

# Pessoa's Wyatt

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## Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Frederick Wyatt, English Poetry, Richard Tottel, Sonnets, Thomas Wyatt.

## Abstract

Pessoa's use of the early pseudonym Frederick Wyatt is a slant allusion to the English poet Sir Thomas Wyatt. In this brief study I review the figure of Thomas Wyatt, who occupies an uneasy place at the beginning of English poetry, and discuss possible connections with Pessoa's fictitious author.

## Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Frederick Wyatt, Poesia Inglesa, Richard Tottel, Sonetos, Thomas Wyatt.

## Abstract

O uso do pseudônimo Frederick Wyatt por Fernando Pessoa é uma alusão oblíqua ao poeta inglês Sir Thomas Wyatt. Neste breve estudo, revejo a importância de Thomas Wyatt, que ocupa um lugar instável nos princípios da poesia Inglesa, e discuto as possíveis conexões com o autor fictício de Pessoa.

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Pessoa's use of the early pseudonym Frederick Wyatt is a slant allusion to the English poet Sir Thomas Wyatt,<sup>1</sup> who with Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, introduced Italianate and neoclassical forms into circulation in England and who thus occupies a position similar to Sá de Miranda, Garsilaso, and Boscán, poets of Wyatt's universe of experience: he was Henry VIII's preferred ambassador to Charles V, whom he followed on two embassies through France and the Iberian peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from being lyrics in a loose collection, from sharing some mundane markers like refrains, quatrains, the occasional reference to a beloved lady, a goddess, or the use of "thy" and "dost," the poetry of Frederick Wyatt and the poetry of Thomas Wyatt show little in common—except the surname, and the poet's surname is precisely what the preface to Pessoa's volume lays claims to: "He preferred the pseudonym ∴ [because] (he used to say) there was already a Wyatt at the beginning of English poetry" (PESSOA, 2016: 359).

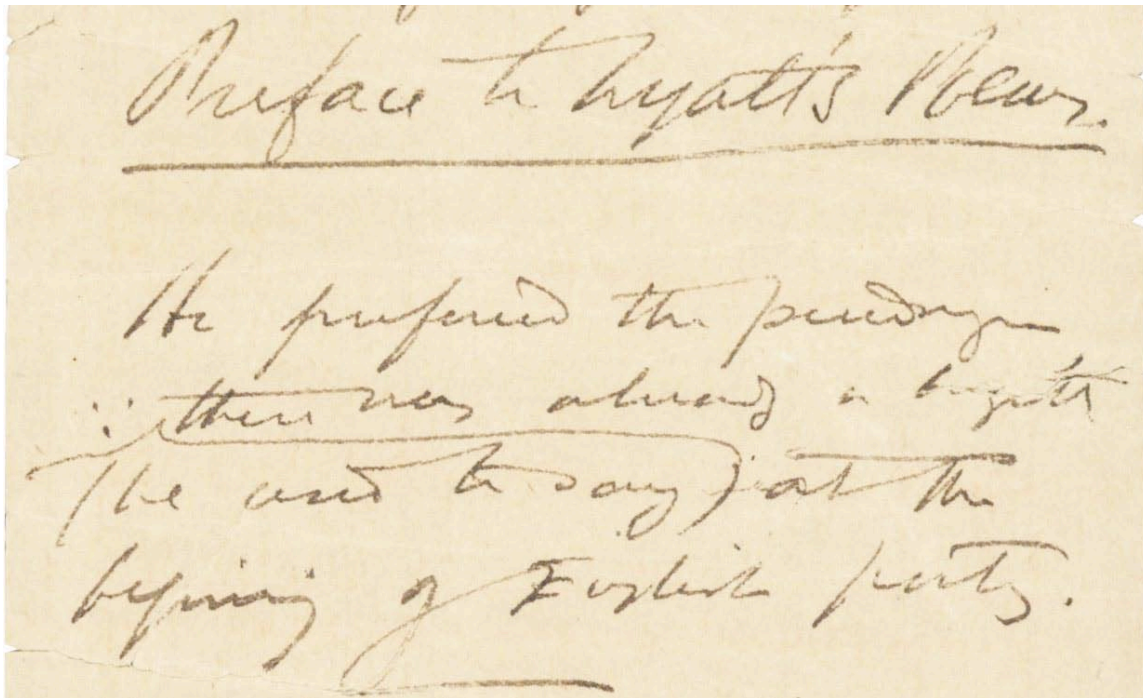


Fig. 1. "Preface to Wyatt's Poems." (BNP/E3, 14E-96; PESSOA, 2016: 359). Detail.

But the surname Wyatt occupies an uneasy place at the beginning of English poetry. Wyatt's poetry circulated in the risky venue of courtly manuscript

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Pessoa created this fictitious English poet around 1913, a year before the invention of Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos, and Ricardo Reis—the heteronyms of the "drama-em-gente" [drama in people] as Pessoa himself referred to his imagined coterie in 1928 (PESSOA, 1928: 10). For a complete transcription of the writings attributed to Frederick Wyatt, see the contribution by Ferrari and Pittella in this issue. See also the introduction of Wyatt in PESSOA (2016: 359-370).

<sup>2</sup> For further biographical details of Thomas Wyatt, see FOLEY (1990).

exchange, where the occulting and exposure of identity was part of a guessing game of courtly intrigue. At the court of a royal monster, not even names rang true, and name-dropping had a way of catching up with the people. Of his Anna Boleyn—he would later almost lose his own life in the Tower, accused of being her lover—he composes the following anagram as a compliment:

What word is that, that changeth not,  
 Though it be turned and made in twaine:  
 It is mine Anna god it wot.  
 The only causer of my paine:

(in TOTTELL, 1557: 295)

Wyatt won a reputation as a poet and wit at the court of Henry VIII. Wyatt's own codex of poetry, now known as the Egerton manuscript, is the first personal manuscript collection to survive with the hand of an English author in it. But the conditions of courtly authorship were so open, collective, dialogic, shared, and contested, that then as now we are uncertain whether many of the poems attributed to him were "by" him.

The print miscellany of published by Richard Tottel in 1557—the *Songes and Sonettes* that brought this courtly oeuvres to young men on the make like Spenser and Shakespeare, mixes Wyatt's poetry with the poetry of Surrey, Grimald, Vaux, Norton, and even Chaucer, and it withholds Wyatt's names from the title page:

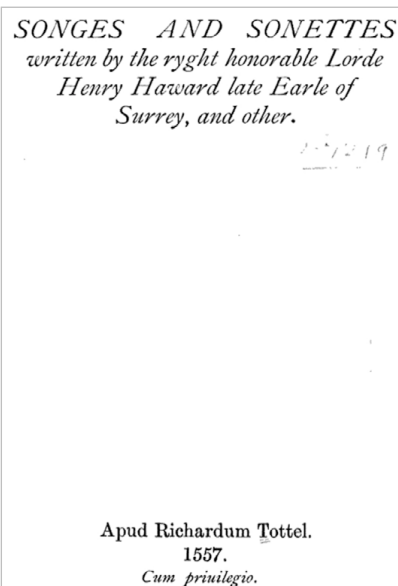


Fig. 2. Title page of Tottel's first edition. *Songes and Sonettes written by the right honorable Lord Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other*, 1557.

The motive for suppressing Wyatt's name is not hard to surmise. Tottel published his anthology in 1557,<sup>3</sup> in the middle of the reign of the Roman Catholic Queen Mary. Wyatt himself was identified with the protestant cause, the Howard family with the conservative Catholics, and, scandalously, Wyatt's son, Sir Thomas Wyatt the younger, in the early months of 1554, just following the execution of Lady Jane Grey and the official accession of Mary, led rebel forces of some 4,000 men against the Crown in as part of a protestant conspiracy to prevent the Queen from marrying Philip of Spain. He was beheaded at the Tower in March 1554, and his family lost their land and titles—to be restored after Mary's death in 1558, when the new queen, Elizabeth, who had surely been party to Wyatt's rebellion, restored them.

Tottel's Miscellany not only suppresses historical names; it supplies factitious literary lives. In titles given by the editor, Wyatt's and Surrey's occasional verses are inserted into Petrarchan narratives of courtly love: "The lover for shamefastnesse hideth his desire within his faithfull hart" (1557: 44); "The lover confesseth him in love with Phillis" (1557: 48); "To his love from whom he hadd her gloves," (1557: 55) or take another case involving names, "The lovers sorrowfull state maketh him write sorrowfull songes, but Souch his love may change the same," (1557: 66) a poem in which the word "Souch" stands for the surname Zouche. For Surrey, it takes a single poem of compliment to a young cousin, Elizabeth Fitzgerald, and constructs a whole narrative of Petrarchan love based upon the pseudonym Surrey gives her, the faire Geraldine.

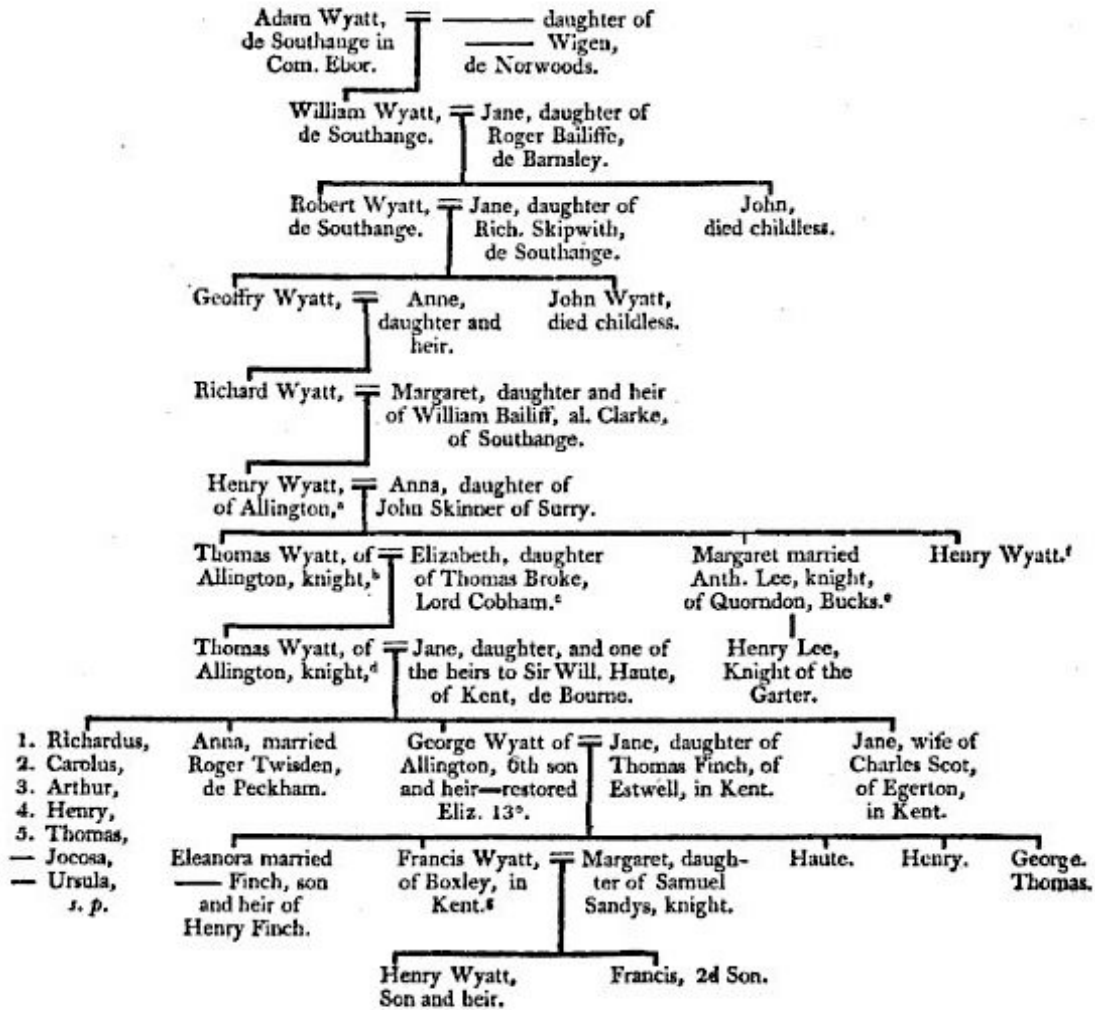
Name play is thus part of the literary story of Thomas Wyatt. Consider, for example, the scholarship reflected in the work of John and G.F. Nott in the 1812/1816 edition, which gives full play to the politics of the Wyatt names in its highly political "memoirs" and which includes a full genealogy, a tradition Pessoa parodies in chart of Wyatt family members (cf. PESSOA, 2016: 368-370) [Fig. 3].

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<sup>3</sup> This anthology consisted of 271 poems, none of which had ever been printed before.

PEDIGREE OF THE FAMILY OF WYATT.

Vincent, Kent, 116. p. 79.



- 1. Richardus,
- 2. Carolus,
- 3. Arthur,
- 4. Henry,
- 5. Thomas,
- Jocosa,
- Ursula,
- s. p.*

- <sup>a</sup> Knighted in the Tower, by Hen. VIII. at his Coronation.
- <sup>b</sup> Knighted at Westminster, xxvi<sup>o</sup>. Hen. VIII.
- <sup>c</sup> She married, after Sir Thomas Wyatt's death, Edward Warner, knight.
- <sup>d</sup> Knighted before the 1st of Edward VI: attainted A. 1<sup>o</sup>. M. and P.
- <sup>e</sup> Ancestor of the Earls of Litchfield.
- <sup>f</sup> This branch of the family settled afterwards in Essex.
- <sup>g</sup> Knighted at Windsor, 7th July, 1618.

To be placed before the Memoirs.

Fig 3. Pedigree of the Wyatt family in *Songs and Sonnets of the Earl of Surrey* (of Sir T. Wyatt, the elder, of uncertain authors, of N. Grimoald), 1812.



Another staple item of nineteenth century edition is the search for codes or cyphers. This is recalled in the reference to a cypher in one of the fragments Fernando Pessoa likely intended for the preface of "The Poems of Frederick Wyatt," and perhaps also in the vertical inscriptions on the manuscript title page, which recalls the anagrams favored in renaissance poetry (PESSOA, 2016: 359 and 363).<sup>4</sup>

Or, to take as an example of a text even closer to the moment of Frederick Wyatt, consider the widely circulated popular edition in Edward Arber's English Poets of 1900.

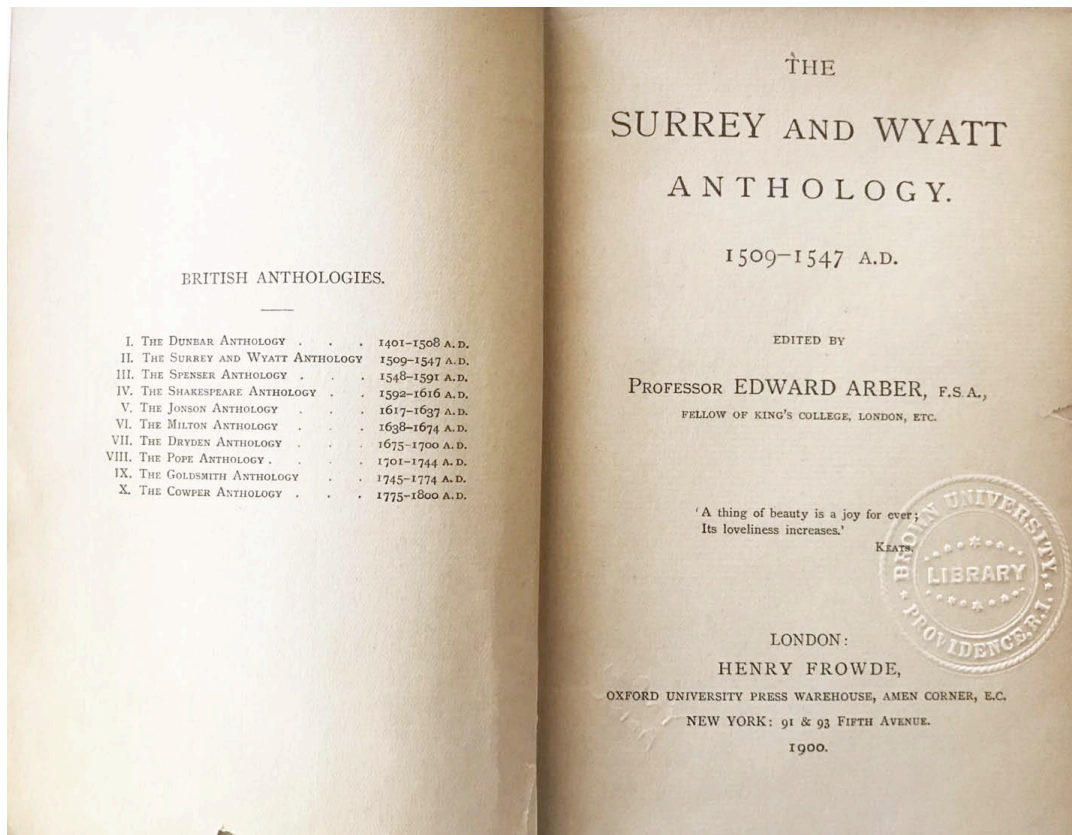


Fig 4. Title page of *The Surrey and Wyatt Anthology*, 1900.

Arber says of his own title to this "people's edition":

Strictly speaking, this Collection of our Poetry during the reign of HENRY VIII should be called *The WYATT and SURREY Anthology*, for Sir THOMAS WYATT the Elder was not only the nobler man and the nobler poet of the two: but it was he that brought the Sonnet Stanza, together with *Terza Rima* and Blank Verse, into England from Italy. It is however customary to say *SURREY and WYATT*, simply because the former was a Peer.

(ARBER, 1900: 1)

<sup>4</sup> For a complete transcription and reproduction of the reference and inscription, see "The Poems of Frederick Wyatt" presented by FERRARI and PITTELLA in the Document Section of this issue.

Arber is reflecting a change in taste, as English literature emerges as a canon, and he is drawing upon the work of a German scholar Edwal Flügel, teaching at the new Leland Stanford Junior University, to reflect a preference for the rugged lines of Wyatt over Surrey's polished verses, in part through restoring Wyatt's text from a study of the manuscripts in the context of courtly circulation.<sup>5</sup> We see the same modern Wyatt story in the work of a young American scholar, Frederick Morgan Padelford, which reached popular publication in *Early Sixteenth Century Lyrics* included in Flügel's *Belles-Lettres* series by D.C. Heath in Boston and London in 1907.

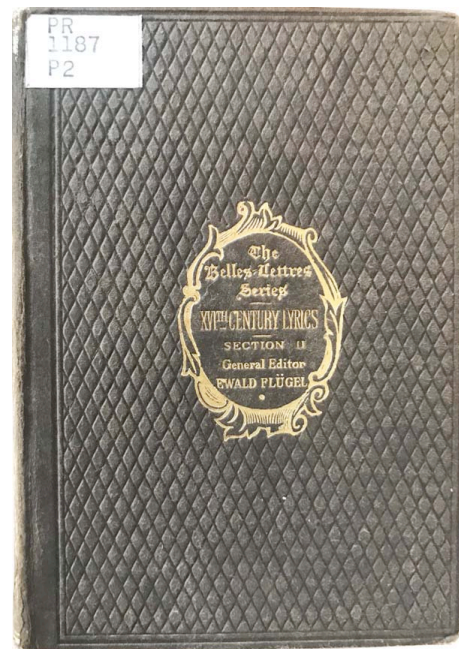


Fig 5. Front cover of the *Early Sixteenth Century Lyrics*, 1907.

These popular volumes in the emerging history of English literature are Pessoa's Wyatt. Here Wyatt is reborn as a modern:

These poems are like monologues snatched from intense situations [...] and it is as if we were to enter the theatre at a moment when a situation is critical, and passionate utterance is at its height [...]. The language is direct, familiar, and unadorned; a case left to stand or fall by the bare truth of it [...]. He [Wyatt] has left a score or more of poems that, in real imagination, imagination in the sense in which Ruskin defined it, surpasses anything that Petrarch and his Italian imitators ever wrote.

(PADELDFORD, 1907: xlv-xlvi)

Such original modern verse is clearly not represented in the corpus left to us by

<sup>5</sup> Editor's note: for a detailed metrical analysis of Wyatt's and Surrey's realization of the line we term iambic pentameter, see DUFFELL (2008: 116-125 and 135-136).

Pessoa's Frederick Wyatt. As the fragment headed "Frederick Wyatt Cypher" above referred claims:

He was extraordinarily ignorant of modern English literature and especially of modern English poets. He never read anything by O[scar] Wilde, B[ernard] Shaw □ Even of the French poets he did not know the more recent ones. He knew Baudelaire, Rollinat ("Les Névroses") certainly. I do not think he had any knowledge of Verlaine.

(PESSOA, 2016: 363)

But Pessoa's introduction also perversely claims a paradoxical literary originality that is belied by his slavish sartorial imitation: "The more deeply original his style became, the more he consciously modelled his □, his manner of dressing, his habits... on Goethe, on Shelley, on □ on innumerable literary people, not all great." (BNP / E3, 14E-96<sup>6</sup>).

As to the Christian name Frederick, no god fearing pope hating Spaniard fearing English aristocrat bears this name in at the court of Henry VIII. But it is the first name of the young American editor I just mentioned, Frederick Morgan Padelford.

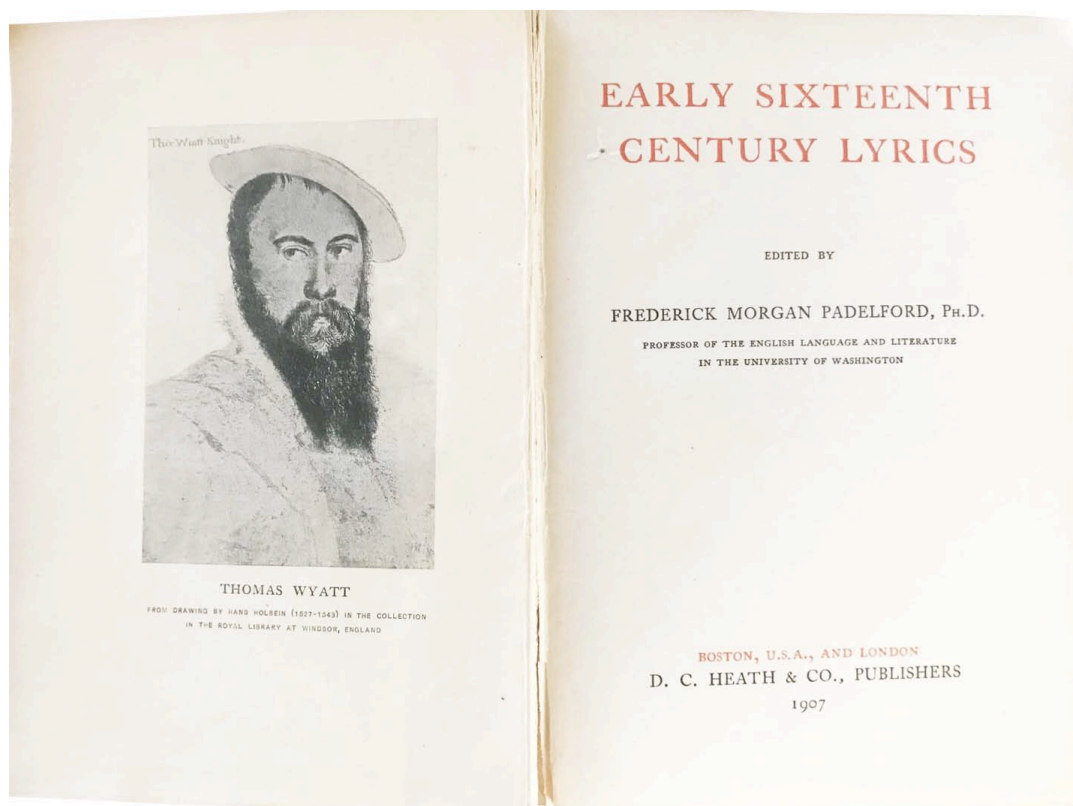


Fig 6. Title page of the *Early Sixteenth Century Lyrics*, 1907.

Of the many other Wyatt family members whose signatures Pessoa forges (PESSOA,

<sup>6</sup> See note 4.



2016: 368-370), one, to my knowledge, has an historical persona: Sir Francis Wyatt,<sup>7</sup> Thomas Wyatt's great grandson, who served as the first governor of the Virginia colony in 1621 and as governor under royal charter granted to him in 1624 and again starting in 1639.

Just like with Thomas Wyatt, whose poems first appeared posthumously in Tottel's Miscellany, none of the poems attributed to Frederick Wyatt were published during Pessoa's lifetime.

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<sup>7</sup> Editor's note: Pessoa's Francis Wyatt did not evolve into a fictitious author. In Pessoa's archive there exists one single signature trial bearing this name (PESSOA, 2016: 370).

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