

# An Original Book

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SEARCH, Alexander [PESSOA, Fernando] (2014). *Un libro muy original | A Very Original Book*. Edición bilingüe y notas de Natalia Jerez Quintero. Medellín: Tragaluz, 2014, 239 p.

Natalia Jerez Quintero's bilingual volume is an anthology of selected works by Alexander Search, an early English-language heteronym, or fictional author, of the celebrated Portuguese avant-garde poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935). The translations of his varied writings bring this lesser-known fictional writer – and writer of fiction – in Pessoa's pantheon to the attention of the Spanish-speaking world, while at the same time providing carefully edited and corrected versions of selected poetry and prose in English, the literary language in which Pessoa was educated in Durban, South Africa. Jerez Quintero's volume adds to the production of Spanish American specialists on Pessoa in Colombia, who are now among the most productive groups researching Pessoa's mysterious works and archive. This volume reflects Jerez Quintero's work in the Pessoa archive in pages displaying variants for selected texts. The title plays on the inventiveness of Pessoa's creations as a whole, while alluding to the title of Search's story of mystery and horror, "A Very Original Dinner," which was revealed for the first time in 1978. The story is reproduced here in a revised English transcription based on a handwritten manuscript from the archive. Diego García Sierra's translation to Spanish follows the original English text, whereas two previous translations to Spanish (in Spain and Mexico) had been based on Portuguese translations.

It should be noted, however, that the first publication of the English text of Search's "A Very Original Dinner" was not in my *Adverse Genres in Fernando Pessoa* (2010), but actually in Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa's book (*Fernando Pessoa e a Literatura de Ficção*, 1978), which reproduced photocopies of the full English manuscript, along with the first translation into Portuguese. Mine was the first transcription based on the photographs of the manuscript. Jerez Quintero notes the difficulties of deciphering Pessoa's handwriting in the manuscript, as well as a number of corrections and scribbled lines he had added, which were omitted in my transcription. Fortunately, with a detailed look at the actual manuscript, Jerez Quintero succeeds in capturing every detail, thus producing the first fully accurate transcription of the short story.

The editor's faithfulness to documents in Pessoa's archive – kept in a trunk in the National Library of Portugal – while anchoring this volume in research, also represents a limit and perhaps even a liability. The editor/researcher runs the risk of being taken in by Pessoa's game, taking too seriously the author's manipulation

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of personalities in the malleable game of authorship. The contents chosen for this book follow a list found on a note about Search in Pessoa's "The Transformation Book, or Book of Tasks" (never completed during Pessoa's lifetime), being one of numerous plans for the organization of his works. On this note, dated 1908, Pessoa gives Search's birthdate (the same as his own) and lists five of his titles: three essays ("The Portuguese Regicide and the Political Situation in Portugal"; "The Philosophy of Rationalism"; "The Mental Disorder(s) of Jesus") and two poems, or groups of poems ("Delirium" and "Agony"). Whereas Pessoa's list documents a range of Search's writings, perhaps indicating a selection intended for future publication, it is not a definitive list, especially considering the recurrence of Search's name Pessoa's archival world, cited by Jerez Quintero in a notebook around 1912-1913, a signed draft in 1914, and a publication plan after 1932 (p. 224). Could Search be brought to life whenever Pessoa wished an author for his English writings, which continued throughout his life? The list also does not include the story "A Very Original Dinner," completed in 1907 and signed Alexander Search, which is the principal part of Jerez Quintero's book; it is unlikely that Pessoa would have simply forgotten to mention it, as Jerez Quintero suggests. Neither did Pessoa list the sequence of 153 poems titled "The Mad Fiddler," which is included in Pessoa's English production and attributed by some to Alexander Search (Jerez Quintero notes that "The Mad Fiddler" constitutes the third volume of the critical edition of Pessoa's English poetry edited by João Dionísio). More attention to this long work would have led the editor to Anne Terlinden's very useful analysis of "The Mad Fiddler" and its place in Pessoa's English poetry (*Fernando Pessoa: the bilingual Portuguese poet*, 1990). Moreover, the early Search poems carry over thematically and linguistically into the longer poetic sequence, such that a reader cannot easily distinguish one from the other.

And there remains the overriding question of Search's early poetry and his proficiency in the English language. Based on the titles or topics "Delirium" and "Agony," Jerez Quintero selected only twelve poems written by Search between 1904-1909, taken from Dionísio's second volume of the critical edition (1997). There is an earlier volume edited by Luísa Freire, which includes 115 early poems, the first complete text of "The Mad Fiddler," and 30 disperse poems (Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia Inglesa*. Edited by Luisa Freire. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1995, republished by Assírio & Alvim in 1999, adding the name Alexander Search).

While there are limitations to the value of publishing a varied selection of works by Alexander Search following a list found in Pessoa's archives, those writings are here translated into Spanish in most cases for the first time, and the volume brings readers close to Pessoa's "workshop" through ample reproduction of notes and documents about Search written in Pessoa's hand. Nevertheless, the question of the extent of Search's writings and his place in the development of Pessoa's poetics remains to be more fully addressed. *Un libro muy original*, aside

from the long story to which the title alludes, documents the fictional Search through a miscellany of diverse items, as if from a scrapbook. The twelve poems selected from the early Search production are hardly sufficient to give an idea of the range, expression, and weight of this early phase of Pessoa's poetic maturation. Were the early poems a preparation for "The Mad Fiddler," which is the only full early work that Pessoa organized and actually presented for publication? Is there any basis in the early poems for themes of political assassination and mental disorders found in the prose? One may hope that Jerez Quintero will augment this corpus with full translations, perhaps including "The Mad Fiddler" as well, accompanied by a more complete study of Search's place in Pessoa's archive and in his literary world.

Jerez Quintero's anthology is important, nonetheless, for being the first to introduce Search's poetry to the Spanish-speaking world, along with the full text of the story "A Very Original Dinner." Another of its important contributions is the exceptional quality of the translations to Spanish. Jerez Quintero comments on her principles of translation (p. 228) and notes her attempt to maintain rhymes and equivalences in English and Spanish metrics. The resulting translations successfully present both a notable fluency in Spanish language and attention to the rhythmic and syntactic qualities of the originals, such that readers who appreciate poetry will be "searching" for a larger body of texts and translations.