

William Wordsworth, Fernando Pessoa, and Riverside Poems Revisited

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, William Wordsworth, "Lisbon Revisited (1926)", Mário de Sá-Carneiro.

Abstract

This article explores the impact of William Wordsworth on Fernando Pessoa's aesthetic ideas and his poetry, particularly his poems about rivers. In this light, it proposes a new reading of Pessoa's "Lisbon Revisited (1926)", as a revisitation of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey".

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, William Wordsworth, "Lisbon Revisited (1926)", Mário de Sá-Carneiro.

Resumo

Este artigo explora a influência de William Wordsworth no pensamento estético e na obra poética de Fernando Pessoa, sobretudo os seus poemas sobre rios. Apresenta uma nova leitura do poema "Lisbon Revisited (1926)" neste contexto, propondo que é uma revisitação do poema de Wordsworth "Tintern Abbey".

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George Monteiro, in the chapter “Speech, Song, and Place: Wordsworth”, in his seminal book *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-century Anglo-American Literature* (2000), takes up leads proposed earlier by Jorge de Sena (Sena 1982: II, 65), to show that the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa was familiar with the William Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and goes on to provide convincing examples of how his artistic theories may be indebted to it (see Monteiro 2000: 13-40), before examining the poem “Ela canta, pobre ceifeira” (1914) as a response to Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper” (1803). Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, in her analyses of the relationship between Pessoa and Wordsworth in *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa’s Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* (2003), also focuses on Pessoa’s reading of *Lyrical Ballads*, and Wordsworth’s notion of a good poet as “a man speaking to men” (Santos 2003: 17, 26-27). Following on from these and other studies, this article examines the intricacies of the influence of Wordsworth’s aesthetic ideas on Pessoa’s in greater depth, before going on to analyse how Pessoa consciously reworked some of Wordsworth’s poetry, in particular “Tintern Abbey” (1798), in his own poems about rivers. It concludes by providing an entirely new reading of “Lisbon Revisited (1926)” in this light, which it argues is, in no small part, a moving poetic tribute to the dead Mário de Sá-Carneiro.

In 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* was published anonymously. In 1800 Wordsworth acknowledged authorship of the bulk of the poems (the remainder were by Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and prefaced the greatly expanded second edition with his first defense of his art. For the next edition, of 1802, he made considerable additions to this Preface, reiterating and heightening the claims made for poetry and introducing a discussion of “What is a Poet?”. It comprises the convictions Wordsworth hoped to express in his poetry, as well as to live by. These were uttered with confidence, and supported by a body of verse that evidently took itself seriously.

Wordsworth was one of the great poet-critics, and in the Preface he consciously attempted to shape the reception of his poetry. Fernando Pessoa was to do the same throughout his career, in letters (especially those to literary critics like Adolfo Casais Monteiro and João Gaspar Simões), prefaces (Ricardo Reis’s prefaces for Alberto Caeiro’s poetry, for instance) and prose pieces promoting his own brand of poetry.¹ It is no coincidence that in some of these texts, as Monteiro has pointed out, he should cite Wordsworth’s example in attempting to educate his readership:

Em Portugal há uns poucos de homens capazes (por seu valor intelectual) de mover o meio; falta, porém, o meio culto que movam. De modo que em Portugal é preciso que apareça um homem que, a par de ser um homem de génio, para que possa mover o meio por inteligência, seja um homem de sua natureza influenciador e dominador, para que ele

¹ Please see Pessoa’s letters to both men, from 1929 onwards, in Pessoa (1999). For Reis’s most developed Preface to Caeiro’s book, see Pessoa (2003: 139-41).

próprio organize o meio que há de influenciar, e ir influenciando ao construí-lo. Diz Wordsworth, num dos prefácios críticos a uma das edições das “Lyrical Ballads”, que o poeta tem de criar o meio que o compreenda. Assim é, quando, como no caso que Wordsworth citava, que era o seu próprio, o poeta é um grande original.

(Pessoa, 1967: 356; BNP/E3, 19-111v)

Pessoa is here creating an elective literary lineage, implicitly fashioning himself, the contemporary Portuguese man of genius, as a direct descendent of Wordsworth. As well as admiring his predecessor’s efforts in “improving the taste and judgment of [his] contemporaries”, as Coleridge would put it in *Biographia Literaria* (168), Pessoa was also attracted to some of Wordsworth’s specific claims for poetry, particularly those which would later become the ideals of the Modernist generation to which he belonged.

Wordsworth’s Preface contains statements that would immediately be hailed as, and remain to this day, the paradigmatic descriptions of High Romanticism, the most famous being that poetry should be the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity” (611). However, it equally anticipates three touchstones of Modernism: the fundamental importance of the workings of the intellect upon the emotions, the poet’s necessary movement towards impersonality, when writing dramatic poetry, and his consequent unavoidable artistic insincerity. Wordsworth’s startling modernity, in this regard, can be drawn out in an against-the-grain reading of the Preface, one in tune with its proto-Modernist rather than Romantic declarations, and I believe Pessoa was one of his earliest readers to perform such a reading.

Wordsworth insists, throughout the Preface, that emotions must be subjected to the process of intellectual thought before they can be expressed in poetry. What is striking is that this insistence is even evident in the sentences that immediately follow his famous prescription that poetry should be the spontaneous overflow of emotion. It thus instantly qualifies one of the most often cited descriptions of Romanticism:

[...] all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings.

(Wordsworth, 2008: 598)

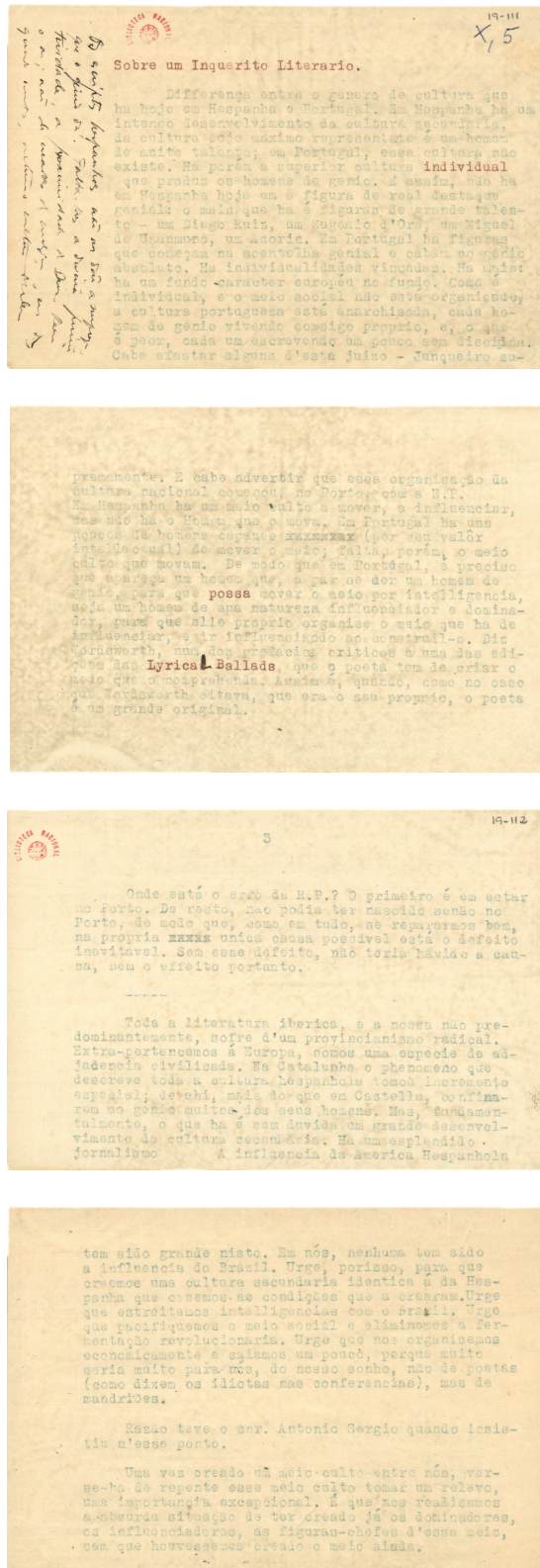


Fig. 1. Wordsworth's example (Pessoa, BNP/E3, 19-111 & 112).

Translation: "[...] Wordsworth, in one of his critical prefaces to an edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, states the poet must create the environment that will understand him. This is the case when, as in the case Wordsworth cited, which was his own case, the poet is a true original."

The notion that emotions must be meditated upon, and therefore mediated by, the rational mind, before they can become art, pervades Pessoa's entire theoretical program. Monteiro cites the following example (there are countless others), which is particularly apt because it appears to echo Wordsworth's passage cited above, as well as his celebrated declaration, also in the Preface, that poetry should originate from "emotion recollected in tranquillity"²:

A composição de um poema lírico deve ser feita não no momento da emoção, mas no momento da recordação dela. Um poema é um produto intelectual, e uma emoção, para ser intelectual, tem evidentemente, porque não é, de si, intelectual, que existir intelectualmente. Ora a existência intelectual de uma emoção é a sua existência na inteligência – isto é, na recordação, única parte da inteligência, propriamente tal, que pode conservar uma emoção.

(Pessoa, 1967: 72; BNP/E3, 18-54^r)

In the same way as he modulates his argument for the primacy of emotion by immediately underlining the importance of thought, Wordsworth also qualifies his definition of a good poet as "a man speaking to men [...] a man pleased with his own passions and volitions" – another classic description of the Romantic poet – by explaining that these passions and volitions must often be imagined, for the poet is forced to "habitually [...] create them where he does not find them". The poet, therefore, must have the

[...] ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events [...] whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.

(Wordsworth 2008: 603)

If the poet must be able to experience thoughts and feelings unprovoked by immediate external excitement, he must, in other words, be a master of impersonality, adept at expressing passions which are imagined rather than experienced. As Wordsworth goes on to imply, this ability necessarily involves a degree of insincerity, however well the poet is able to empathize with those whose feelings he describes:

² "I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind" (Wordsworth, 2008: 611).

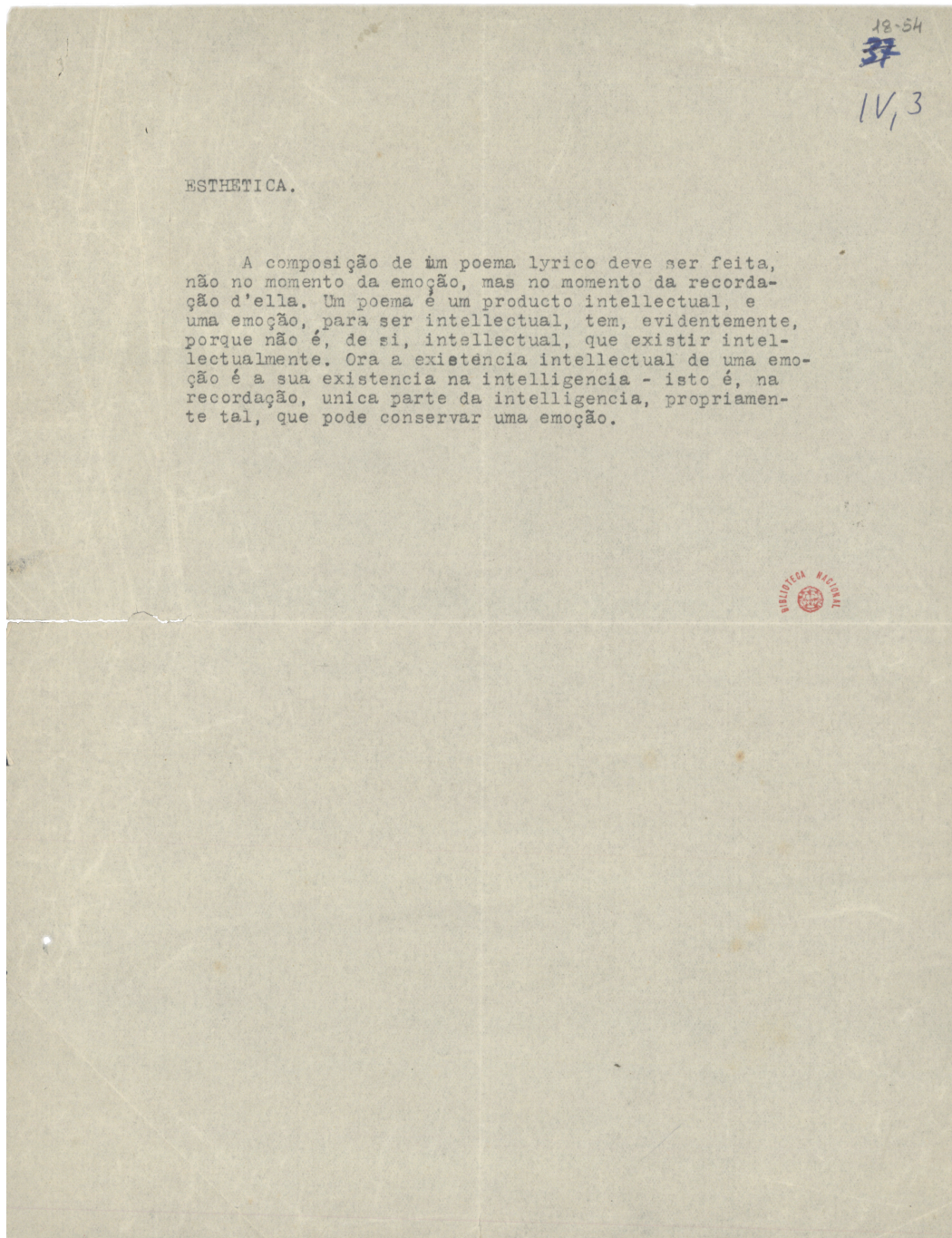


Fig. 2. The composition of a lyric poem (Pessoa, BNP/E3, 18-54r).

However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that, while he describes and imitates passions, his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his feelings with theirs.

(Wordsworth, 2008: 604)

The poet must therefore learn to truly feel what he feigns: the feelings of others. Pessoa would agree wholeheartedly; he writes in “Os graus da poesia lírica” that the highest type of poetry is characterized by the poet being able not merely to feel, but even to live, the states of soul he does not directly possess (“Não só sente, mas vive, os estados de alma que não tem directamente”) (Pessoa 1967: 68; BNP/E3, 18-50^r). As he would put it most memorably, in the orthonymous poem “Autopsicografia” (1934), the poet is, therefore, a faker (“fingidor”). In this poem, Pessoa turns Wordsworth’s dictum – that the poet must truly feel what he feigns – on its head, arguing, instead, that the poet must feign what he truly feels. It is illuminating to approach this seemingly perverse pronouncement as, in part, a playful inversion of Wordsworth’s idea, which is transformed into one of Pessoa’s beloved paradoxes.

Many of Pessoa’s descriptions of his own poetic creativity, with all the impersonality and insincerity it involves, mirror Wordsworth’s emphasis on the poet being able to imagine thoughts and feelings not his own:

Sincerity is the one great artistic crime. Insincerity is the second greatest. The great artist should never have a really fundamental and sincere opinion about life. But that should give him the capacity to feel sincere, nay to be absolutely sincere about anything for a certain length of time – that length of time, say, which is necessary for a poem to be conceived and written.

(Pessoa: 2009: 158; BNP/E3, 20-115)

Or the length of time, say, which is necessary for a heteronym to be conceived and written. Such extreme impersonality, together with its attendant insincerity (or illusion of sincerity), is a central component of dramatic poetry, as Pessoa everywhere recognizes, such as in his letter of 11 December 1931 to João Gaspar Simões:

O ponto central da minha personalidade como artista é que sou um poeta dramático; tenho continuamente, em tudo quanto escrevo, a exaltação íntima do poeta e a despersonalização do dramaturgo. Voo outro – eis tudo.

(Pessoa, 1999: 255)

Several of Wordsworth's poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, like "Simon Lee", "Goody Blake and Harry Gill", and in particular "The Thorn", are unequivocally dramatic, like Pessoa's heteronymic output, written in the assumed voices and imagined personalities of different characters, who are not to be confused with their flesh-and-blood author. In his "Advertisement" to the first edition of the book, Wordsworth explained that "The poem of the Thorn, as the reader will soon discover, is not supposed to be spoken in the author's own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently shew itself in the course of the story" (Wordsworth 2008: 592). Showing the character of his fictional narrators through the poetry he writes under their name is exactly what Pessoa does with the heteronyms.

But Alberto Caeiro, Reis and Campos are not merely fashioned by the poems Pessoa ascribes to them. Because Pessoa gives them detailed biographies which are external to the poems themselves. Wordsworth, too, felt compelled to write an extended "Note to *The Thorn*", for the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. His later explanation for this poem contains a description of its speaker which is profoundly evocative of the fictional biographies Pessoa would craft for the heteronyms *a posteriori*:

The character which I have here introduced speaking is sufficiently common. The Reader will perhaps have a general notion of it, if he has ever known a man, a Captain of a small trading vessel for example, who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; and from the same cause, and other predisposing causes by which it is probable that such men may have been affected, they are prone to superstition. On which account it appeared to me proper to select a character like this to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind.

(Wordsworth, 2008: 598)

The characterizations of the speakers of dramatic poems are usually provided merely by the poem(s) they are meant to proclaim; precious few, before or since Pessoa's heteronyms, were given this type of detailed back-story, and external psychological description, subsequent to the poetry that creates them.

There is one further aspect of Wordsworth's critical texts in *Lyrical Ballads* that Pessoa was probably greatly attracted to, and it may well have helped to shape his construction of a specific heteronym. Coleridge, in the first detailed analysis of Wordsworth poetry, *Biographia Literaria* (a work Pessoa was also familiar with), describes the intended distribution of labor for their joint collaboration on *Lyrical Ballads*. His own endeavors were to be 'directed to persons or characters supernatural [...] yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of the imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which

constitutes poetic faith". The best realization of this effort is the haunting poem "The Ancient Mariner". Wordsworth, in contrast, was to attempt to:

[...] give the charms of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

(Coleridge, 2008: 314)

Earlier in the same piece, Coleridge had written the following appraisal of his friend's greatest strength:

To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar [...] this is the character and privilege of genius [...] it is the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence.

(Coleridge, 2008: 202)

This could be a description of the philosophy underpinning the poetry of the heteronym Alberto Caeiro. Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, in an essay called "'O Deus que faltava': Pessoa's theory of lyric poetry", argues that a sense of wonder at the everyday is what drives the poetic vision of this heteronym, and that it largely derives from Pessoa's enthusiasm for Walt Whitman (2013: 23-36). But Wordsworth was another important influence in this regard. The first line of his epigraph to "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807), a poem Pessoa praises as a wonderful "collaboration between feeling and thought" (Pessoa, 1967: 151-52), is "The child is father of the man" (Wordsworth, 2008: 573), a line taken from his short poem "The Rainbow" (1807), which could be a perfect description of Caeiro's attitude to life:

My heart leaps up when I behold
 A rainbow in the sky;
 So is it now I am a man;
 So be it when I shall grow old,
 Or let me die!
 The Child is father of the Man

(79)

In a prose text ascribed to Álvaro de Campos, Pessoa has Caeiro comment on three lines from Wordsworth's poem "Peter Bell", which Campos cites:

Referindo-me, uma vez, ao conceito directo das coisas, que caracteriza a sensibilidade de Caeiro, citei-lhe, com perversidade amiga, que Wordsworth designa um insensível pela expressão:

A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

E traduzi (omitindo a tradução exacta de "primrose", pois não sei nomes de flores nem de plantas): "Uma flor à margem do rio para ele era uma flor amarela, e não era mais nada".

O meu mestre Caeiro riu. "Esse simples via bem: uma flor amarela não é realmente senão uma flor amarela".

Mas, de repente, pensou.

"Há uma diferença", acrescentou. "Depende se se considera a flor amarela como uma das várias flores amarelas, ou como aquela flor amarela só".

E depois disse:

"O que esse seu poeta inglês queria dizer é que para o tal homem essa flor amarela era uma experiência vulgar, ou coisa conhecida. Ora isso é que não está bem. Toda a coisa que vemos, devemos vê-la sempre pela primeira vez, porque realmente é a primeira vez que a vemos. E então cada flor amarela é uma nova flor amarela, ainda que seja o que se chama a mesma de ontem. A gente não é já o mesmo nem a flor a mesma. O próprio amarelo não pode ser já o mesmo. É pena a gente não ter exactamente os olhos para saber isso, porque então eramos todos felizes".

(Pessoa, 2014: 454-455)

What Caeiro condemns is Peter Bell's lack of wonder, his inability to see the yellow flower, child-like, as if for the first time. Caeiro's poetry "corrects" Wordsworth, as António M. Feijó shows in his article "A constituição dos Heterónimos. 1. Caeiro e a correcção de Wordsworth" (1996). Furthermore, with the creation of a nature poet who speaks in a prosaic poetic style, Pessoa also corrects one of Coleridge's less charitable appraisals of Wordsworth. For Coleridge could not suspend his own disbelief when it came to his friend's dramatic poems, feeling that the attempt to imitate "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation", as set out in the Preface, was "impracticable, and that, were it not impracticable, it would be useless" (Coleridge, 2008: 593, 345). Wordsworth may not have mirrored the real language of men in his own dramatic poems, at least not to Coleridge's satisfaction, but Pessoa does so masterfully in the poetry of Alberto Caeiro.

Wordsworth's influence on Pessoa extends, also, to specific poems. The ways in which the latter reworked the poem "The Solitary Reaper" in the orthonymous poem "Ela canta, pobre ceifeira", for instance, has been profitably drawn out by such critics as Monteiro, Feijó, and Klobucka. In his chapter on Pessoa and Wordsworth, Monteiro goes on to consider Álvaro de Campos's sonnet sequence "Barrow-on-Furness", ingeniously arguing that Pessoa's mistake in the place-name – the correct name being "Barrow-in-Furness" rather than "Barrow-on-Furness" – whether deliberate or otherwise, has the effect of placing Campos on

the banks of a river, thus aligning him to the English Romantic tradition of riverside poetry. Monteiro writes:

Minor though it might appear at first, the mistake is crucial to the poem. [...] the “real” river over which [Campos] contemplates has no geographical existence. But it does have a poetic source - certain poetic practices of the first English Romantics [...] One thing Fernando Pessoa was sure of - his shaky geography apart - was that Álvaro de Campos’s meditations must take place while he stands looking out at or over the flow of a river. The best authorities he knew said so. And in this case, those best authorities were the English Romantic poets.

(Monteiro 2000: 33)

The English Romantic poets were not, of course, the first to wax poetic on riverbanks, for the trope is as old as the hills: the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (c. 535 - c. 475 B.C.) must probably be credited with establishing it as a metaphor for personal change and the inexorable passage of time, when he stated that we never step into the same river twice, and the trope has been taken up by philosophers and artists ever since. But riverside reflections became, for them, a favorite theme, one which allowed them to combine their love of nature with a growing internal meditation on the nature of the self.

Monteiro’s dazzling display of mental acrobatics is of the highest order. It is entirely convincing, and it offers us a new interpretative key to the poems in question. However, on several occasions there was no need for Pessoa to fashion, consciously or subconsciously, an imaginary river upon which to place Álvaro de Campos in order to approximate him to the English Romantic tradition. There exists a perfectly good river in Lisbon, the river Tagus, and Campos meditates while looking out over its flow in several poems. One in particular, “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, contains interesting parallels with Wordsworth’s poem “Tintern Abbey”. A comparison between the two is a fruitful starting-point for an examination of Pessoa’s own riverside poems, and what they may owe to Wordsworth’s riverbank revisitations.

“Tintern Abbey” moved Coleridge to believe that Wordsworth possessed more of the genius of a great philosophic poet than any man he ever knew (Coleridge, 1835: 23). It is arguable whether Wordsworth is indeed a philosophical poet, for no philosophical system underpins his works as a whole, but Pessoa would agree with Coleridge, writing in a fragment that Germany would never produce a dramatic poet like Shakespeare, nor a philosophical poet like Wordsworth³. He, too, counted “Tintern Abbey” among his favorite Wordsworth poems, singling it out for praise in several texts, including one in which he writes

³ Cf. “A Alemanha nunca poderá ter um poeta dramático como Shakespeare nem um poeta filósofo como Wordsworth” (Pessoa, 1967: 298; BNP/E3, 19-87^o).

that “in the ‘Tintern Abbey’ lines [...] it seems that a sincere faith does make itself visible in poetry” (Pessoa 1967: 335).

“Tintern Abbey” opens with the speaker’s declaration that five years have passed since he last visited this location, encountered its tranquil, rustic scenery, and heard the murmuring waters of the river. He recites the objects he sees again, and describes their effect upon him:

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur. – Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

(Wordsworth, 2008: 131)

From this point on, the poem becomes an interior, personal meditation rather than a description of nature, as the self replaces the landscape as the poetic subject. So much so that “Tintern Abbey” finally becomes an entirely interior, personal revisitation:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of my mind revives again.

(Wordsworth, 2008: 133)

By this point, as Jerome McGann eloquently puts it, the poem has “replaced what might have been a picture *in* the mind (of a ruined abbey) with a picture of the mind” (Rawes, 2007: 97). Coleridge had precociously understood, in *Biographia Literaria*, that Wordsworth’s philosophy of self-consciousness found knowledge and aesthetic form originating in the mind, rather than in the external world. Keats would be less complimentary, writing disparagingly of Wordsworth’s “egotistical sublime”, or tendency to absorb everything around him into himself (Coleridge, 2008: 386-387).⁴ Modernist poets like Pessoa, on the other hand, would accept, in Wordsworth’s wake, that we never see the world as it truly is, but merely as we are at the time of seeing. The movement in “Tintern Abbey”, from a description of nature to an exploration of the landscape of the mind, is another example of Wordsworth’s startling modernity.

⁴ In this famous letter to to Richard Woodhouse of 27 October 1818, Keats compares this quality, unfavourably, to the chameleon poet’s (the ideal poet, represented by Shakespeare) ability to have no identity of his own, i.e. to become impersonal.

The full title of “Tintern Abbey” is “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on *Revisiting* the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798” (my italics). It is, I think, no coincidence that Pessoa employs the word “revisited” in the English title “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, and adds after it, too, a date, which as we shall see is an important one. “Lisbon Revisited (1926)” is also about a return to the riverside landscape of the speaker’s past (the speaker being, presumably, Álvaro de Campos, to whom the poem is ascribed), which leads to a contemplative revisitation of both the location and of himself, but mostly of himself. The poem begins with a wonderful illustration of the Wordsworthian egotistical sublime, as Campos dives into the abyss of his own mind before turning to describe the external landscape which presumably prompted his thoughts and feelings:

Nada me prende a nada.
Quero cinquenta coisas ao mesmo tempo.
Anseio com uma angústia de fome de carne
O que não sei que seja —
Definidamente pelo indefinido...
Durmo irrequieto, e vivo num sonhar irrequieto
De quem dorme irrequieto, metade a sonhar.

(Pessoa, 2002: 268; 2014: 184)

There is not even the pretence, in these lines, that the landscape is what informs the speaker’s characteristically obsessive self-reflection, rather than the other way round. This is true of most of Pessoa’s riverside poems: in the orthonymous poem that begins “Na ribeira deste rio”, the speaker declares: “Vou vendo e vou meditando, | Não bem no rio que passa | Mas só no que estou pensando”. One exception is Campos’s earlier poem “Ode Marítima” (1914), which begins with a description of a boat sailing up the river. Yet even in this case the boat is immediately transformed into a symbol for the speaker himself:

Inconscientemente simbólico, terrivelmente
Ameaçador de significações metafísicas
Que perturbam em mim quem eu fui...

(Pessoa, 2002: 129; 2014: 73)

In short, whereas Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” begins with the landscape around him, which is then absorbed into the speaker as he meditates on his past, in contrast to his present, self, Campos’s “Lisbon Revisited (1926)” begins with a reflection of his present and past, which is what then prompts him to consider the riverscape before him. When he finally does so, towards the end of poem, his phrasing is highly evocative of the opening lines of “Tintern Abbey”:

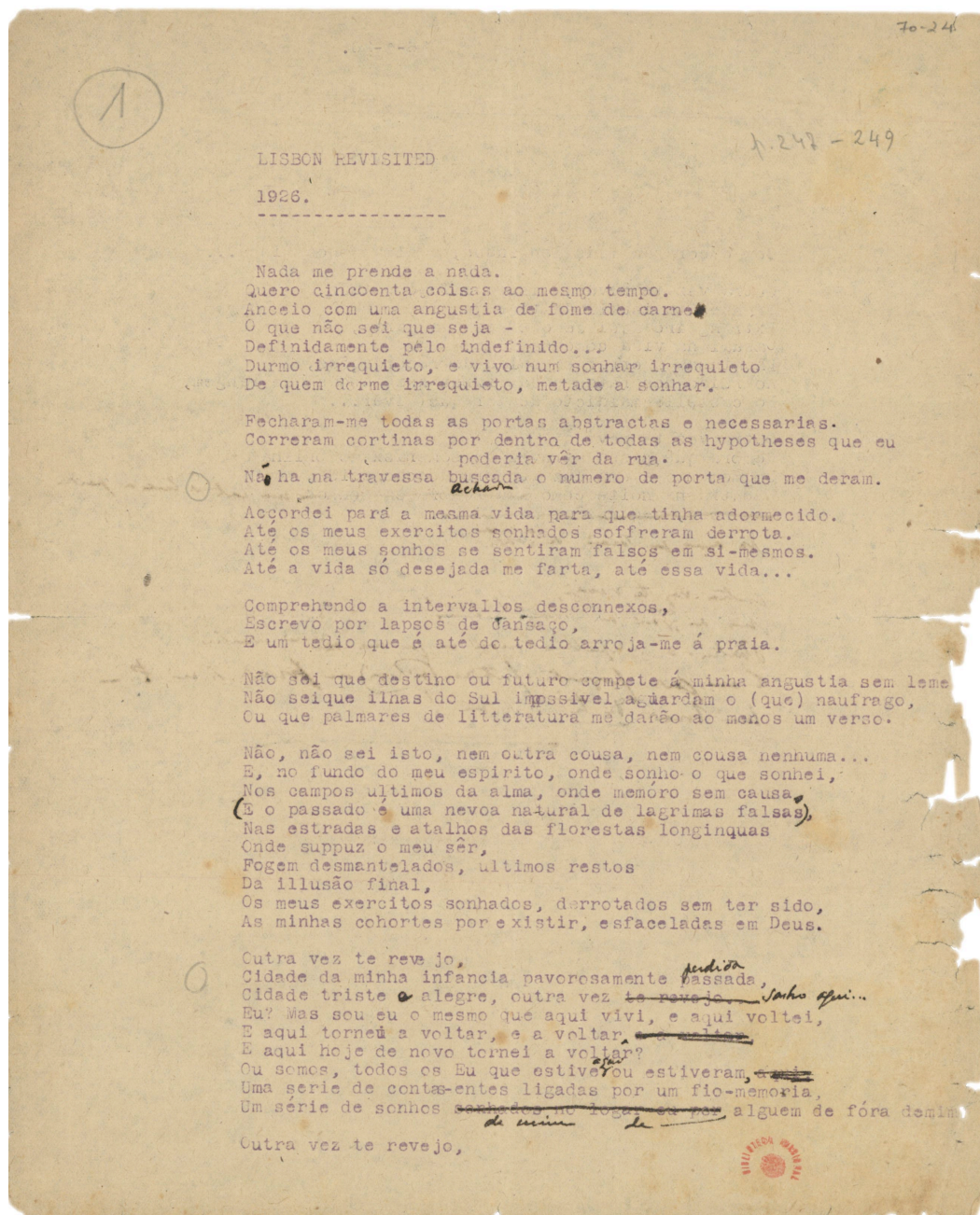


Fig. 3.1. Two-page typescript, dated with autograph additions and corrections (BNP/E3, 70-24^r).

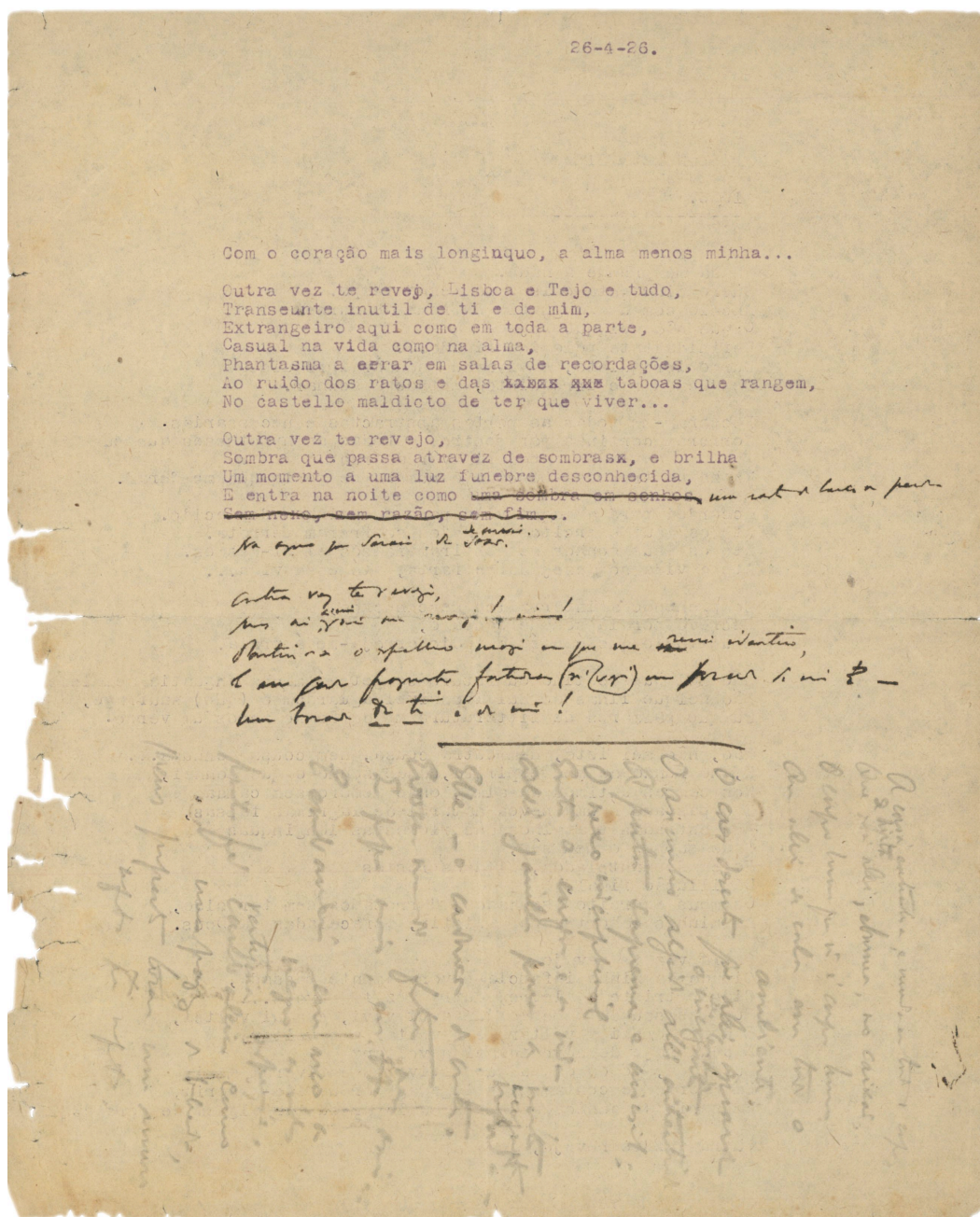


Fig. 3.2. Two-page typescript, dated with autograph additions and corrections (BNP/E3, 70-24^v).

Outra vez te revejo,
Cidade da minha infância pavorosamente perdida...
Cidade triste e alegre, outra vez sonho aqui...

The phrase “outra vez te revejo” is repeated four times in the poem:

Outra vez te revejo,
Com o coração mais longínquo, a alma menos minha.
Outra vez te revejo — Lisboa e Tejo e tudo —,
[...] Outra vez te revejo,
[...] Outra vez te revejo

(Pessoa, 2002: 131; 2014: 185)

It is worth returning to the opening stanza of Wordsworth’s poem, because its echoes in the latter part of “Lisbon Revisited (1926)” seem to me unmistakable:

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and *again I hear*
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur. – *Once again*
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Among the woods and copses lose themselves,
Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb
The wild green landscape. *Once again I see*
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms
Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some hermit’s cave, where by his fire
The hermit sits alone.

(Wordsworth, 2008: 131)

Wordsworth’s memory of his former self causes him no outright anguish, even if it is bittersweet, for in “Tintern Abbey” the speaker is able to compensate for the loss of his past by the sad but moving compromise of including that loss as part of his present self. Even though he is no longer able to resume his old relationship with nature, he has been compensated by a new set of more mature

gifts, and sense something more beautiful, more subtle, in it: “look on nature not as in the hour | Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes | The still, sad music of humanity.” Campos, on the contrary, would love to get back to his thoughtless youth, even if he never had one. His anguish is borne out of the unfamiliarity of the memory of his past self, and his inability to reconcile it with what he has become:

Eu? Mas sou eu o mesmo que aqui vivi, e aqui voltei,
E aqui tornei a voltar, e a voltar,
E aqui de novo tornei a voltar?

(Pessoa, 2002: 131; 2014: 185)

The same applies to Campos’s earlier riverside meditation, “Lisbon Revisited (1923)”. This poem makes it even clearer that what Campos is reflecting upon, with sublime egotism, is himself exclusively, and that while the riverscape may be what prompts his introspection, it is remote, rather than a part of himself, as in Wordsworth’s poem:

Ó mágoa revisitada, Lisboa de outrora de hoje!
Nada me dais, nada me tirais, nada sois que eu me sinta.

(Pessoa, 2002: 128; 2014: 176)

This is emotion recollected, but certainly not in tranquility. Romantic poets like Wordsworth observe nature, which leads them to turn their gaze inwardly; Modernist ones like Campos observe themselves observing nature, which leads them to observe themselves observing themselves, in a nihilistic downwards spiral that leads to total alienation: “Já disse que sou sozinho!”, Campos writes in “Lisbon Revisited (1923)” (Pessoa, 2002: 128; 2014: 176)

To complicate matters, Campos’s alienation is also a condition of his heteronymic status. The heteronyms are all ghosts, or shadows of Pessoa himself, their creator; their death-in-life predicament is therefore inbuilt. But our former selves, what once we were, are also ghosts that haunt our present days, as the “Lisbon Revisited” poems so vividly capture. This amalgamation of specters is wonderfully represented, in “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, in the image of the speaker (Pessoa, and Campos, or Pessoa-Campos), as a ghost wandering the rooms of memory, which is exactly what he has been doing throughout the poem:

Fantasma a errar em salas de recordações,
Ao ruído dos ratos e das tábuas que rangem
No castelo maldito de ter que viver...

(Pessoa, 2002: 131; 2014: 185)

The imagery in Pessoa's riverside poems, taken as a whole, is remarkably consistent. In almost all of them, there are references to the speaker as a ghost, or shadow. These poems also contain numerous allusions to death, the land ghosts inhabit; in "Lisbon Revisited (1923)", Campos declares: "A única conclusão é morrer". They are equally littered with allusions to sleep, death's closest relative in the realm of the living (think of Hamlet's most famous speech, or of Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night"), and, by extension, to dreams. These related images are apt representations of the speaker's predicament, as he is unable to relate the flowing of the rivers before him – a metaphor, as we have seen, for the passage of time, and the movement between past and present – and the past self he is unable to regain. In the orthonymous poem that begins "Aqui na orla da praia, mudo e contente do mar", we read:

A vida é como uma sombra que passa por sobre um rio.
[...] Sonho sem quase já ser, perco sem nunca ter tido,
E comecei a morrer muito antes de ter vivido.

(Pessoa, 1995: 118; 2001: 157; BNP/E3, 117-47^r)

These are the opening and closing stanzas of another orthonymous poem:

Entre o sono e o sonho,
Entre mim e o que em mim
É o quem eu me suponho,
Corre um rio sem fim.

[...] E quem me sinto e morre
No que me liga a mim
Dorme onde o rio corre –
Esse rio sem fim.

(Pessoa, 1995: 173; 2004: 139; BNP/E3, 118-19^r)

In the heteronym Ricardo Reis's most emblematic riverbank poem, the one that begins "Vem sentar-te comigo, Lídia, à beira do rio", there is a reference to his own death: "Ao menos, se for sombra antes, lembrar-te-ás de mim depois". Reis's attempted stoicism in this poem – to the point of declaring that the thought of his death leaves him utterly unmoved – is not convincing, for the poem's tone is one of extreme melancholy and underlying despair. Reis may not voice the anguish that the river trope causes Álvaro de Campos and the orthonym – he may even deny it – but it is present nonetheless.

The riverside poems of Alberto Caeiro are the only ones that do not reveal any anguish. Looking at a river does not lead Caeiro to any tortured thoughts because it does not lead him to any thoughts; he does not make the Romantic leap from external observation to internal meditation. Consequently, he does not see

rivers as a metaphor for himself: “O rio da minha aldeia não faz pensar em nada. | Quem está ao pé dele está só ao pé dele.”

Pessoa’s poetry usually germinates from a superabundance of sources, and there is another poem that must be taken into account in the context of “Lisbon Revisited (1926)” in addition to Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”. It is John Milton’s poem “Lycidas” (1637), and it begins:

*Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,
I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc’d fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.*

Milton’s poem was a direct influence on “Tintern Abbey”, and may well have been a direct influence on “Lisbon Revisited (1926)”, for Pessoa refers to it specifically in several texts.⁵

“Lycidas” bears the following note after its title: “In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown’d in his Passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion fortels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height.” Its speaker laments the loss of this friend from the start:

*Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for Lycidas?*

Towards the end of “Tintern Abbey”, a “dear, dear Friend” also makes an appearance, in this case Wordsworth’s sister Dorothy, his companion on the day he revisits the riverside scene:

*For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while*

⁵ He writes in one, for example: “A composição do poema é perfeita, o seu desenvolvimento magnificamente realizado. Nada parece haver que tenha esforço... / Já aqui se notam os característicos fundamentais do génio miltónico. Já aqui se vêem a majestade do estilo, o seu ritmo severo e sereno, o uso dos nomes próprios como estímulo, evocativo como rítmico, para a imaginação, o final, absolutamente calmo, como é de quem segue a grande tradição dos gregos...” (Pessoa 1967: 324).

May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister!

(Wordsworth, 2008: 133)

The friend Milton's celebrates in his poem is a dear, dead friend. Wordsworth's is his sister Dorothy, whose presence has a calming and positive effect upon the speaker in "Tintern Abbey", for it is in her voice and manner, as well as in the river scene, that he is able to revisit his former self, "what I was once". It is conceivable that Pessoa's "Lisbon Revisited (1926)" is also, in part, a riverside reflection on a dear friend.

"Lisbon Revisited (1926)" is one of only two known poems that Pessoa dated the tenth-year-anniversary, to the very day, of the suicide of his closest friend, and fellow Modernist, Mário de Sá-Carneiro. (The other is Campos's "Se te queres matar, porque não te queres matar?", which I argue in another article, largely due to the date Pessoa gave it, is a deliberate response to Hamlet, intended to pay homage to the departed Sá-Carneiro; see Castro, 2011.) This raises the tantalizing suggestion that Sá-Carneiro is part of the collective "tu" of "outra vez te revejo", the phrase that is repeated no fewer than five times in "Lisbon Revisited (1926)". The "tu" is, ostensibly, the river scene of the Tagus flowing through Lisbon: "Outra vez te revejo – Lisboa e Tejo e tudo –". But that "tudo" is watery and ambiguous, as are so many of the poem's ghostly images:⁶

Outra vez te revejo,
Sombra que passa através de sombras, e brilha
Um momento a uma luz fúnebre desconhecida,
E entra na noite como um rastro de barco se perde
Na água que deixa de se ouvir...

(Pessoa 2002: 131; 2014: 186)

This shadow who passes among shadows, shining a moment with an unknown funereal light, before entering the silent waters of the river, is the speaker himself, who here envisions his disappearance into the night, in an image evocative of death by drowning, which approximates it to Milton's poem. However, the image of a shadow passing among shadows, before entering the waters of the river, is also an apt one for a dear, dead friend. If so, Pessoa's friend, while not physically beside the speaker in the present moment, as in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", becomes part of Campos's haunting memory of what once he was.

If we allow that Sá-Carneiro is part of the spectral past that the speaker of "Lisbon Revisited (1926)" attempts to regain by memory, a child-like, innocent past

⁶ In Pessoa's works we find "several specters, ghosts, and other illusory and enchanting forms"; see Paulo de Medeiros's "Phantoms and Crypts", in *Pessoa's Geometry of the Abyss* (2013).

when, to cite Campos's poem "Aniversário" (1929), "Eu era feliz e ninguém estava morto", then the anguish and alienation in the poem assume a profoundly personal dimension. At end of the poem, the speaker sees himself as a broken mirror, useless in adequately reflecting anything, and this image contains the suggestion, too, of emotional devastation. How much of Sá-Carneiro's presence may be felt in these lines is an open question, but his memory exists in the poem, at the very least in its date, which helps to account for the deeply emotional charge we perceive in the final heartfelt cry:

Outra vez te revejo,
 Mas, ai, a mim não me revejo!
 Partiu-se o espelho mágico em que me revia idêntico,
 E em cada fragmento fatídico vejo só um bocado de mim —
 Um bocado de ti e de mim!...

(Pessoa 2002: 131; 2014: 186)

Approached with the shadow of Sá-Carneiro in mind, such passages of "Lisbon Revisited (1926)" read like a love poem to a dear friend.

Pessoa's reworking of Wordsworth's riverside revisitations, as well as his assimilation, development and transformation of the critical ideas in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, is entirely characteristic of his attitude towards strong influences, and "Lisbon Revisited (1926)" provides a wonderful illustration of T. S. Eliot's precept that mature poets, meaning the best ones, transform their sources into something better, or at least something different.

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