. Victor Hugo was mystic, not Verlaine, nor Mallarmé, or [... *Blank space in original document*] – just as vague or more than him [... *Blank space in original document*] (/Nothing mistakes/) The symbolist is a poet of imagination, not of thought".<sup>18</sup> Despite this last statement, Pessoa finds a link between the symbolist movement and the apparition of mystic schools in France:

The poetical movement called symbolism, certainly or without someone knowing why, is the flourishing of analogical intelligence in discursive intelligence.

As Huret's Literary Survey clearly evinces, nobody really knows how, or with what consciousness, this name symbolism came to be given to this movement, that is exactly convenient for it, which happens in coincidence with the renaissance of the occult studies in France, being of the time the foundation of the mystic schools as the [... *Blank space in original document*] Hermetic Rosae-Crucis, established in 1888 by St[anislas] de Guaita ...<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Pascoaes e Robert Browning. Semelhanças. || Um é um místico-poeta, outro um pensador-poeta, a seu mais rígido modo um místico-poeta também" (BNP/E3, 14D-4).

<sup>18</sup> "O vago dos symbolistas não é o vago dos mysticos. Mystico era Victor Hugo, não Verlaine, ou Mallarmé, ou [... *Blank space in original document*] – tão mais vagos que elle [... *Blank space in original document*] (/Nada erra/) O symbol[is]ta é um poeta de imaginação, não de pensamento" (BNP/E3, 14<sup>2</sup>-14).

<sup>19</sup> "O movimento poetico chamado *symbolismo* certamente ou sem que alguém soubesse porquê é o aflorar da intelligencia analogica na int[elligencia] discursiva. Como no Inq[uérito] Lit[erário] de

The survey quoted by Pessoa in this fragment is Jules Huret's *Enquete sur l'évolution littéraire* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1891). In this book there is actually a chapter entitled "Les Mages" in which several magicians are consulted about their view on the relation between magic and literature. Pessoa, as we have mentioned above, considered magic to be inferior in relation to mysticism which would probably, if not fully, explain the distaste he often expressed in relation to the symbolist poets.

After the stage of romantic mysticism in literature, there comes a transformation into what Pessoa calls Pantheism: "The curious fact that W[illia]m Blake has like Hugo the symbolic spiritualism, and be like Hugo, more *real* and unbalancedly, a *visionary*. (Blake inferior because atypical – of his moment, /of his race/, [... *Blank space in original document*]). In both we probably find already the transition from symbolic spiritualism to pantheism".<sup>20</sup> As Pessoa writes on the other side of a page quoted above: "Arrived at its maximum complexity, modern ideation needs a supreme complex instrument of expression".<sup>21</sup>

It is at this stage that Pessoa himself moves into the poetic spectrum. And what kind of a poet is Pessoa himself?

In a fragment on Goethe (1932), Pessoa remarks: "The genius is an alchemy. The alchemical process is fourfold: (1) putrefaction, (2) ablation, (3) rubification, (4) sublimation. First you leave sensations rot; after dead, they whiten up in the memory; after that they are rubified by the imagination; finally they are sublimed by expression".<sup>22</sup> This would sound like a very familiar formula to a reader of T. S. Eliot, who in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" presents us with the analogy of the catalyst, in which emotions and feelings are catalysed, so to say, in the mind of the poet.<sup>23</sup> In these cases the poet is looking *from outside*, as we observed before.

Huret claramente se nota, ninguém sabe determinar ao certo como, ou com que consciencia, veio este nome *symbolismo* a ser dado a este movimento, a que tal nome exactamente convém, o que acontece em coincidência com o renascimento dos estudos occultos em França, sendo do tempo a fundação de escolas mysticas como a [... *Blank space in original document*] Hermetica dos Rosa-Cruz, estabelecida em 1888 por St[anislas] de Guaita..." (BNP/E3, 129A-7).

<sup>20</sup> "O curioso facto de W[illia]m Blake ter como Hugo o espiritalismo symbolico, e sêr como Hugo, mas mais *real* e desequilibradamente, um *visionario*. (Blake inferior porque atypico – do seu momento, /da sua raça/, [... *Blank space in original document*]). Em ambos está talvez já a transição do espiritalismo symbolico para o pantheismo" (BNP/E3, 14<sup>5</sup>-65<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>21</sup> "Chegada á sua maxima complexidade a ideação moderna precisa de um instrumento de expressão maximamente complexo" (BNP/E3, 14<sup>2</sup>-14<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>22</sup> "O genio é uma alchymia. O processo alchymico é quadruplo: (1) putrefacção, (2) albação, (3) rubificação, (4) sublimação. Deixam-se, primeiro, apodrecer as sensações; depois de mortas, embranquecem-se com a memoria; em seguida rubificam-se com a imaginação; finalmente se sublimam pela expressão" (Pessoa, 2006: I, 80; BNP/E3, 19-4<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>23</sup> "When two gases previously mentioned [oxygen and sulphur dioxide] are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of

And it is from this impersonal perspective that he builds his Work. With this fact in mind Pessoa establishes a distance between what he calls a mystic poet and the poet with which he himself may be identified, which would be a step (or several steps) ahead of the mystic poet: an alchemic poet perhaps? An undated index Pessoa elaborated to describe the different stages of Portuguese literature contains at its number six: "The new mysticism. – The F[orest] of O[therness] of Mr. F Pessoa".<sup>24</sup>

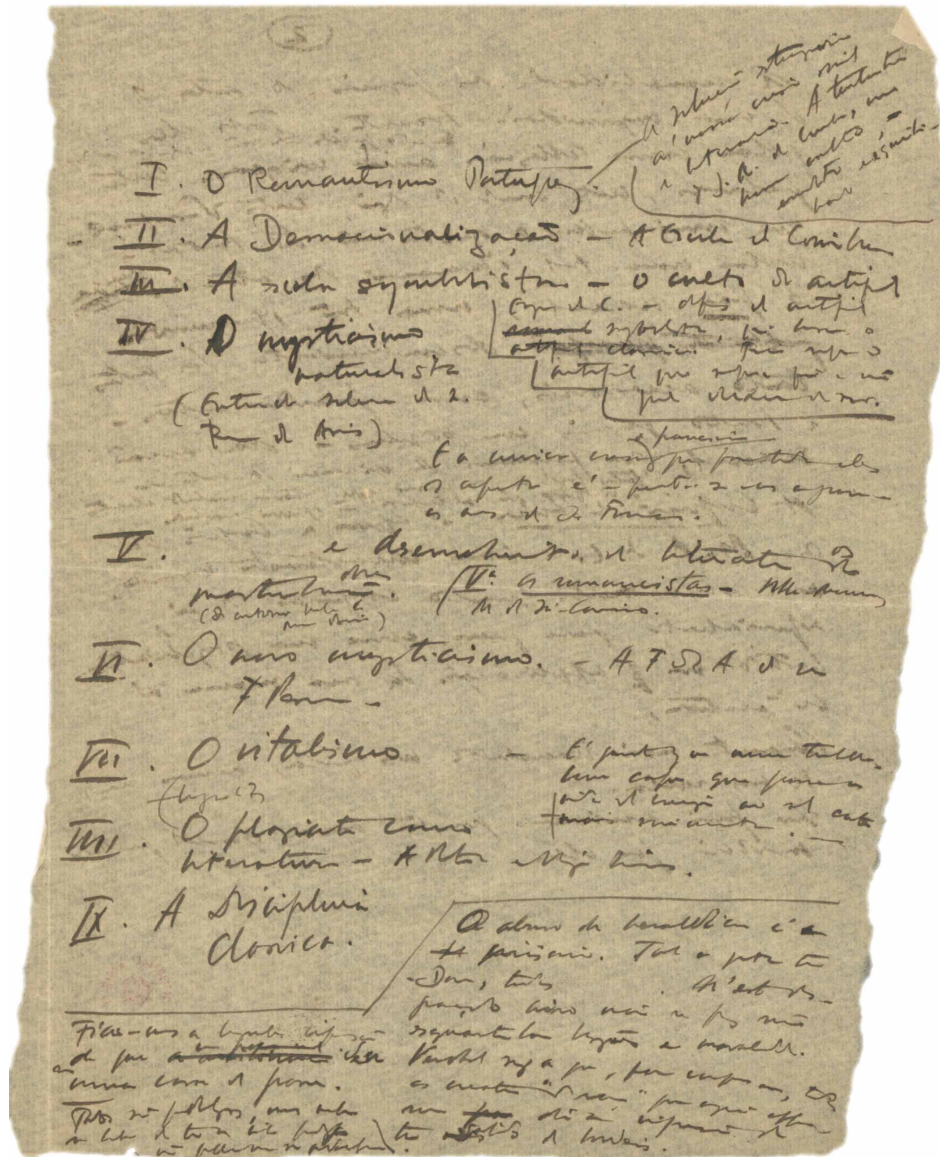


Fig. 4. BNP/E3, 14E-76v.

the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its materials" T. S. Eliot (1975: 41).

<sup>24</sup> "O novo misticismo. – A F[loresta] do A[lheamento] do sr. F Pessoa's" (BNP/E3, 14E-76v; c. 1914).

In another undated fragment Pessoa wrote on occultism we find the following statement:

As they have infiltrated the substance of European intelligence, it is noteworthy that theosophic and occultist ideas have appeared all over in literature. They appear there in three different ways: as theories forming part of the fable of the work – which is evident in several occultist poems written nowadays; as a profound emotion of the mystery and the supernatural indefinitely permeating the fable, or the style, or both – as it was done conscious or unconsciously in Portugal (more and better than in any other place) in the current that started in Orpheu; as a new way to face antique rites and legends which constitute the apparent substance of Christianity, and mainly its pagan part, which is the Catholic religion.<sup>25</sup>

All three appearances may be confirmed in Pessoa's own poetry. The first has already been studied in several occasions, especially in *Mensagem*. I would venture that the second appearance, "as a profound emotion of the mystery and the supernatural indefinitely permeating the fable, or the style, or both", may be found, among other poems, in the *Ode Marítima* by Pessoa's heteronym Álvaro de Campos which appeared in *Orpheu* in 1915. Here both, style and fable, convey the transcendence of Matter through Form.<sup>26</sup> Redemption through Art. The Poem in the eternal present of its actualization discovers and uncloses a secret truth. And it would be worth the while deciphering what Pessoa meant by the third –which certainly entails his heteronymic cosmos.

There are many more documents to be studied before we may draw conclusions on the place the mystic and esoteric matters occupy in Pessoa's poetry; what we may say so far is that Pessoa acknowledged the occultist influence in the literature of his time, and in his own, and made an effort to explain his particular path, which followed, as he insisted, the mystic and not the symbolist tradition – poetry of thought and not poetry of imagination<sup>27</sup>. The deciphering and organization of the existing documents in Pessoa's legacy may bring further insight to what we have tried to convey in these pages.

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<sup>25</sup> "Como se tem infiltrado na mesma substancia da intelligencia europeia, é de ver que as idéas theosophicas e occultistas por toda a parte apparecem na litteratura. Apparecem alli de trez modos distinctos: como theorias formando parte da these ou fabula da obra – o que se vê nos numerosos poemas occultistas que hoje se escrevem; como emoção profunda do mysterio e do além permeando indefinidamente já a fabula, já o stylo, já ambas cousas – como tanto consiente como inconscientemente se fez em Portugal (mais e melhor que em qualquer outro poncto) na corrente que surgiu no Orpheu; como novo modo de encarar os antigos ritos e lendas que constituem a substancia aparente do christianismo, e sobretudo da sua parte pagã, que é a religião catholica" (BNP/E3, 54-56r).

<sup>26</sup> I studied this poem in Bothe (2003), explaining its construction and its different semantic levels.

<sup>27</sup> For further information on this matter see: Pablo Javier Pérez López (2012).

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