

Metrical Complexity in Pessoa's 35 Sonnets

Geoffrey Russom*

Keywords

Hopkins, Kiparsky, Meter, Metrics, Milton, Pessoa, Poetry, Prosody, Rhythm, Shakespeare, *35 Sonnets*

Abstract

Though obviously inspired by Shakespeare's sonnets, Pessoa's English sonnets employ metrical patterns, enjambments, and grammatical constructions not used by Shakespeare. This mixture of effects has been criticized as somewhat awkward or even incompetent. The assumption seems to be that Pessoa tried, and failed, to create an authentic Shakespearean masquerade. Here I argue that Pessoa's sonnets are modernist poems that appropriate the past in the manner of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Like Pessoa, Hopkins was intensely interested in metrical variety, wrote innovative sonnets, and appropriated complex rhythms from English poets other than Shakespeare, notably Milton. Like Pessoa, Hopkins used archaic English and modernist grammatical constructions as well. Aspects of Pessoa's verse sometimes criticized as excessive are carried even farther by Hopkins, whose verse is now widely admired. The assumption that Pessoa is a modernist of a particular kind brings into focus his strengths as a scholarly poet.

Palavras-chave

Hopkins, Kiparsky, Métrica, Versificação, Milton, Pessoa, Poesia, Prosódia, Ritmo, Shakespeare, *35 Sonnets*.

Resumo

Embora claramente inspirados nos sonetos de Shakespeare, os *35 Sonnets* de Pessoa empregam esquemas métricos, cavalgamentos e construções gramaticais não utilizadas por Shakespeare. Esta mescla de efeitos tem sido criticada como estranha ou, até mesmo, como incompetente. A suposição é que Pessoa teria tentado, sem sucesso, criar uma imitação Shakespeariana. Aqui defendo que os sonetos de Pessoa são poemas modernistas, os quais se apropriam do passado à maneira de Gerard Manley Hopkins. Tal como Pessoa, Hopkins interessava-se profundamente pela variedade métrica, tendo escrito sonetos inovadores e se apropriado de ritmos complexos de poetas ingleses para além de Shakespeare, notavelmente Milton. Tal como Pessoa, Hopkins também usou inglês arcaico e construções gramaticais modernísticas. Alguns aspectos do verso pessoano, por vezes criticados como excessivos, são levados ainda mais longe por Hopkins, cuja poesia é hoje largamente admirada. A suposição de que Pessoa é um tipo especial de modernista traz à tona a sua erudição como poeta.

* Emeritus Professor. Department of English at Brown University.

In *35 Sonnets* (PESSOA, 1918), the author employs a Shakespearean rhyme scheme and a number of Shakespeare's rhythmical devices. The sonnets would not work as forgeries, however, because Pessoa's lines are more complex than Shakespeare's on average and because Shakespeare does not use some of Pessoa's most complex rhythms (FERRARI, 2012: 214, 305-322). To evaluate Pessoa's metrical skill, we will need a concrete definition of rhythmical complexity.

The rhythm of an iambic or trochaic line should obviously conform somehow to the basic alternating rhythm. Persistent strict conformity soon becomes annoying, however. One scholar interested in trochaic meters can imagine no greater form of torture "than to listen, night after night, to a story set in the meter of *Hiawatha*," a poem by Longfellow in a rather "sing-song" variety of trochaic tetrameter (DAUNT, 1947: 224). Daunt is reacting to lines like item (1), where prominent stress is marked with an acute accent and the boundaries of trochaic feet are marked with slashes.

(1) *Hómeward / húrried / Hía/wátha*

Here the first two trochaic feet are realized as trochaic words and the following name has two trochaic constituents. Item (1) has been cited as an example of the "metrically most banal" way to realize a trochaic line (KIPARSKY, 1977: 224). Iambic lines of comparable banality, with strict alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, are used sparingly by Shakespeare and Milton, and even by Alexander Pope, who adheres with unusual strictness to metrical norms (KIPARSKY, 1977: 189). Occasional use of simple realizations keeps the basic rhythm in view, but first-rate poets provide rhythmical variety as well. Musical analogues come readily to mind. Even in the wildly innovative be-bop era, when the adjective *crazy* expressed approval, most jazz was in 4/4 time, the trochaic rhythm of popular songs. Jazz solos did not imitate the tick-tock regularity of a metronome, however. To appreciate the difference between basic rhythm and artistic rhythm, imagine Charlie Parker marking 4/4 time by tapping his foot while improvising in his usual style on the saxophone. The solo would depart considerably from the foot-tapping rhythm and in that sense would be rhythmically complex.

Jazz musicians somehow learn to provide spectacular rhythmical variety while maintaining the sense of a norm. These artists often place accented notes in unusual locations, but such syncopated effects reinforce the basic rhythm in a curious way and tempt you to get up and dance. Rhythmical variety creates audience involvement. Involvement ends, however, when an improviser violates rules of rhythmical practice for the relevant tradition. A jazz musician who "loses the beat" is likely to be booed off the stage. Like musical traditions, poetic traditions allow a variety of rhythmical patterns while ruling out others as unacceptable. Rules for poetic and musical traditions are similar to the rules of a language, which allow a variety of linguistic patterns while excluding a larger

number of imaginable patterns, such as patterns attested in other languages. Children acquire linguistic rules largely by intuition, without conscious thought. Once learned, such rules apply reliably with amazing speed as we speak and listen. Metrical rules can also be acquired by intuition and implemented in real time. Illiterate oral poets who cannot state the rules of their traditional meter nevertheless obey those rules as they improvise and scold pupils instantly when a metrical rule is violated (JAKOBSON, 1963).

To evaluate Pessoa's rhythmical ingenuity, I find it useful to work outward from his most direct realizations of iambic pentameter to his most challenging ones.¹ As usual in my research, I assume that units of poetic form are based on units of linguistic form, with metrical positions based on syllables, metrical feet based on words, and metrical lines based on sentences (RUSSOM, 2011). Consider the iambic foot, which consists of a weak metrical position, normally occupied by an unstressed syllable, and a following strong metrical position, normally occupied by a stressed syllable. If metrical units are based on linguistic units, the simplest realizations of iambic pentameter will be lines like item (2), where each metrical position is realized as one syllable, each iambic foot is realized as an iambic word, and the line is realized as a sentence.

- (2) *Refined / gourméts / demánd / supérb / cuisíne* (constructed)
- (3) *Of hánd, / of fóot, / of líp, / of éye, / of brów* (S106.6)
- (4) *But whèn / I cáme / where thòu / wert láid, / and sáw* (4.9)

Though metrically simple, lines like (2) are difficult to construct and rarely occur for practical reasons. Most English words with two syllables are trochaic. I chose a topic for (2) that permitted heavy use of iambic words borrowed from French. Item (3), from a sonnet by Shakespeare, is somewhat less simple than (2).² Each foot is realized as a small phrase with iambic rhythm, and the foot boundaries are aligned with phrase boundaries marked by punctuation. Within the line there is strict alternation between unstressed or weakly stressed function words and prominently stressed nouns. By *function words* I mean words like the pronoun *I*, the demonstrative adjective *that*, the preposition *of*, the conjunction *and*, the article *the*,

¹ For analysis of Pessoa's sonnets from a variety of theoretical perspectives, see FERRARI (2012: 207-217, 285-322). I owe thanks to Ferrari for sharing his metrical insights and for providing an electronic text of 35 *Sonnets* (PESSOA, 1918), which I incorporated into a Microsoft Excel file for analysis. As references below will make clear, I depend on Ferrari for information about Pessoa's life and in particular about Pessoa's study of English iambic pentameter. Any errors are of course my responsibility.

² Since I will argue that all of Pessoa's metrical licenses are used by Shakespeare, Milton, or Donne, I offer KIPARSKY (1977) as an impartial witness to relevant details of iambic pentameter tradition, using lines cited by Kiparsky as examples and accepting his scansion without demur. Examples from Pessoa are cited by sonnet number and line. Examples from Shakespeare's sonnets are cited in the same way, but with "S" before the sonnet number.

the auxiliary verb *will*, and the substantive verb *is*. Function words tend to appear on the initial weak position of the iambic foot because they have high frequency and correspondingly low prominence. Their occurrence is often so predictable that we omit them. In ordinary prose, item (3) becomes “of hand, foot, lip, eye, and brow.” The more prominent words include lexical nouns like *hand*, lexical adjectives like *huge*, and main verbs like *demand*. Item (4) from Pessoa’s sonnets stays almost as close to the basic pattern as item (3), but some of the words on strong positions have low prominence. I have marked weak stress on *when* and *thou* with a grave accent but they could be pronounced as unstressed without adverse metrical consequences. Placement of an unstressed syllable on a strong position neither supports nor disrupts the iambic rhythm. A musical analogue would be a rest in a position normally occupied by an accented note, something that occurs routinely in Classical music as well as jazz.

If stressed syllables are positioned normally, the foot boundary can fall within a word, as in Pessoa’s item (5).

(5) *In níght/ly hórr/ors of /despáired / surmíse (3.12)*

Here the first two foot boundaries fall within words rather than between them. In the third foot, the unstressed function word *of* appears on a strong position. After introducing these elements of complexity, Pessoa concludes the line in the simplest way, realizing the last two feet as iambic words. Iambic words are perfectly appropriate in any foot, but Pessoa places them in the last foot more than twice as often as in any other foot.³ This metrical practice falls under the universal principle of closure, which states that adherence to metrical norms tends to become stricter toward the end of a metrical unit such as a line, a couplet, a quatrain, or a whole poem (HAYES, 1983: 373).

In Shakespeare’s sonnets, a stressed monosyllabic word often occupies a weak position when a more prominent stress follows on the strong position of the foot (KIPARSKY, 1977: 208). Stressed monosyllables can be placed with relative freedom because they have no inherent word rhythm.

(6) *That this / hùge stáge / presént/eth náught / but shóws (S15.3)*

(7) *Mòre in / tíme’s úse / than my / creát/ing whóle (3.2)*

(8) *Thou dost / lóve her / becàuse / thou knówst / I lóve her (S42.6)*

(9) *And the / will to / renóunce / doth ál/so miss (29.4)*

(10) *The strày / stárs, whose / innúm/erab/le líght (18.3)*

³ Gilbert Youmans transformed all poetic word orders into ordinary word orders in a large sample of Milton’s verse (7,339 lines). One of his findings was that Milton often used poetic word orders to place an iambic word at the end of the line but rarely to remove an iambic word from that position (YOUMANS, 1989: 377).

In item (6), *hùge stáge* has the most prominent phrasal stress on *stáge* and the foot has iambic rhythm despite the subordinate phrasal stress on *huge*. Compare *time's úse* in Pessoa's item (7). Less often, Shakespeare places a stressed monosyllable on a weak position when the adjacent syllables are unstressed, as in the second foot of item (8). Pessoa's item (9) has the same kind of trochaic inversion in its second foot.⁴ A stressed monosyllable stands out less starkly on a weak position when adjacent to stress in the preceding foot, as in Pessoa's item (10), where *stars* is immediately preceded by *stray*. This kind of inversion is less strictly regulated by the principle of closure than the kind of inversion in (9), which Pessoa places most often in the second foot and never in the fourth. Inversions like those in the second foot of (10), on the other hand, appear eight times in the fourth foot, once every four or five sonnets.⁵

In a two-word English phrase, the last word usually has the most prominent stress. The rising rhythm of phrases contrasts with the falling rhythm of compound words, which usually have the strongest stress on the first syllable. If I say *bláckbird*, with the strongest stress on *black*, I am using a compound word that refers to one species of bird, *turdus merula* to be precise. If I say *blàck bírd*, with the strongest stress on *bird*, I am using a two-word phrase that refers to any bird colored black. A cormorant, for example, is a black bird.

English iambic pentameter allows special departures from the norm at the margins of the line, which normally coincide with the margins of a sentence or large phrase.

- (11) *Béauty / and lóve / let nó / one sép/aràte* (19.1)
- (12) *Náture's / bequést / gíves nóth/ing but / doth lénd* (S4.3)
- (13) *By àn/y skill / of thóught / or trícK / of séem(ing)* (1.10)
- (14) *Líke to / the lárk / at bréak / of dáy / arís(ing)* (S29.11)
- (15) (pause) *Twén/ty bóok/ës clád / in blák / or réed* (Chaucer, A.Prol.294)
- (16) (pause) *Név/er, név/er, név/er, név/er, név(er)!* (K. L. 5.3.308)

⁴ Trochaic inversions like those in item (9) also occur in the second foot of 3.11, 15.8, 18.9, 21.13, 24.11, 31.5, 31.11, and 32.2; and in the third foot of 16.7 and 31.6. Such inversions cannot occur in the first foot (since no unstressed syllable precedes in the same line) and are restricted for irrelevant reasons in the fifth foot, where a line-final function word like *to* would cause radical enjambment. Inversion with radical enjambment does occur in Pessoa's items (49) and (50), discussed below, but in such cases the line-final function word acquires special prominence from rhyme and becomes a more appropriate occupant for the strong position.

⁵ This less complex inversion also occurs in the second foot of 13.10, 20.8, and 33.7; in the third foot of 8.12, 14.10, 14.11, 15.2, 16.8, 18.8, 20.12, 23.2, 27.12, 28.9, 29.2, and 32.7; and in the fourth foot of 2.9, 3.13, 12.7, 14.10, 16.4, 21.5, 29.13, and 35.1. As with inversions like (9), those like (10) cannot occur in the first foot and have no exact equivalents in the fifth foot due to the presence of rhyme in that location.

Stress is most easily perceived on a syllable that stands between unstressed syllables of the same phrase.⁶ It is more difficult to perceive stress in the first syllable of a phrase. Items (11) and (12) both have stress on the weak position of the first foot; but this stress is muffled at the beginning of the line, which is also the beginning of a sentence.⁷ The last foot in the line can be followed optionally by a single unstressed syllable, as in items (13) and (14), where the optional syllable is parenthesized. Since Chaucer, iambic pentameter has also allowed “headless” lines in which the first syllable is omitted, as in item (15). Shakespeare’s item (16) is a headless line that also has an extra syllable at line end. Lines like (16) are rare for reasons that have nothing to do with stress. This line has perfectly regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. All its strong positions are occupied by stressed syllables and all its weak positions are occupied by unstressed syllables. The special complexity of (16) results from its persistent refusal to align foot boundaries with word boundaries. As a line with five trochaic words, item (16) is the binary opposite of item (2), a line with five iambic words that realizes each foot in the simplest way.

Item (16) is an extreme example of an effect noticed by eminent poets and critics: that a concentration of trochaic words creates a trochaic counter-rhythm even in an iambic metrical context (KIPARSKY, 1977: 234). This metrical dissonance occurs in Shakespeare’s most harrowing scene of cathartic pity and terror, when King Lear’s world has been utterly destroyed and he is dying of a literally broken heart. Program music for a film version of the play would surely employ harmonic dissonance here. In a similar way, the metrical dissonance of item (16) accompanies and intensifies the emotional tension of the scene.

Some freedoms available at the margins of the line are also available within the line at the margins of phrases.

(17) *But the / wòrds’ sènsè / from wòrds / — knówledge, / tràth, chángè* (26.12)

(18) *My lóve / shall in / my vèrse / éver / live yóung* (S19.14)

(19) *Do máke /it bétt(er); / its pér/il is / its áid* (11.4)

(20) *Must cúrt/sy at / this cén(sure). / Oh, bóys, / this stó(ry)* (Cym. 3.3.55)

In the fourth foot of item (17), *knowledge* has muffled stress at the beginning of a line-internal phrase marked off prominently by a dash. This stress can occupy the weak position of an iambic foot, like the line-initial stress of *beauty* in item (11).⁸ In

⁶ Conspicuous syllables of this kind are called *stress maxima* by HALLE and KEYSER (1971: 169-171).

⁷ It is worth adding that the first foot is the one least influenced by the principle of closure and provides a doubly appropriate site for trochaic inversion, which is more common there than at the beginning of a line-internal phrase.

⁸ Line-internal inversions also occur in the second foot of 23.9 and 27.14; the third foot of 6.3, 6.7, 8.1, 9.6, 11.5, 14.7, 15.4, 15.10, 16.2, 17.2, 17.7, 18.5, 25.14, 26.14, and 31.11; and the fourth foot of 8.10, 11.1, 18.10, 21.13, 25.9, and 28.1.

item (19), line-medial *bett(er)* adds an extra unstressed syllable at the end of a phrase. Compare line-final *seem(ing)* in item (13).⁹ Shakespeare's corresponding items (18) and (20) appear among other examples in KIPARSKY (1977: 217, 231). As rhythmical variations become more complex, it becomes harder to find examples in Shakespeare's sonnets, which are metrically stricter than his plays.¹⁰ Kiparsky cites no examples like (20) from the sonnets.

Although iambic pentameter regulates syllable count rather strictly, two unstressed vowels may occupy the same weak position when they are adjacent, either within the same word or across a word boundary. Within a given word, unstressed vowels can also share a weak position when they are separated by one resonant consonant (KIPARSKY, 1977: 239-244). Resonant consonants like *l*, *m*, *n*, and *r* do not make sharp syllable divisions. They tend to coalesce with vowels because they are like vowels in important respects; and they actually become vowels in words like *bottle*, *bottom*, *button*, and *butter*, as pronounced in my dialect of American English. Optional assignment of two vowels to one metrical position, generally called *elision*, occurs frequently in English iambic pentameter (KIPARSKY, 1977: 240). Word-internal elision is marked by parentheses in the cited examples. Elision across a word boundary is marked by an underscore.

(21) *We_ are bórn / at sún/set and /we díe / ere mórn* (14.1)

(22) *With the / òld sád/ness for / the_ immór/tal hóme* (20.4)

(23) *All (i)s éi/ther the / irrát/(iona)l wórld / we sée* (2.10)

The fact that *we are* can be contracted into *we're* makes it easy to understand why Pessoa can treat the first two syllables of item (21) as if they were a single syllable.¹¹ In item (22), the unstressed vowel of *the* shares a weak position with the adjacent unstressed vowel of *immortal*.¹² In an edition of Milton's poetry, spelling as *th' immortal* might be used to show that the vowel of *the* does not count as an independent metrical syllable. The last two unstressed vowels of *irrat(iona)l* can share a weak position in (23) because they are separated only by the resonant consonant *n*. When eligible for contraction, adjacent syllables separated by a word boundary can share one metrical position even if their vowels are separated by a consonant, as in the first foot of item (23). Item (23) would scan without this option

⁹ Similar examples internal to the line occur with *sinn(er)* (5.13), *bitt(er)* (28.13), and *words (of)* in 25.14, which also has trochaic inversion in the third foot after a phrase boundary and elision of the first two vowels in *reality*.

¹⁰ For a thorough metrical analysis of Shakespeare's non-dramatic and dramatic long line see DUFFELL (2008: 131-136).

¹¹ Vocalic resonants count as elidable vowels and can be elided in the second foot of 9.11, in the fourth foot of 29.9, and in the fifth foot of 19.4 and 31.7.

¹² Similar elision occurs with *the* in the second foot of 5.8 and the fourth foot of 31.14.

if the poet had used the contracted form spelled *All's* (as for example in *All's well that ends well*).¹³

Elision can also occur when one of the adjacent vowels is stressed.

(24) *The_équal/ble tú/rrant of / our díff/(ere)nt fátes* (27.10)

(25) *With the / h(igher) trífflíng lèt / us wórld / our wít* (35.11)

(26) *(Éve)n when / the féélíng's ná/ture_ís ví/olènt* (6.12)

In the first foot of item (24), *the* is elided with the following stressed vowel and the combination counts as one syllable with muffled stress.¹⁴ My performance of (24) would not require elision across *r* in *different* because this word has only one unstressed syllable in my dialect of English. Now it is by no means necessary to pronounce two elided vowels as one syllable for effective performance of a line (compare KIPARSKY, 1977: 240). Elision does typically correspond, however, to monosyllabic pronunciation in rapid speech or in a dialect other than the poet's.¹⁵ In item (25), the stressed vowel of *higher* elides with *-er*, the adjacent unstressed vowel (a centralized vowel in r-less dialects, a vocalic resonant *r* in my dialect).¹⁶ Item (26) illustrates a subtype of elision across *v*. The corresponding monosyllabic pronunciation is indicated by an apostrophe in spellings for *even* like *e'en*.¹⁷

As item (6) has shown, Shakespeare uses heavy iambic feet with a stressed word followed by a word of more prominent phrasal stress (*hùge stáge*). Pessoa employs heavy iambic feet in some complex lines.

¹³ Compare item (31) below, where Pessoa uses the contracted form *And's* and the first foot scans as written. Contraction of *is* can take place across consonants that would block elision, for example the voiceless stop [k] in *Frank's*. Although *We are* in item (21) scans with routine elision of adjacent vowels across a word boundary, *All is* in item (23) is best analyzed as assignment of contractible syllables to one weak position (rather than as elision across a resonant consonant and a word boundary).

¹⁴ Elision with *the* before a stressed vowel also occurs in the third foot of 18.7, 29.14, and 32.12; and in the fourth foot of 19.8. Milton uses this kind of elision in lines like *As from / the cén/ter thríce / to th'út/mòst póle* (PL 1.74).

¹⁵ Sub-varieties of elision can be distinguished as analogues of the corresponding linguistic rules for dialects or rapid speech, and poets can differ in their choice of sub-varieties (KIPARSKY, 1977: 239-241).

¹⁶ Elision after a stressed vowel also occurs in the first foot of 15.12, 23.14, and 25.12; the second foot of 4.10, 17.8, 17.10, 21.8, 29.3, and 35.8; the third foot of 2.11, 15.2, 20.6, 22.11, 23.13, 27.9, 33.14, and 34.13; the fourth foot of 2.5, 11.11, 29.2, 33.14, and 34.6; and the fifth foot of 30.10. In 33.14, *being* elides twice. In 25.14, *r(eá)lity* shows elision of an unstressed vowel before an adjacent stressed vowel, as with *p(oé)tic*, cited as an example in KIPARSKY (1977: 239). Such elision is possible when simplex words from the same root have a stressed vowel followed by an unstressed vowel, as with *póet* and *réal*, the latter elided by Pessoa in 15.12.

¹⁷ This subtype of elision also occurs in the first foot of 6.12, 23.1 and 23.9; the second foot of 3.8 and 29.12; the third foot of 11.8; and the fourth foot of 18.6 and 29.2. In 29.2, the corresponding sound change in *ever* is marked by the spelling *e'er*.

- (27) *The púshling próm/-ise of / nèar fár / blùe skies* (11.12)
 (28) *Like a / fierce béast / sèlf-pénned / in a / bàit-láir* (9.5)
 (29) *Hòw but / by hópe / do I / the_unknówn / trùth gét?* (31.14)
 (30) *And with / òld wóes / nèw wáil / my déar / tìme's wáste* (S30.4)

Item (27) ends with two consecutive heavy iambs. Item (28) has three heavy iambs. The neologistic compound *bait-lair* rhymes with *despair* and must have the same stress pattern as *sèlf-pénned*, a compound of the less usual kind in which the second stress is stronger (compare *sèlf-táught* and *Thànksgíving*, the latter contrasting with a southern American variant *Thánksgìvin'*). The phrase *unknown truth* would ordinarily have the most prominent phrasal stress on *truth*. In item (29), however, *truth* is subordinated by the Rhythm Rule (KIPARSKY, 1977: 218-223). This rule of ordinary language creates alternating rhythm within a series of adjacent stresses, as for example in *góod òld mán*.¹⁸ As item (30) shows, Shakespeare employs the same closing rhythm.¹⁹

Some of the most complex rhythms in Pessoa's sonnets are attested in Shakespeare's plays.

- (31) *And's ón/ly v(isi)/ble when / invís/ible* (12.8)
 (32) *That sáw / the P(óssi)/ble like / a dáwn / grow pále* (24.7)
 (33) *And spénd/s / his pr(ódi)/gal wíts / in bóot/less rhýme* (L. L. L. 5.2.64)
 (34) *For the / r(àrer) p(ó)tion mine / own dréams / I'll táke* (28.11)
 (35) *And if / 'tis p(óssi)/ble (to) Thóught / to béar / this frúit* (17.13)
 (36) *A sám/ple to / the yóung(est); / (to) the móre / matúre* (Cym 1.1.48)
 (37) *So the / sèn cóup/le's (to)gél/thernèss / shall béar* (19.7)

By resolution, an optional rule largely confined to early English poetry, a short stressed vowel can share a strong metrical position with an unstressed vowel if the two vowels are separated by any single consonant (KIPARSKY, 1977: 236). Pessoa resolves *visible* in item (31) and *Possible* in item (32). Resolved sequences are parenthesized and the stressed vowels in all these sequences are short. Shakespeare's item (33) resolves *prodigal*. In item (34), resolution of *rarer* may look at first glance like elision across a resonant. When an unstressed vowel is elided after a stressed vowel, however, the two vowels are not normally separated by a

¹⁸ If *truth* were not subordinated to *get*, the Rhythm Rule would have created alternating rhythm by a shift of stress to the prefix *un-* in the phrase *úknòwn trùth*. This kind of stress shift occurs in items (42) and (43), discussed below.

¹⁹ Pessoa uses similar rhythms in the second foot of 26.8; the third foot of 7.8, 7.11, 8.4, 12.3, and 14.13; and the fifth foot of 3.8, 5.11, 12.11, and 23.4. These rhythms show no influence from the principle of closure and Pessoa seems not to apprehend them as especially complex.

consonant.²⁰ A quite different option “permits the vowel of a monosyllabic clitic (i.e. an unstressed word not belonging to a lexical category) to be disregarded” (KIPARSKY, 1977: 237). In the third foot of Pessoa’s item (35), the clitic function word *to* is disregarded.²¹ In addition, *possible* is resolved, as in item (32). Clitic *to* is similarly disregarded in Shakespeare’s item (36), where the suffix *-est* is an optional unstressed syllable at the end of a line-internal phrase (compare items (19) and (20)). In Pessoa’s item (37), the clitic prefix *to-* is disregarded.

Shakespeare will place a trochaic word in the first iambic foot of a line, as in item (12), or in the first foot of a line-internal phrase, as with *ever* in item (18). In item (38), Pessoa places trochaic *motion* in the second foot of a phrase.²²

(38) *In the / mótion / of móv/ing póis/ëd áye* (29.6)

(39) *But to / vánquish / by wís/dom héll/ish wíles* (Milton, PR 1.175)

Non-initial inversion within a phrase is common in Milton, but Shakespeare generally avoids it, and it is not used at all by Alexander Pope (KIPARSKY, 1977: 212-214). Although Miltonic lines like (39) invert the expected pattern of a foot, Milton always aligns the boundaries of the inverted foot with word boundaries. This reduces the overall complexity of the line, compensating for the mismatch between stresses and metrical positions. Lines like (38) and (39) also occur in Wyatt’s sonnets (KIPARSKY, 1977: 202).

Shakespeare uses heavy iambic feet in lines like item (6), but this only occurs when the boundaries of the heavy foot are aligned with word boundaries (KIPARSKY, 1977: 201-203). In Pessoa’s item (40), *sug/gèsts* is misaligned with a foot boundary. Its unstressed syllable occupies a strong position in the first foot and its stressed syllable occupies a weak position in the second foot. Three consecutive mismatches to the basic pattern within a single word (two stress mismatches and a boundary mismatch) make this line particularly complex. The same kind of triple

²⁰ Resolution across a resonant can also be assumed for *common* in 32.6. Linguistic double consonants were reduced to single consonants at word level in Middle English. In Shakespeare’s time, the double consonants of *possible* and *common* had become artificial spelling conventions used to indicate that the preceding stressed vowel was short. A resolved sequence also occurs in (*óra*)*tor* (6.1) and once again in *P(óssi)ble* (24.7). In a copy of the printed book, Pessoa marked *common* for deletion and substituted *day*, simplifying the metrical pattern (PESSOA, 1993: 82).

²¹ Other monosyllabic clitics to be disregarded in scansion include *the* in 23.14; *of* in 21.11, 21.12, and 24.12; *a* in 22.12; *for* in 30.12; *I* in 32.4; *when* in 35.13; and *to* again in 28.9 and 35.8. Line 24.12 also requires archaic pronunciation of *ignorëd* and elision in *éch(oi)ng*. An apostrophe indicates that a clitic function word should be disregarded in *is’t* (35.7), *that’t* (24.13, 24.14), and *i’t’h’* (5.10, 15.13). In *do’t* (35.12), *it* might be elided within a phonological word rather than simply disregarded.

²² Similar trochaic inversions occur with *nearer* (10.7), *country* (17.5), *endless* (29.9), *active* (29.12), *older* (31.1), and *duty’s* (34.3). The principle of closure restricts these complex inversions to the first three feet.

mismatch is allowed by John Donne, as item (41) shows, but not by Milton, Shakespeare, or Pope.²³

(40) *Stíll sug/gèsts fórm / as áught / whose pró/per bé(ing)* (21.3)

(41) *Shall be/hòld Gód, / and né/ver tást / dèaths wóe* (Holy Sonnets, 7)

The examples in (40) and (41) differ from those in (42) and (43), which involve reversal of stress in ordinary speech by the Rhythm Rule.²⁴

(42) *An ún/knòwn lán/guage spéaks / in ús, / which wè* (25.13)

(43) *Thy ád/vèrse párlty is /thy ád/vocàte* (S33.7)

(44) *That én/tire déath / shall núll / my én/tire thóught* (7.2)

Words undergoing this kind of reversal often have subordinate stress on the first syllable, as with *fiftéen*. Reversal occurs when the most prominent stress is perceptibly close to the stressed syllable of a following word, as within the phrase *fiftèen mén*. Shakespeare employed the Rhythm Rule in some words to which the rule no longer generally applies. Pessoa employs such words with trochaic value in several lines like item (44).²⁵

Item (45) is like item (40) except that the stressed syllable on the weak position of the second foot is followed by an unstressed syllable on the strong position (which is elided with the following unstressed syllable in this particular case). Lines like (45) are even more complex than those like (40), since they involve four consecutive mismatches (a boundary mismatch and three stress mismatches).

²³ Iambic words split by the foot boundary include *contained* (7.6), *recalled* (16.8), *compel* (25.3), and *perplexed* (26.11). Pessoa might have scanned some such prefixed words as trochaic, assuming that the Rhythm Rule would have applied in Shakespeare's English.

²⁴ Similarly with *úknòwn* (31.13) and *únsèn* (20.11, 23.6). Reversal can also result from contrastive stress, as probably with *ínside* (8.5) and *únmask* (8.13). In 28.4, the proper scansion is probably *sòmewhère*, with contrastive stress on *where*; and similarly with *sòmething* in 28.7. Note the striking resemblances between these two instances, which involve very similar words with identical stress patterns and occur just a few lines apart in the same poem.

²⁵ Shakespearean pronunciations required by the meter include *dírect* (3.4), *éntire* once again (7.2), *óbscure* (14.4), *cómplete* (14.7), *éxact* (9.2), and *cómmuned* (24.4). These Rhythm-Rule pronunciations are discussed in SHMIDT (1971: 1413–15), and in Schmidt's entries for the individual words. Essentially the same edition of Schmidt's lexicon was published in 1902. Such information was available when Pessoa was working on *35 Sonnets*. Due to lack of evidence in Shakespeare's works, trochaic Shakespearean value is uncertain for *forgot* in 8.12, *forecome* in 10.11, *withdrawn* in 23.13, and *compel* in 25.3, though these prefixed words resemble others to which the Rhythm Rule applies. With regard to *forecome*, compare *fóregòne conclúsiòn*. Other early English pronunciations required by rhyme or meter include *grímáces* (8.11), *hórízòn* (23.2), *absólute* (24.4), *tówards* (4.14, 30.14), *inactiòn* (29.12), *explanatiòn* (32.12), *ignorèd* (24.12), and *enjoyèd* (16.6, with elision of the preceding syllable). Pessoa may have intended monosyllabic *bring'th* for *bringeth* in 35.10. Scansion of 35.10 with elision in *mat(eri)ng* yields an acceptable but more complex rhythm.

(45) *In ir/rép(ara)/ble sáme/ness fár / awáy* (27.4)

(46) *In váine / this séa / shall en/lárgé or / enróugh* (Donne, *Progress of the Soul*, 52)

(47) *And he / that súffferth offfénce with/òut bláme* (Wyatt, *CV*, 1.70)

The rhythmical variation in (45) is not allowed by Shakespeare, but Donne employs it in lines like (46), where *en/lárgé* creates a two stress mismatches in addition to the word boundary mismatch and unstressed *or* mismatches a strong position.²⁶ The same four mismatches occur in Wyatt's item (47), where *offfénce* is followed by unstressed *with-* (KIPARSKY, 1977: 202-203).²⁷

We have now considered all the rhythmical variations in *35 Sonnets*. As we have seen, Shakespeare uses most of them, in dramatic verse if not in his own sonnets. The remaining variations are used by Milton, Donne, or Wyatt. Pessoa differs from these English sonneteers in employing complex rhythms more often. His sonnets are certainly more difficult than Shakespeare's but should not be faulted for that reason alone. Consider Pessoa's item (38), which places a trochaic word in an iambic foot that is not the first foot of a line or phrase. This complex variation is used by Milton, as in item (39), but not by Shakespeare. Gerard Manley Hopkins, an English admirer of Milton, "cultivated the same metrical construction with characteristic extravagance" (KIPARSKY, 1977: 203). Pessoa was not the only modern poet to use a complex rhythm more frequently than Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope had done. Hopkins's poems in iambic "sprung rhythm," now widely admired, employ a basic pattern of five strong positions per line alternating with weak positions; but these sonnets depart very far indeed from Shakespeare's metrical practice (KIPARSKY, 1989: 310-312). Hopkins's metrical complexity delayed publication until after his death. The first edition of his poems (HOPKINS, 1918) happened to coincide with publication of Pessoa's *35 Sonnets*.²⁸ Pessoa also admired Milton and had difficulty publishing his own innovative work.²⁹ Hopkins was published too late to influence *35 Sonnets* directly, but he and Pessoa test the metrical limits in similar ways. Just a few years later, an eminent modernist summed up the spirit of those times: "it appears likely that poets in our

²⁶ The same kind of inversion occurs in 1.3 (third foot) and 15.6 (second foot). Pessoa restricts the frequency of these inversions and places them before the fourth foot.

²⁷ The Rhythm Rule cannot apply here because there is no relevant stressed syllable after *offence*.

²⁸ Editor's note: Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) is not mentioned in any of Pessoa's writings. He is also absent from the Pessoa's private library (See PIZARRO, FERRARI, and CARDIELLO, 2010).

²⁹ In addition to expressing admiration, Pessoa annotated Milton's verse extensively (FERRARI, 2012: 122-27). In 1917, *The Mad Fiddler* was rejected by the London publisher Constable and Company (FERRARI and PITTELLA, 2014: 228). This rejection may have led Pessoa to self-publish his English chapbooks in Portugal.

civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult" (ELIOT, 1921). To me at least, Pessoa seems timely rather than erratic.³⁰

Pessoa provides hints that he knows exactly what he is doing. His most complex effects are disciplined by the principle of closure, appearing most often in the earlier part of the line. Pessoa highlights metrical options by using the same word to illustrate both options, sometimes within a single line. In item (22), one instance of *the* elides but the other counts as a metrical syllable. In item (31), resolution occurs in *visible* but not in *invisible*. In 17.13, and again in 28.9, *to* is disregarded when it first appears but counts as a metrical syllable when it appears again toward the end of the line. Besides displaying awareness of metrical options, these lines provide a useful introduction to Pessoa's metrical style. They guided me as I scanned *35 Sonnets*.

Repetition highlights a complex option in other cases. In item (44), *entire* appears twice with early English stress on the first syllable. In 33.14, *being* elides twice. The elided value of *mystery* is displayed in 12.13 and repeated in 12.14, where *mystery* occurs twice, the second time without elision. The simplex adjective *real* first appears in 15.12 with its monosyllabic value (a value transferrable to the derived form *réality* in 25.14). The disyllabic value of *real* is introduced in 17.6 and underscored by a second appearance in 17.12. In sonnet 29, the monosyllabic value of *ever* is specified by the spelling *e'er* (29.2), which primes us for elision across *v* in *(eve)n* (29.12). Unusual stress patterns can also be highlighted by repetition. In item (28), the unexpected pattern of *bàit-láir* is introduced by a more idiomatic example of the pattern, *sèlf-pénned*. Approximate repetition in nearby lines highlights contrastive stress on the second syllable of *sòmewhére* (28.4) and *sòmething* (28.7).

If the metrical line is based on the sentence, as I assume in my research, a sentence that overflows the line should add to metrical complexity. This effect is widely acknowledged, as the traditional term *enjambment* shows. The complexity is moderate when the line boundary falls between large sub-constituents of a sentence, as for example in Shakespeare's item (48), where an elaborate subject fills out the first line and the predicate fills the next.

³⁰ Since I am focusing on critical reaction to *35 Sonnets* as originally published, I have not considered changes Pessoa wrote into his copies of the printed work, some of which appear in the critical edition (PESSOA, 1993: 67-84). More than half of the changed lines substitute new words for others with the same metrical value (1.1, 1.10, 3.10, 7.11, 8.8, 11.2, 14.1, 14.5, 14.9, 28.6, 28.8, and 30.1). These changed lines are identical to the original lines in stress patterning and placement of word boundaries. For the example in 3.10 see Fig. 2, where *possible* is substituted for *thinkable*. Some of the remaining changed lines are metrically more complex than the originals and a few others are less complex, with no clear pattern. Pessoa had no second thoughts worth mentioning about the metrical complexity of his sonnets. His changes have more to do with meaning than with form. For clarity, I have excluded from consideration a version of sonnet 34 so thoroughly reworked that the metrical significance of an individual change can be difficult to assess.

- (48) *And so the general of hot desire*
Was sleeping by a virgin hand disarmed (S154.7–8)
- (49) *Alas! All this is useless, for joy's in*
Enjoying, not in thinking of enjoying (16.9–10)
- (50) *In the country of bridges the bridge is*
More real than the shores it doth unsever;
So in our world, all of Relation, this
Is true — that truer is Love than either lover (17.5–8)

Complexity is extreme when the line boundary falls inside a phrase much smaller than the lines that contain it, as in Pessoa's item (49), where the line boundary splits the prepositional phrase *in enjoying*. In the fifth foot of 16.9, *joy's in* represents a kind of trochaic inversion usually encountered toward the beginning of the line, as in Shakespeare's item (8). Since it is the tenth syllable of 16.9, *in* must occupy the fifth strong position. This is confirmed by rhyme between *in* and *sin* in line 11.³¹ The rhyme gives artificial prominence to *in* and renders it more appropriate to a strong position. Pessoa's inversion with enjambment is clearly a deliberate experiment, since the experiment is repeated in item (50), which comes from the following sonnet. Inversion occurs with *bridge is* in the fifth foot of 17.5, where the line boundary splits the small phrase *is more real*. A similar experiment follows at once in 17.7–8, where the line boundary splits the small phrase *this is true* and the function word *this* occupies the fifth strong position. In 17.7, *this* is preceded by an unstressed syllable and there is no trochaic inversion. The most prominent syllable in the fifth foot is *this* and its light stress makes for a somewhat less unusual rhyme. Since both *is* and *this* are function words, Pessoa's function-word rhymes can hardly be regarded as careless oversights. Enjambment is a signature characteristic of modernist poetry. Pessoa signals his modernist orientation with enjambments more complex than those employed by Shakespeare and Milton.³² Pessoa's decision to go beyond the metrical practice of these poets should come as no surprise, given Pessoa's own self-assessment, as witnessed in a bold declaration datable to around 1915: "I am now in full possession of the fundamental laws of literary art. Shakespeare can no longer teach me to be subtle, nor Milton to be complete" (PESSOA, 1966: 20).³³

³¹ Rhyming of stressed syllables with unstressed syllables is clearly detectable by the human ear, since it is used systematically in Irish *deibide* meter (MURPHY, 1961: 31). Pessoa uses similar rhymes in less complex lines, for example items (28) and (33). The function-word rhyme in 16.9 differs from the rhyme in Shakespeare's item (8), where *love* occupies the fifth strong position and *love her* rhymes with *approve her* two lines below. In this line, the function word *her* is the optional eleventh syllable and participates in a polysyllabic rhyme.

³² Other complex enjambments occur in 7.13–14, 11.9–10, 12.13–14, 13.7–8, and 17.10–11 — two lines after item (52) in a poem of very systematic experimentation.

³³ Editor's note: for a full transcription see Annex.

Reviews of *35 Sonnets* in 1918 were quite positive in some respects but were critical of Pessoa's English usage. The *Glasgow Herald* objected to "crabbedness" in some Renaissance locutions and *The Scotsman* declared that Pessoa's English was "always a foreigner's English." No argument or evidence was provided for these criticisms (FERRARI, 2012: 201 and 214-215). I do not know quite what to make of them. Someone who disapproved of Renaissance English in modern poetry would also be obliged to disapprove of Hopkins's brilliant "Angelus ad Virginem," written throughout in unabashedly archaic English (HOPKINS, 1990: 168-169). Archaic English is appropriated by other modernist poets, American as well as English. Ezra Pound's translation of the Old English *Seafarer* provides an extreme example. If there is something odd about phrases like *near far blue skies* (item 29), that must be equally true of *fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls* in "Pied Beauty" (HOPKINS, 1990: 144).

After devoting more than forty years to the study of English linguistics, I could not find one instance of second-language confusion in *35 Sonnets*. Such confusion would not be expected in Pessoa's writing. His childhood education took place in a South African English-language school and until he was twenty-one he wrote the greater part of his poetry exclusively in English (FERRARI and PITTELLA, 2014: 227). A section of Pessoa's large private library was devoted to linguistics and philology as well as to literature (FERRARI, 2012: 166, note 4).³⁴ Pessoa must have had native-speaker competence or something close to it. The reviewers do not provide examples of un-English language in the *35 Sonnets*. Given nothing to work with, I can only speculate that item (51) might have seemed flagrantly unidiomatic.

(51) *That doth not even my with gone true soul rime* (3.8)

(52) *That dòth / not (éve)n / with my / gòne trúe / sòul ríme*

Certainly *gone true soul* is not ordinary English and the last two feet of (51) are unusually heavy, as with *near far blue skies*; but such language is no more un-English than modernist constructions used by Hopkins. If the reviewers were reacting to (51), attribution to foreign-language influence seems quite wrong-headed. The really awkward feature of (51) is placement of *with* after *my* inside the noun phrase *my gone true soul*. To my knowledge, there are no constructions in Romance languages that place a preposition inside the noun phrase governed by that preposition. This word salad could hardly be due to language interference and turns out to be a misprint. Item (52) provides a scansion for the line as it stands in the author's handwritten version.

³⁴ MacKenzie (HOPKINS, 1990: VII) refers to "piquant Victorian speculations in philology" as representative of the books Hopkins knew.

p. 589-590 [842]

16A-27

When I do think my ~~dearest~~^{best} line shall be
 Man in Time's ~~hand~~^{we} that my creating whole,
 That future eye, more ~~clearly~~^{clearly} shall feel me
 In this wiled page than in my direct soul;
 When I conjecture just to make me seeing
 Good readers of me in some after-time
 Thankful to some idea of my being
 Which doth not even with my gone time soul ~~stay~~^{live};
 An anger at the essence of the world
 That makes this thus, or thinkable this-wise,
 Takes my soul by the throat and makes it hurled
 In mighty honors of departed surmise,
 And I become the mere seam of a rag
 That lacks the very words whom warts might ^{stay}.

25-V-1912

Fernando Pessoa



Fig. 1. Manuscript of Pessoa's "Sonnet III." BNP/E3, 16A-27.

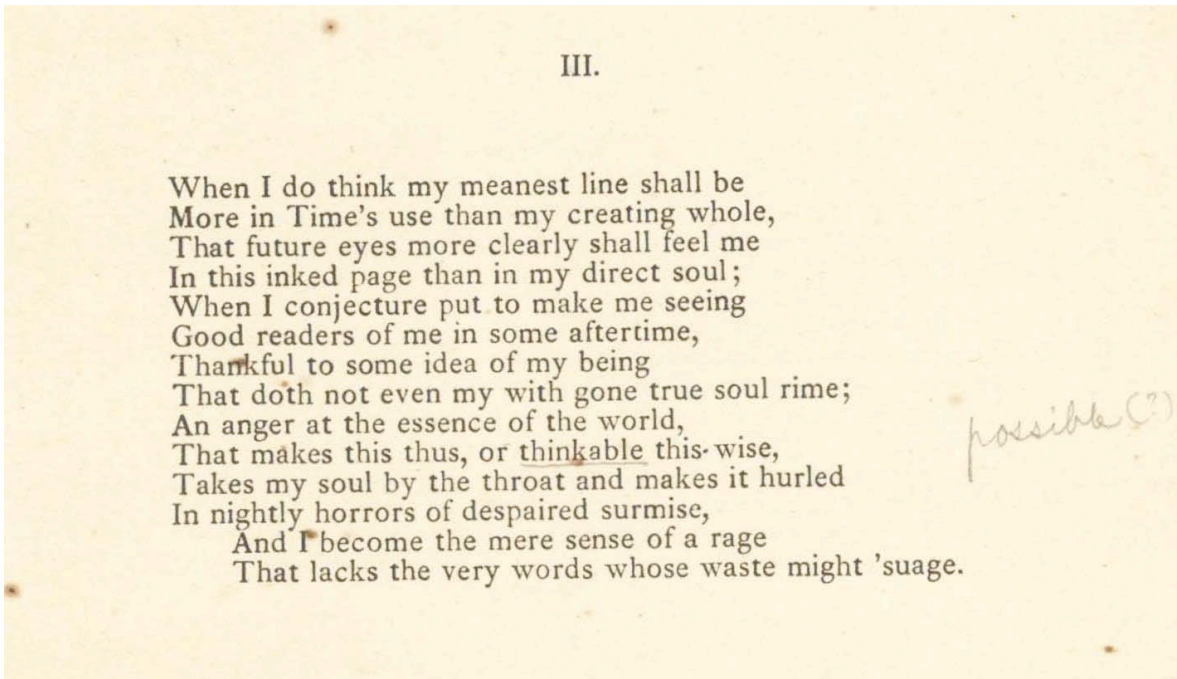


Fig. 2. "Sonnet III" as printed in the *35 Sonnets*. One of Pessoa's personal copies with marginal emendations datable to 1918. BNP/E3, 98¹-1^v. Detail.

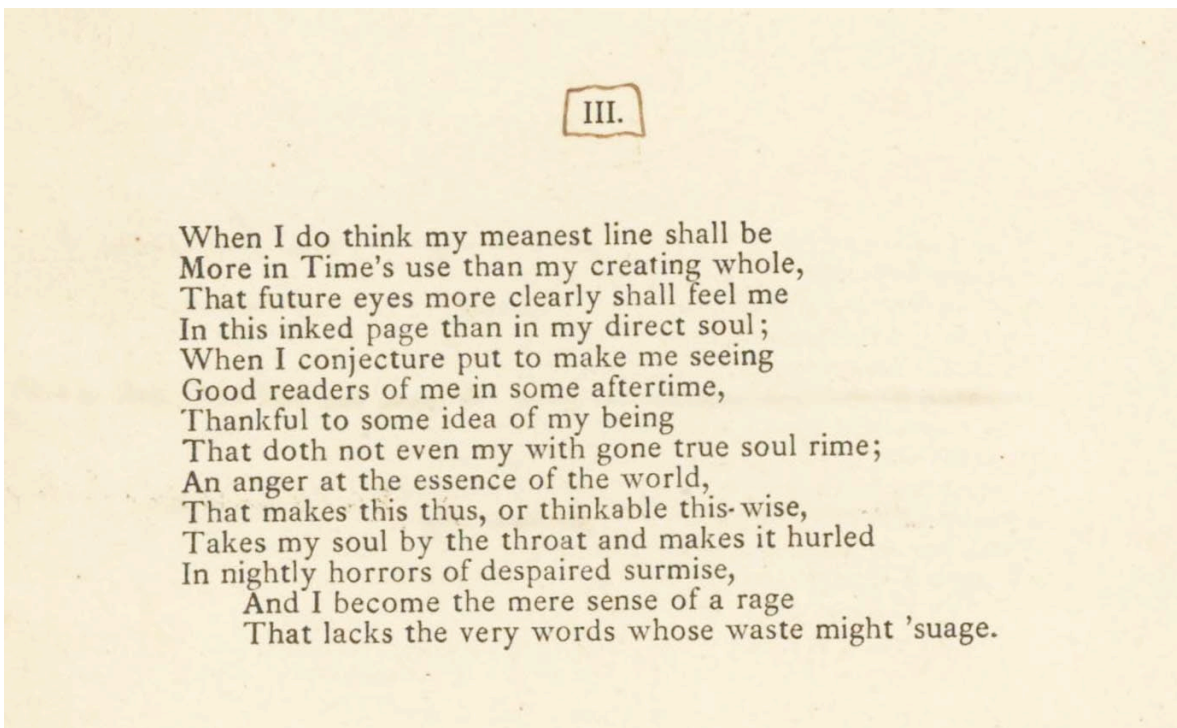
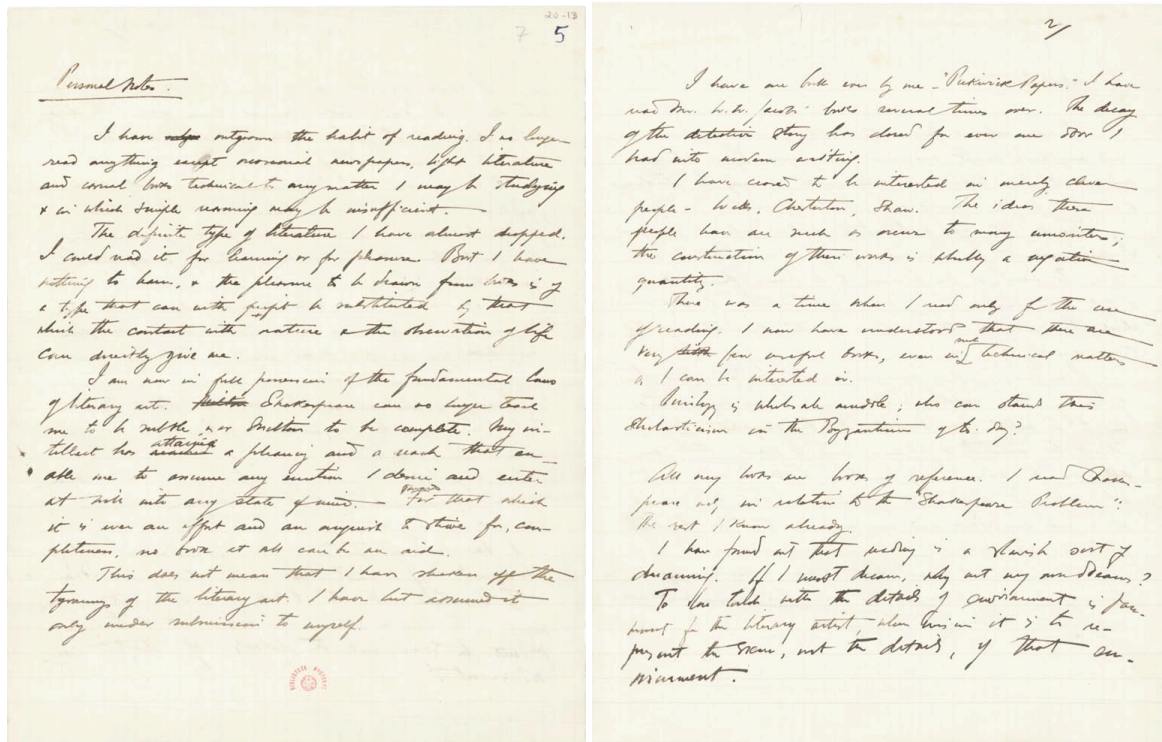


Fig. 3. "Sonnet III" as printed in the *35 Sonnets*. Pessoa's other personal copy with emendations datable to 1918. BNP/E3, 98²-1^v. Detail.

As we have seen, Wyatt, Donne, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope have different metrical dialects. Rhythmical variation becomes progressively more restricted from Wyatt to Pope: "any alignment of stresses with the basic metrical pattern that is found in Milton or Shakespeare is also metrical for Wyatt, and any

that is found in Pope is metrical for all the others, but Milton and Shakespeare each have lines that would not be allowed by the other" (KIPARSKY, 1977: 215). Milton and Shakespeare also differ with regard to enjambment (KIPARSKY, 1977: 216). Pope avoids a subtype of elision used by the other poets (KIPARSKY, 1977: 240). For fine-grained metrical analysis, the sort of analysis useful to editors, the concept of "unmetrical" must be relativized to the poet under inspection. What is "unmetrical" for Pope can be "metrical" for the other three poets, and what is "metrical" for Wyatt can be "unmetrical" for the others. Each poet has explored the possibilities of rhythmical variation, especially no doubt those used by illustrious predecessors, adopting some variations while avoiding others. A modernist is unlikely, of course, to accept Pope's as the best of all possible dialects of iambic pentameter. In an era when poems are typically encountered as printed or electronic texts, a poem can be studied at leisure and poets can present their readers with stiffer challenges, especially in a short form like the sonnet. Careful preparation may be required for effective oral performance of a modernist poem; but the performance can then circulate in recorded form, making the effort especially worthwhile. In my opinion, Pessoa's English sonnets are artful appropriations of the literary past. They deserve wider circulation and closer attention from literary scholars.

Annex. [BNP/E3, 20-13]. Lined-paper handwritten in black ink. Datable to around 1915. Published in *Páginas Íntimas e de Auto-Interpretação* (PESSOA, 1966: 20-21), without the last paragraph. Pessoa left several passages praising Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (see PESSOA, 2013: 105-109). Seven books by W.W. Jacobs' books are extant in Pessoa's Private Library (see PIZARRO, FERRARI and CARDIELLO, 2010: 263-264 and 367). Numerous critics have argued that Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a writer of great erudition, had penned some of Shakespeare's plays. Fascinated by this hypothesis, Pessoa elaborated a bibliography with more than thirty titles regarding the "Questão Shakespeare-Bacon" (see 144D²-16 and 17) (fac-similed in PESSOA, 2006: I, 355) and wrote extensively on the matter. One article in Portuguese and several books in French and English on this controversy may be found in the Private Library (PIZARRO, FERRARI, and CARDIELLO, 2010: 50, 97, 190, 196, 239, 251, 263, 269, 275, 307, 320, 325, and 387). Pessoa left numerous unpublished fragments on the "Question" dating from 1912/1913.



Figs. 4 & 5. Manuscript of Pessoa's "Personal Notes." BNP/E3, 20-13^r & 13^v.

Personal Notes.

I have outgrown¹ the habit of reading. I no longer read anything except occasional newspapers, light literature and casual books technical to any matter I may be studying and² in which simple reasoning may be insufficient.

The definite type of literature I have almost dropped. I could read it for learning or for pleasure. But I have nothing to learn, and³ the pleasure to be drawn

from books is of a type that can with profit⁴ be substituted by that which the contact with nature and⁵ the observation of life can directly give me.

I am now in full possession of the fundamental laws of literary art. Shakespeare⁶ can no longer teach me to be subtle, nor Milton to be complete. My intellect has attained⁷ a pliancy and a reach that enable me to assume any emotion I desire and enter at will into any state of mind. Towards⁸ that which it is ever an effort and an anguish to strive for, completeness, no book at all can be an aid.

This does not mean that I have shaken off the tyranny of the literary art. I have but assumed it only under submission to myself.

I have one book ever by me – “Pickwick Papers.” I have read Mr. W. W. Jacobs’ books several times over. The decay of the detective story has closed for ever one door I had into modern writing.

I have ceased to be interested in merely clever people – Wells, Chesterton, Shaw. The ideas these people have are such as occur to many non-writers⁹; the construction of their works is wholly a negative quantity.

There was a time when I read only for the use of reading. I now have understood that there are very few¹⁰ useful books, even in such¹¹ technical matters as I can be interested in.

Sociology is wholesale muddle; who can stand this Scholasticism in the Byzantium of to-day?

All my books are books of reference. I read Shakespeare only in relation to the “Shakespeare Problem.” The rest I know already.

I have found out that reading is a slavish sort of dreaming. If I must dream, why not my own dreams?

To lose touch with the details of environment is paramount for the literary artist, whose mission it is to represent the scene, not the details, of that environment.

NOTES

- 1 <outg> outgrown
- 2 &] *in the original.*
- 3 *see note 2.*
- 4 *a cross under this word indicates hesitation and possible variant.*
- 5 *see note 2.*
- 6 <Milton> Shakespeare
- 7 <reached> [↑ attained]
- 8 For [↑ Towards]
- 9 nonwriters] *in the original.*
- 10 very <book> few
- 11 in [↑ such] technical

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