

Ophelia's lovers

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Edgar Allan Poe, Álvaro de Campos, Ophelia Queiroz, Carlos Queiroz, *Cartas de Amor*.

Abstract

Pessoa's interest in the life and works of Edgar Allan Poe, evidenced early, influenced not only his own writings. Besides translating the American poet's poems (notably "The Raven," "Annabel Lee," and "Ulalume"), he edited collections of Poe's tales. He also tried his hand at writing original ratiocinative tales in the Poe vein. Unstressed, however, has been the effect that the details of Poe's life, as related by Charles Baudelaire in the English-language translation of the French poet's essay printed as the introduction to *The Choice Works of Edgar Allan Poe* published in London in 1902 (a copy of which Pessoa owned), had on Pessoa's love affair with Ophelia Queiroz in 1920 and, after a hiatus of 10 years, in 1930. In both instances Pessoa managed to escape this pre-marital situation by invoking his heteronym Álvaro de Campos, categorized by Ophelia as the "mau" one. Parallels to Poe's behavior towards women, both the sometimes very young ones he favored and often featured in his work but especially, calculatingly, toward Sarah Helen Whitman (showing up drunk at her door), is echoed in his continual drinking (even though she would tolerate the drinking, but not the smoking), emblematically established in the famous photograph of himself at Abel's that he autographed for Ophelia with the portentous words "em flagrante delitro."

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Edgar Allan Poe, Álvaro de Campos, Ophelia Queiroz, Carlos Queiroz, *Cartas de Amor*.

Resumo

O interesse de Pessoa pela vida e obra de Edgar Allan Poe, mostrado desde cedo, influenciou mais do que a sua própria escrita. Além de traduzir poemas do poeta Americano (com destaque para "The Raven", "Annabel Lee", e "Ulalume"), Pessoa organizou coletâneas dos contos de Poe e tentou escrever contos de raciocínio à moda de Poe. O efeito de pormenores da vida de Poe – relatados por Charles Baudelaire na tradução inglesa do seu ensaio introdutório a *The Choice Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, publicado em Londres em 1902, de que Pessoa possuía um exemplar – na relação amorosa com Ophelia Queiroz em 1920, e decorrido um hiato de dez anos, novamente em 1930, tem sido pouco assinalado. Nas duas ocasiões Pessoa esquivou-se do compromisso pré-nupcial invocando Álvaro de Campos, designado por Ophelia como sendo o "mau". Paralelos com o

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comportamento de Poe para com as mulheres, tanto as muito jovens que ele elegia e frequentemente representava na sua obra, como, e calculadamente, para com Sarah Helen Whitman (tendo aparecido embriagado à sua porta), tem eco no consumo contínuo de bebidas alcoólicas por Pessoa (que Ophelia tolerava embora não suportasse que ele fumasse), tornado emblemático na famosa fotografia de Pessoa no Abel, que ele próprio assinou para Ophelia com a notável designação, “em flagrante delitro”.

Fernando Pessoa insisted that Poe was not a great poet. "There are not many poems by Edgar Poe," he wrote, "and among those few there are not many good ones" (BNP/E3, 14D-16^r)¹. Even Poe's masterpiece, "The Raven," Pessoa found to be "no very remarkable poem" (Pessoa, 1967: 194 [in "Erostratus"]). Yet Pessoa chose to include "The Raven" in the first issue of *Athena: Revista de Arte*, published under the co-editorship of Ruy Vaz and himself. In the October 1924 issue appeared Poe's poem – translation by Fernando Pessoa, "in rhythmic conformance to the original," as he himself boasted; and three months later, in the January 1925 issue (which turned out to be the journal's penultimate number) Pessoa once again included Poe. Under the rubric "Edgar Poe's Last Poems," he published his versions – once again calling attention to the fact that his translations were "in rhythmic conformance to the original" – of "Annabel Lee" and "Ulalume." These translations of three poems dealing in some way or another with the death of a beautiful young woman were to be the only translations of Poe's poetry that Pessoa would publish.

It was not only Poe as poet, however, that Pessoa attended to. He knew him as a critic (he thought "The Philosophy of Composition," particularly his account of how he wrote "The Raven," to be a self-delusion) and he knew him even better as a writer of fiction, both the ratiocinative and puzzle tales (which resulted in experiments of his own along similar lines) and his stories of love and horror. In 1924, for instance, he brought out an edition of "The Masque of the Red Death," and a year later a volume containing "The Gold Bug," "William Wilson" and "Ligeia."

The last named story had been on his mind for some time. As early as 1916 the legend *Ligeia* had appeared on a list of Pessoa's projects, including works of theory, poetry and original prose. And it had emerged in still another way a year earlier: as a short poem that would not achieve publication until 1956 when it was included in *Poesias Inéditas (1919-1930)*. Unrhymed and composed as a single stanza of eight lines, Pessoa's "Ligeia" reads:

¹ BNP – Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal; E3 – Espólio n.º 3 (Fernando Pessoa Papers). [Library number given by Margarida Vale de Gato (ed. / trad.), in *Principais Poemas de Edgar Allan Poe*. Lisboa: Babel, 2011, p. 13. – Editor's note.]

Não quero ir onde não há a luz,
 De sob a inútil gleba não ver nunca
 As flores, nem o curso ao sol dos rios
 Nem como as estações que se renovam
 Reiteram a terra. Já me pesa
 Nas pálpebras que tremem o oco medo
 De nada ser, e nem ter vista ou gosto,
 Calor, amor, o bem e o mal da vida.

(Pessoa, 1969: 505)²

I do not want to go where there is no light,
 Beneath the useless earth, never to see
 Flowers and flowing rivers in the sun,
 Or the seasons renewing themselves
 As they reiterate the land. Already
 The hollow fear of being nothing weighs
 On my trembling eyelids, of no longer
 Having the ability to see and taste,
 Feel warmth and love, life's good and life's bad.³

Pessoa's title instructs us to read the lines dramatically. The voice is that of Poe's dark heroine – which is not the case in the story. Poe's tale is also told in the first-person but by one who has first married Ligeia and then, after her death, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena. It is this male narrator who retells retrospectively the story of his passion for Ligeia, which, after the death of his second wife, leads to Ligeia's "hideous drama of revivification" (Poe, 1956: 93) in which she returns by usurping the body of the Lady Rowena. Never in Poe's story are we made privy to Ligeia's thoughts, her wishes, or, for that matter, her fears, as we are in Pessoa's poem. Poe's Ligeia is described as "tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated," with hair that is "blacker than the raven wings of midnight." But the narrator's obsession is with her eyes – eyes not made for the dark tomb to which she must descend even, perhaps, before her death. Pessoa's poem gives Ligeia the opportunity to speak of her fears, this side of interment, that Poe and his narrator have denied her. It permits Ligeia to define what she dreads, what it is, in Poe's story, that impels her to return from the tomb "where there is no light."

In 1919-20, just about midpoint in that stretch of eight years between his first mention of Ligeia and the writing of the poem, Pessoa went through his one documented affair of the heart. How often did the specter of Poe, his young cousin, and her early death occur to Pessoa in those months of courtship, especially when he met his Ophelia outside her place of employment, the offices of the firm Dupin?

² [There is a poem of 1932 with the same title and incipit, "Não quero ir onde não ha a luz," (BNP/E3, 32-60r), published in Fernando Pessoa's Critical Edition, volume I, tome 4, *Poemas de 1931-1933*. – Editor's note.]

³ My translation here and throughout this essay.

Or when he signed his letters "Ibis" and incestuously called his lover "Ibis" as well? And was he not condemning to the tomb, if not his corporeal lover herself, at least his image of their love when, feigning madness (or merely using his genuine madness), he wrote Ophelia that last letter bringing their affair to a close?

For a decade after their separation in 1920, Pessoa and Ophelia had no direct contact. But there would be a second phase in their relationship. It lasted only a few months, from September 1929 until January 1930. Yet it reached its own high pitch. In one letter, directed to the "Terrible Baby," he admits, in a mixture of lover's prattle and rather deadly serious self-revelation, "I feel sad, and I'm crazy, and nobody likes me [...] and I'd like to kiss you on the mouth, right on the mark, voraciously, and eat up your mouth, and eat up all those kisses you've got hidden in there..." ("eu estou triste, e sou maluco, e ninguém gosta de mim, [...] e gostava de lhe dar um beijo na bocca, com exactidão e gulodice e comer-lhe a bocca e comer os beijinhos que tivesse lá escondidos"; Pessoa, 1978: 155). Discernible here is the obsessed lover's desire for vampiric fusion with his beloved. The lover's vampirism was now closer to the surface than it had been a decade earlier when Pessoa had taunted Ophelia with the notions that she was a "small pink pillow just right for planting kisses (what foolish talk!)" and that his "Baby" was "good for biting!" ("minha almofadinha côr-de-rosa para pregar beijos (que grande disparate!)" ; "para dar dentadas!"; Pessoa, 1978: 66 e 78).

When Pessoa decided to bring his renewed courtship to its close, this time for good, he again resorted to playing on his fear of renewed (or constant) madness. "The old automobile crank I carry around in my head," he warned, "and my mind, which was no longer in existence, went r-r-r-r-r" ("Partiu-se a corda do automovel velho que trago na cabeça, e o meu juizo, que já não existia, fez tr-tr-r-r-r-..."; Pessoa, 1978: 157). This time Pessoa chose to dismiss not only their chances for marriage but even the mere continuation of some sort of relationship. He sent her a poem ("Poema Pial"), just composed, that would have the effect of certifying his mental instability.

Toda a gente que tem as mãos frias
Deve mettel-as dentro das pias.

Pia numero UM,
Para quem mexe as orelhas em jejum.

Pia numero DOIS,
Para quem bebe bifés de bois.

Pia numero TREZ,
Para quem espirra só meia vez.

Pia numero QUATRO,
Para quem manda as ventas ao theatro.

Pia numero CINCO,
Para quem come a chave do trinco.

Pia numero SEIS,
Para quem se penteia com bolos-reis.

Pia numero SETE,
Para quem canta até que o telhado se derrete.

Pia numero OITO,
Para quem parte nozes quando é afoito.

Pia numero NOVE,
Para quem se parece com uma couve.

Pia numero DEZ,
Para quem colla sellos nas unhas dos pés.

E, como as mãos já não estão frias,
Tampa nas pias!

MOITA*

* Silencio na estação
á vontade do freguez.

(Pessoa, 1978: 162-163)

Everyone with cold hands
Should put them into the troughs.

Trough number One,
For those who mess with their ears before breakfast.

Trough number Two,
For those who drink their beefsteaks.

Trough number Three,
For those who sneeze only half a time.

Trough number Four,
For those who flare their nostrils at the theatre.

Trough number Five,
For those who eat the latchkey.

Trough number Six,
For those who comb themselves with cake.

Trough number Seven,
For those who sing until the roof melts.

Trough number Eight,
For those who crack nuts when it's daring.

Trough number Nine,
For those who look like collard greens.

Trough number Ten,
For those who stick stamps to their toenails.

And, since the hands are no longer cold,
Cover the troughs!

HUSH*

* Silence in the station
at the customer's pleasure.

"Cover the troughs," indeed, for the customer, who is no longer interested in the custom. And as if the poem were not sufficient to get Pessoa's point across – that he has washed his hands of her and her threatening love – he had the temerity to instruct her: "This poem should be read at night and in an unlit room" ("Este poema deve ser lido de noite e num quarto sem luz"; Pessoa, 1978: 161). He could not have gone much deeper for evidence of his subliminal death wish for Ophelia or even for her premature burial, like Ligeia's – a wish that just a few weeks earlier had surfaced unmistakably, if in different form: "I'd like it if my Baby were a doll, and I would do with it as a child would: I'd undress it, and that part ends right here. It seems impossible that this has been written by a human being, but it written by me" ("eu gostava que a Bebê fosse uma boneca minha, e eu fazia como uma criança, despia-a, e o papel acaba aqui mesmo, e isto parece impossivel ser escripto por um ente humano, mas é escripto por mim"; Pessoa, 1978: 155-156).⁴

⁴ It is the argument of Y.K. Centeno (1985), in "Ophélia – bebézinho ou o horror do sexo," that Pessoa's "horror of sex" made it impossible for him to see Ophelia as anything more than as a child, who as such would be no threat to him sexually.

APARTADO 147
LISBOA

Bébé fera:

Pero desculpada de a avaliar,
Parti-n a corda do automovel
velho que trago na cabeça, e o meu
juízo, pe já não existe, foi t-r-r-r...

Logo a seguir a telephonia-la,
star a esquecer-la, e naturalmente
telephoner outra vez, se lhe não faz
mal os nervos, e naturalmente
será, até a qualquer hora, mas é
hora em que lhe telephoner.

Gosta de mim por mim sem
mim ou por não? Ou não gosta
mesmo sem mim sem não? Ou
então?

Todas. sta phias, e maneiras
de não dizer nada, são sinais
de que o ex-lbis, o extenito bis,
o bis sem concerto nem gostamentos
alheis, vai para o Tchêl, ou para

Fig. 1. Letter 9-10-1929 (first page).

Pessoa left us an epitaph to his love for the death of his love for the beautiful young woman – his Ophelia, his “Baby,” his Ligeia. On August 26, 1930, he set down a simple, if disingenuous, quatrain:

E ou jazigo haja
 Ou sótão com pó,
 Bebê foi-se embora.
 Minha alma está só.

(Pessoa, 1969: 534)

Let there be a tomb
 Or dusty attic.
 Baby has gone away.
 My soul is all alone.

This quatrain is disingenuous, I would argue, because Fernando Pessoa’s hunger for love, like Poe’s, as both of them knew, had been unrealizable; and that was the way, down deep, Pessoa had always wanted it to be.

The fact, moreover, is that “Baby” had not gone away. Even after their first break in 1920, and a hiatus of nearly ten years, Ophelia was apparently still willing to resume their courtship. In both instances it was Fernando Pessoa who orchestrated the courtship but it was Álvaro de Campos who engineered the rupture. Beginning with a mere mention and waxing to the point that Campos would actually write to Ophelia, Pessoa’s most faithful heteronym served him as the agent for getting out of his relationship with Ophelia both in 1920 and in 1930. Ophelia feared the “bad” Álvaro de Campos and Fernando Pessoa played on that fear to extricate himself from the love affair that he no longer wished to continue. In his letters to Ophelia he quoted Campos and he deferred to him, sometimes announcing that what he was doing at the time he did with Campos’ permission. Indeed, there is a direct ratio between the decline of Pessoa’s interest in continuing his relationship with Ophelia and the growing presence of Campos in the correspondence, beginning as early as April 5, 1920, less than three weeks after Pessoa’s first letter to Ophelia, with a parenthetical mention of “Álvaro de Campos.” His heteronym authorizes his not having a third reason for the fact that his handwriting in this particular letter is somewhat strange.

Não te admires de a minha letra ser um pouco esquisita. Ha para isso duas razões. A primeira é a de este papel (o unico acessivel agora) ser muito corredio, e a penna passar por elle muito depressa; a segunda é a de eu ter descoberto aqui em casa um vinho do Porto esplendido, de que abri uma garrafa, de que já bebi metade. A terceira razão é haver só duas razões, e portanto não haver terceira razão nenhuma. (Alvaro de Campos, engenheiro).

(Pessoa, 1978: 77-78)

Don't be surprised that my handwriting is a bit funny. There are two reasons for it. The first one is that the paper (the only one available at this time) is very slick and my pen passes over it very quickly; the second is that I have discovered here in the house a splendid port wine, a bottle of which I have opened and of which I have already drunk half. The third reason is that there are only two reasons, and therefore is no third reason. (Álvaro de Campos, engineer).

It is interesting that Álvaro de Campos should make his first appearance in these love letters just at the time that Pessoa has confessed to having drunk half a bottle of port. Would Pessoa have surmised in some oblique way that intoxication and Campos went well together, especially in those times when he would not pursue his courtship of Ophelia with the innocence (feigned or not) of his first letter?⁵ Was there operative somewhere in his subconscious the example of Edgar Allan Poe, who also had employed his drunkenness to break off an amorous alliance? Baudelaire told the story that Poe “went hopelessly drunk to scandalize the neighbourhood of her who should have been his wife, having this recourse to his vice to disembarass himself of a perjury towards that poor dead spouse whose images always haunted his mind...” (Baudelaire, 1902: 18) Pessoa knew the story.

But it is not just that Campos' presence makes itself felt increasingly, but that Fernando Pessoa fades away as Álvaro de Campos takes over his thoughts, his feelings, his very body. It is as if Pessoa dies as Campos comes to life. This uncanny usurpation is revealed in the letter of October 15, 1920, the penultimate letter in the first phase of the Fernando/Ophelia courtship:

Bebezinho:

Tens mais que milhares — tens milhões — de razões para estares zangada, irritada, offendida commigo. Mas a culpa mal tem sido minha; tem sido d'aquelle Destino que acaba de me condemnar o cerebro, não direi definitivamente, mas, pelo menos, a um estado que exige um tratamento cuidado, como não sei se poderei ter.

Tenciono (sem applicar agora o celebre decreto de 11 de Maio) ir para uma casa de saude para o mez que vem, para ver se encontro alli um certo tratamento que me permita resistir á onda negra que me está cahindo sobre o espírito. Não sei o resultado do tratamento — isto é, não antevejo bem qual possa ser.

Nunca esperes por mim; se te apparecer será de manhã, quando vaes para o escriptorio, no Poço Novo.

Não te preocupes.

Afinal o que foi? Trocaram-me pelo Alvaro de Campos!

Sempre muito teu

Fernando

(Pessoa, 1978: 129)

⁵ That the entire courtship from beginning to end was an elaborate act of characteristic feigning is argued by José Augusto Seabra (1985), in “Amor e fingimento.” See also Antonio Tabucchi (1984), who asserts, in “Um Fausto mangas-de-alpaca: as *Cartas de Amor* de Pessoa,” that in this courtship Pessoa, as always, is living out his “life in literature”.

My little baby:

You have thousands – you have millions – of reasons for being angry, irritated, offended. But the blame has hardly been mine; it has been the fault of that fate which has just condemned my brain, I shall not say permanently, but to a state, at least, that calls for careful treatment such as I am not sure I can get.

I intend (without now invoking the celebrated decree of 11 May) to go to a mental hospital next month to see if I can find there a certain treatment that will enable me to resist this black wave that is falling over my spirit. I don't know how the treatment will turn out – that is, I cannot foresee what good it might do me.

Never wait for me; if I show up it will be in the morning, when you are on your way to the office, on Poço Novo.

Don't worry.

After all, what was it? I was exchanged for Álvaro de Campos!

Always very much yours,

Fernando

In his place – that is, Fernando Pessoa's – stands Álvaro de Campos. It is as if Pessoa has died away before the vampirish burgeoning of the engineer-poet and love's executioner that is Álvaro de Campos.

On October 21, 1935, less than a month before Pessoa's own death, Campos wrote what was possibly his last poem. It was also a final word on his involvement in the Fernando/Ophelia affair, which by all rights, should be described as the Fernando Pessoa – Álvaro de Campos/Ophelia liaison.

Todas as cartas de amor são
Ridículas.
Não seriam cartas de amor se não fossem
Ridículas.

Também escrevi em meu tempo cartas de amor,
Como as outras,
Ridículas.

As cartas de amor, se há amor,
Têm de ser
Ridículas.

Mas, afinal,
Só as criaturas que nunca escreveram
Cartas de amor
É que são
Ridículas.

Quem me dera no tempo em que escrevia
Sem dar por isso
Cartas de amor
Ridículas.

A verdade é que hoje
 As minhas memórias
 Dessas cartas de amor
 É que são
 Ridículas.

(Todas as palavras esdrúxulas,
 Como os sentimentos esdrúxulos,
 São naturalmente
 Ridículas).

(Pessoa, 1969: 399-400)

All love letters
 Are ridiculous.
 They would not be love letters if they
 Were not ridiculous.

In my time I too wrote love letters,
 Like the others,
 Ridiculous.

Love letters, if there is love,
 Have to be
 Ridiculous.

But, finally,
 It is only children who have never written
 Love letters
 That are
 Ridiculous.

Oh how I wish I were back in the time
 When I wrote (without being aware
 Of it) ridiculous
 Love letters.

The truth of it is that today
 It is my memory
 Of those love letters
 That is
 Ridiculous.

(All singular words,
 Like singular feelings,
 Are naturally
 Ridiculous.)

Although Fernando Pessoa had initiated the affair with Ophelia, it will be recalled, it was Álvaro de Campos who broke it off both times; and it is Campos who has

the last word on the matter. As he claims, he too has written love letters—not that he has written them for himself will he assert (that matter remains ambiguous) but merely that having written them, he knows what he is talking about. Had Campos, in the last years of the poet's life, once again taken over his thoughts, his feelings, his body? Had he, in short, replicated the vampirish triumph of Poe's Ligeia over the Lady Rowena? As Poe's narrator says, "I shrieked aloud, 'can I never – can I never be mistaken – these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of my lost love – of the Lady – of the Lady Ligeia'" (Poe, 1956: 94). It is merciful, no doubt, that Ophelia Queiroz was at the last spared that final vision of the complete takeover of her beloved Fernando by the very "bad" Álvaro de Campos.

This paper has a post-scriptum. In the *Jornal de Letras* for Nov. 12/18, 1985, Maria da Graça Queiroz published a most interesting interview with Ophelia. Therein, in Ophelia's own words, appears an account of the way in which Fernando Pessoa's courtship of Ophelia was renewed in 1929, a decade after it was first broken off. The story had been told originally in *Cartas de Amor*, but as she acknowledges, it bears repeating:

Em 1929, e conforme já contei, começamos através de um retrato que o meu sobrinho levou para casa. Era Ele a beber, no Abel Pereira da Fonseca. Eu achei muito engraçado e disse ao Carlos que também gostava de ter um. Alguns dias depois recebi realmente o retrato com a dedicatória: "Fernando Pessoa em flagrante delitro". Agradei-lhe numa carta, ele respondeu-me e começamos assim o "namoro". Esta segunda fase, vem também relatada, no livro *Cartas de Amor*, e conforme contei, o F[ernando] estava muito diferente. Muito mais velho, nervoso, bebia muito.

(Queiroz, 1985: 4)

In 1929, as I have already told the story, we began again by way of a photograph that my nephew brought home. It was he, drinking at Abel Pereira da Fonseca's place. I found it very amusing and told Carlos that I too would like to have one. A few days later I actually received a photograph with an inscription: "Fernando Pessoa in flagrante delitro." I wrote him a letter of thanks, he replied, and thus we resumed our "courtship." This second phase is well described in the book *Cartas de Amor* and as I said, F. was very much different. He was much older and nervous. He drank a great deal.

Scarcely hidden here, in the anecdote regarding the photograph of Pessoa drinking, is Ophelia's own attraction to the Pessoa who was Álvaro de Campos, the "bad" one who had usurped the more innocent lover's very being at the end of the first phase of their courtship in 1920. Finally clear is the message Pessoa sent Ophelia in the inscription to the photograph: "Fernando Pessoa in flagrante delitro." She was amply forewarned. As Pessoa, in the very first letter of this second phase—that of November 9, 1929—asked perceptively: "So, a drunken shadow occupies space in your memories?" ("Então uma sombra bebada ocupa lugar nas lembranças?"; Pessoa, 1978: 137). Once again their relationship was

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