

Alexander Search's immersion in English and American poets

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Keywords

Alexander Search, English poets, American poets, Emotion, Stylistic conventions, Skepticism, Occultism, Questioning, Restlessness, Exclusion.

Abstract

While a student in Durban High School, the young Fernando Pessoa / Charles Robert Anon (afterwards Alexander Search) will make of English and American poetry his first “adverse genre” by borrowing its emotions and simplicity, at the same time intellectualizing a dark questioning of existence. Pessoa’s excursion through Shakespeare, Milton, and the romantics records the depth of his discontent through expressive dark themes. By 1909 these readings fade into the background of Pessoa’s radical skepticism and the dramatization of his intellectual pursuit of the absolute.

Palavras-chave

Alexander Search, Poetas ingleses, Poetas americanos, Emoção, Convenções estilísticas, Ceticismo, Ocultismo, Questionamento, Inquietação, Exclusão.

Resumo

Enquanto era estudante no liceu de Durban, o jovem Fernando Pessoa / Charles Robert Anon (posteriormente, Alexander Search) faz da poesia inglesa e norte-americana o seu primeiro “gênero adverso” por meio do empréstimo das suas emoções, ritmos e simplicidade, ao mesmo tempo que intelectualiza um questionamento tenebroso da existência. A viagem pessoana por Shakespeare, Milton e os românticos regista a profundidade do seu descontentamento, evidenciada nos temas críticos mais expressivos. Em 1909 estas leituras passam para um segundo plano, o do ceticismo radical de Pessoa e da dramatização da sua busca intelectual à procura do absoluto.

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Alexander Search, Charles Robert Anon's "poetic successor" (DIONÍSIO, 2008: 119), wrote more than a hundred poems in English between 1904-1910, and some prose, including the well-known short story "A Very Original Dinner," first revealed and translated to Portuguese in 1978 (SOUSA, 1978; FERRARI & PIZARRO, 2015). In Durban, Pessoa signed his first English poems Charles Robert Anon, although he later would attribute the full range of English poems from this period to Search, under whose name they became fully accessible only in 1995 and 1997 in quite different editions by Luísa Freire (131 poems, 1995, 1999) and by João Dionísio (164 poems, 1997; for the critical edition of Fernando Pessoa published by the INCM). As early as 1974, in a groundbreaking essay, Jorge de Sena had proclaimed the importance of the English poems as a whole for an understanding of Fernando Pessoa's writings in Portuguese, even though his access to early poems in English was limited to those few published in books or journals: "Nunca é demasiado acentuar o paradoxo máximo de Fernando Pessoa enquanto poeta português, e para a compreensão do qual estes poemas ingleses são a decisiva prova" (PESSOA, 1974: 14) [*One can never accentuate too much the greatest paradox of Fernando Pessoa as a Portuguese poet, and to understand him these English poems constitute definitive proof*]. And in a study of the young Pessoa in Durban, South Africa, Alexandrino Severino comments that when Pessoa returned to Portugal in 1905 he carried with him the English writers on whose works he had been tested in the Matriculation Exam offered at Durban High School by the University of the Cape of Good Hope and who would be present indirectly in his mature poetic creations (SEVERINO, 1988: 20). Freire likewise sees in Search's English verses a formative stage for the development of Pessoa's overall literary project, guiding the development of themes that would later be recast throughout the poetry:

A acreditarmos nas palavras do poeta em relação ao tempo em que se processa a escrita de Search, poderemos admitir que este irmão-gêmeo seja não só a personagem que mais se identifica com a sua verdade, mas ainda o embrião poético que em sua "Busca" (e o nome é simbólico) já contém em si as preocupações metafísicas e as diferentes facetas que darão vida e justificarão os futuros outros em que Pessoa se desdobrará.

(PESSOA, 1995: 4)

[By believing the poet's words in relation to the time in which Search's writing is taking place, we are able to affirm that this brother-twin is not only the personage who is most identified with his truth, but furthermore is the poetic embryo that in his search (and the name is symbolic) already contains in itself the metaphysical preoccupations and the different features that will enliven and justify the future others in which Pessoa will unfold.]

A detailed look at books that Pessoa was reading at the culmination of his studies at Durban High School in British South Africa, in a youthful period of voracious reading of English and some American poets, may add to the documentation of his literary development from ages 16 to 20 and help to illuminate

the contributions of Charles Robert Anon and Alexander Search to the caldron of Pessoa's growing literary, aesthetic, and philosophical interests. Hubert D. Jennings suggested that the main interest in early poems written in English in South Africa after Pessoa's return from a year-long visit to Portugal in 1902 is to what extent they describe his development as a poet (JENNINGS, 1984: 91), although Jennings does not establish the transition from earlier poems attributed to Charles Robert Anon, author of the sonnet "On Death" dated May 1904, for example, to those of Alexander Search, author of the poem "Perseverance" written in September 1904. Dionísio cites one of Pessoa's lists of works (c. 1907), "Poems written in childhood, or in boyhood—that is up to my sixteenth year—June 1904" (BNP/E3, 48B-119), which is possible evidence of the change or transition from Pessoa or Anon to the poetry of Alexander Search.¹

Freire describes Search's poetry as "simples, despida e ingénua, ora exaltada, emotiva e confessional" [*simple, bare and ingenuous, sometimes exalted, emotive and confessional*], in contrast to the concision and precision of the later English sonnets (PESSOA, 1995: 5). Further evidence that links Search to the English romantics is provided in a letter Pessoa wrote to José Osório de Oliveira in 1932, in which Pessoa described English romantic poets as "irregular shadows" of Shakespeare and Milton, writers who captured his full attention during the years at Durban High School: "Em minha segunda adolescência dominaram meu espírito Shakespeare e Milton, assim como, acessoriamente, aqueles poetas românticos que são sombras irregulares deles" (PESSOA, 1980: 190) [*In my second adolescence Shakespeare and Milton dominated my spirit, as well as, secondarily, those romantic poets who were their irregular shadows*]. The limitations he ascribes to the English romantics apply doubly to the full production of Alexander Search, whose poetry shows him to be an accessory or irregular shadow of the romantic poets he imitates. Criticisms that Pessoa had aimed at Macaulay in a 1904 essay published in *The Durban High School Magazine*² confirm the assumption that Search became immersed in the meter, harmony, spirit, and soul of the romantics as a counterbalance to Macaulay's flaws, which Pessoa had catalogued bluntly in his essay as "lack of the perception of harmony;" the "abruptness and snap of his sentences [...] rough [...] and startling;" "he never understood the true poetic spirit. He knew the mind, but not the soul of the Muse" (in JENNINGS, 1966: 102). Search seeks to fulfill what Macaulay lacks: It is he who reads deeply in Coleridge, Shelley, and Whitman, as well as Keats, Tennyson, Byron, and Poe. In a hand-written note titled "Influences" referring to the period 1904-1905 Pessoa specifically names Milton, Pope, Byron, Keats, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Poe, as well as unnamed minor Portuguese poets read in childhood. Some of the names were added the list and written in above the line, suggesting that

¹ A series of 21 poems Pessoa assigned to Alexander Search would later be reattributed to Frederick Wyatt, another Pessoaan fictional author (see FERRARI & PITTELLA, 2016).

² For more on Pessoa's essay on Macaulay, see JENNINGS (2019: 52 & 62-63).

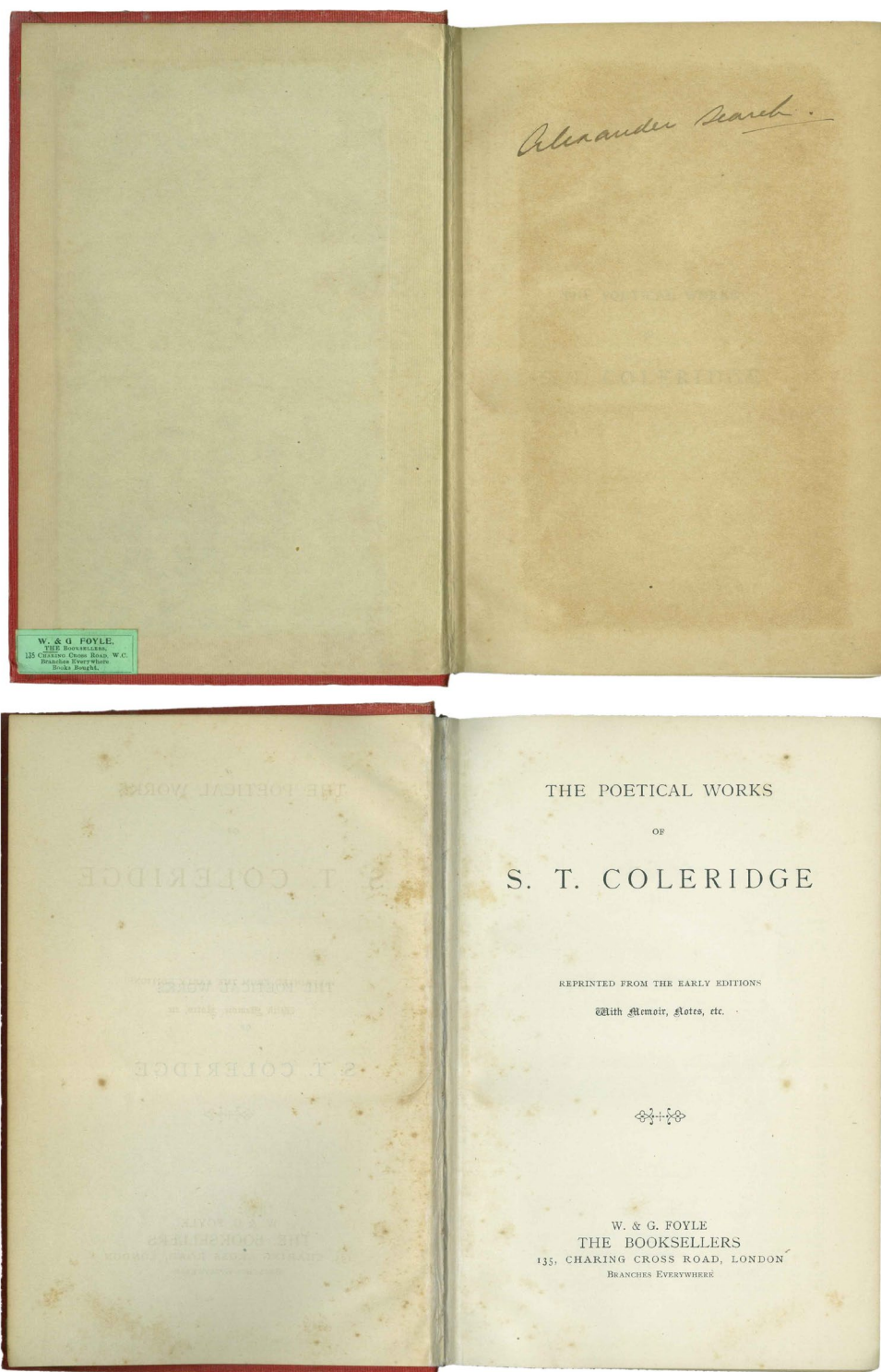
it is neither a definitive nor complete account. Whitman is not present, for instance (cf. PIZARRO, 2019: 83-85).

The young Pessoa/Search will make of romantic poetry another adverse genre by borrowing its sonorous and expressive emotions, its ingenuous simplicity, while intellectualizing a dark questioning of existence and foregrounding Search's own increasing isolation and inability to feel. In his poetry he will convert romantic themes of dream worlds and the unknown to abstractions that question perception of reality, the validity of action, and the worth of existence. While maintaining the rhythm, rhyme, and sonority of the genre, Search will increasingly alter its content with thoroughgoing skepticism and doubt.

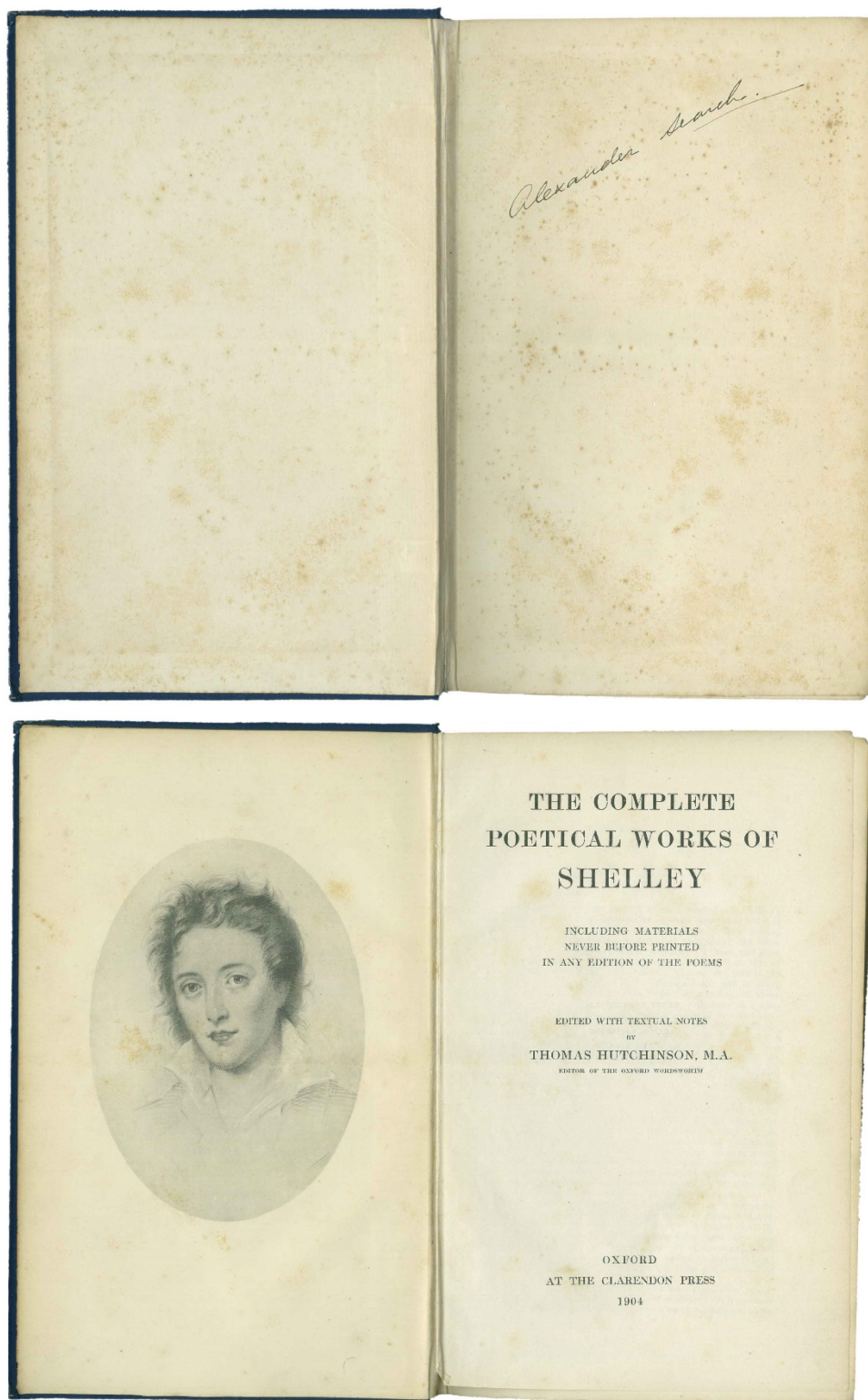
To test our hypothesis of Search's grounding in romantic poetry, we will examine the volumes of poetry in Pessoa's library that carry the full signature "Alexander Search," written obliquely in the same hand in two books, the *Poetical Words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: W.& G. Foyle, 1893) and *The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1904). In these volumes Search marked certain poems in the table of contents and underlined or marked numerous verses. A third volume, *Poems by Walt Whitman* (London: Review of reviews office, 1895), is signed "ASearch" at the top of the title page, also undated, indicating the importance of Whitman to Pessoa's early literary project.

Although unsigned, we also consider fundamental to Anon/Search's writings the three volumes of poetry that Pessoa received at Durban High School in 1903 as the "Queen Victoria Memorial Prize" for his essay in the matriculation examination. Those are *The Complete Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (London: Macmillan and Co. 1902), in which 16 poems are checked in the table of contents; *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (London: Frederic Warne and Co. 1898), with 20 poems checked; and *The Choice Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Poems, Stories, Essays*, with an introduction by Charles Baudelaire (London: Chatto and Windus, 1902), with 19 poems checked. These prize volumes correspond by date to Anon/Search's early compositions. Pessoa also marked poems in other volumes of English poetry: four poems are checked in the volume *Poems of Robert Browning 1833-1865* (London: Cassell and Company, 1907), there is extensive underlining in *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (1898), and ten poems are checked in the first volume of *Poems of John Donne* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, 1905) from the same period. The volume *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, the only complete and copyright text in one volume* (Ernest Hartley Coleridge, ed., London: John Murray 1905) is unsigned and unmarked, although Pessoa repeats his name several times in his reminiscence about influences.³

³ For a preliminary study of the influence of Byron, Keats, and the Brownings (among others) on Pessoa, see MONTEIRO, 2000.



Figs. 1 and 2. COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor (1893). *The Poetical Works*. Reprinted from the earlier editions with memoir, notes, etc. London: W. & G. Foyle. 680 p. 19 cm. CFP 8-117.



Figs. 3 and 4. SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe (1904). *The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley*. Including materials never before printed in any edition of the poems. Edited with textual notes by Thomas Hutchinson. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1024 p. 23 cm. CFP 8-513.

The volumes signed by Search, the three books received as a prize for the matriculation examination in 1903, and the volumes of poems by Browning, Keats, and Donne provide evidence that Pessoa's poems develop through and because of his reading of English poetry during his last two years at Durban High School and after his return to Lisbon in 1905. The poets he was reading guide his search for an aesthetic ideal and shape themes that prepare the dramatic depersonalization of his poetry, both before and after his return to Portugal where he becomes, in effect, an English-language poet in exile, who will write and publish his first three books in English more than a decade after his return. Luísa Freire corroborates that Pessoa's readings in English poetry develop many major themes treated widely throughout his literary world:

Destacando o essencial da temática de Search, expressa num discurso decadente, com laivos românticos e simbolistas, podemos ver que ela já integra o mais importante da temática pessoana: a incapacidade de se dizer; o sentido de predestinação e de missão a realizar; a dúvida permanente e a percepção do mistério que tudo envolve; o excesso de ser e de pensar que o impede de sentir ou de ter paz; o sentimento de exclusão e de diferença em relação aos outros; a sua constante tristeza em oposição à felicidade alheia; o medo do génio e da loucura que sente em si e a busca permanente da poesia, da beleza, do absoluto.

(PESSOA, 1995: 4)

[Highlighting the essential in Search's thematics, expressed in decadent discourse, with romantic and symbolist tinges, we can see that it already integrates what is most important in Pessoa's thematics: the incapacity to speak of the self, the feeling of predestination and mission to be followed; permanent doubt and the perception of all-involving mystery; the excess of being and thinking that prevents him from feeling or being at peace; the sentiment of exclusion and difference in relation to others; his constant sadness opposed to others' happiness; the fear of genius and madness that he feels in himself and the permanent search for poetry, beauty and the absolute.]

One of the poems marked by Search in the volume of Coleridge, "Dejection, an Ode," merits special attention for themes that will recur throughout Search's poetry. The poem begins with an epigraph from the "Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence," a Scottish ballad on a 13th century theme of maritime disaster. Margaret, the daughter of Alexander III, sails to Norway to marry King Eric, and on the return journey the ship under the command of Patrick Spence is lost at sea. Twenty years later, Alexander's grand-daughter Margaret, Maid of Norway and heiress to the Scottish throne, dies on the return voyage. Coleridge recalls the ballad on a stormy night and startled by the sounds of the storm around him recalls Margaret's voyage as a tragic epithalamium:

O Lady! We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live:
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud...

(COLERIDGE, 1893: 203)

Search/Pessoa will continue to follow the epithalamium theme assiduously in the metaphysical poems of Donne, whose verses echo in Pessoa's own "Epithalamium," published in *English Poems III* (1921), which starts by repeating the image of a maritime voyage: "Open the windows and the doors all wide | Lest aught of night abide, | Or, like a ship's trail in the sea, survive | What made it there to live!" Scholar Virginia J. Tufte traces the epithalamium to folk songs in literary pre-history that sprang out of fertility rites and dramas of life and death. Connection with tragedy is not common and implies disunion, evil spirits, and darkness (TUFTE, 1970: 236-37).

Search identifies with Coleridge's blank gaze at stars in the Western sky, and with his affirmation of an inward life, by underlining the verses "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are! [...] I may not hope from outward forms to win | The passion and the life, whose fountains are within." Search underlines the verse "My shaping spirit of Imagination," in which Coleridge outlines a strategy for poetic creation that reads like a recipe for Pessoa's heteronymism:

For not to think of what I needs must feel,
 But to be still and patient, all I can;
 And haply by abstruse research to steal
 From my own nature all the natural man –
 This was my sole resource, my only plan:
 Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
 And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

(COLERIDGE, 1893: 204)

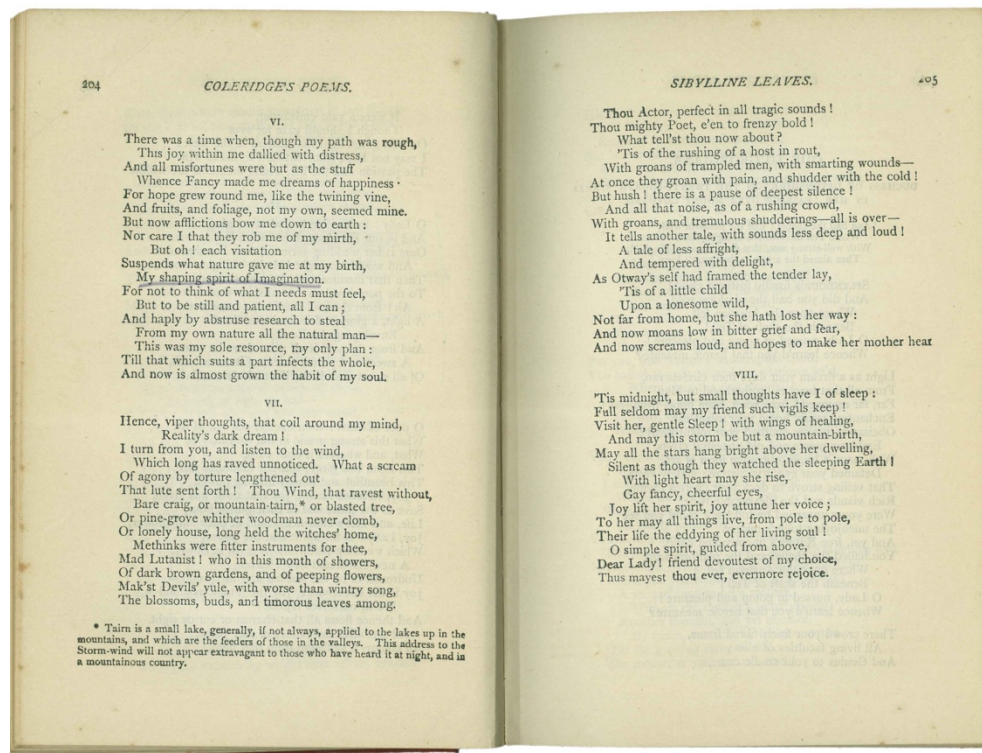


Fig. 5. COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor (1893). *The Poetical Works*, pp. 204-205.

Coleridge compares the stormy wind to the sound of a lute played for witches or devils ("I turn from you, and listen to the wind, | Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream | Of agony by torture lengthened out | That lute sent forth!"). His exclamation "Mad Lutanist!" —who plays "with worse than wintry song"— casts the poet as tragic actor ("Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!") and foreshadows Pessoa's own long unknown and unpublished poem "Mad Fiddler."

Search paid special attention to Tennyson's poem "The Two Voices," which poses the question of life's worth ("Were it not better not to be"). The poem is in the form of a dialogue in which one voice complains of misery and anguish, while the other answers with arguments in favor of continuing and renewing life: "[...] will one beam be less intense, | When thy peculiar difference | Is cancell'd in the world of sense?" Stanzas such as this one marked by Search call attention to the poet's quest for absolute or ideal truth, marked by constant challenges to the terms of existence itself:

To search thro' all I felt or saw,
The springs of life, the depths of awe,
And reach the law within the law: [...]

'Here sits he shaping wings to fly:
His heart forebodes a mystery:
He names the name Eternity.

'That type of Perfect in his mind
In Nature can he nowhere find
He sows himself on every wind. [...]

The end and the beginning vex
His reason: many things perplex,
With motions, checks, and counterchecks. [...]

Ah! sure within him and without,
Could his dark wisdom find it out,
There must be an answer to his doubt, [...].

Search underlines verses that evoke forgotten or potential realities said to lie beyond the power of language to describe, even though they arise from pain and anguish:

'Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams —

'Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where
Such as no language may declare.'

(TENNYSON, 1902: 31-36)

That Search read poetry from a critical distance with a careful ear both for sound and sense is documented by numerous brief comments or judgments written in the margins of some books. In *The Georgics of Virgil*, Book IV (S.E. Winbolt, ed., London, Blackie & Sons, 1902), which is signed "F.A.N. Pessoa, Durban High School, 1904," we found the comment "Examples of sound being an echo to the sense," citing "line 174 Cyclops forging thunderbolts" in an annotation in English on the first blank page (VIRGIL, 1902), giving evidence of an aesthetic goal of merging word, sound, and meaning. In many cases, Search plays the role of reviewer or critic. Alongside the title of Shelley's poem "One word is too often profaned", Search writes "extremely fine;" in the margin of Tennyson's "Two Voices" a single word ("marvellous") and by the poems "To E.L. on his Travels in Greece" and "His Last Sonnet" he scribbles "admirable." Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" is marked "admirably spiritual," the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" "marvelous;" the poems "Fragment of an Ode" and "On Fame" are marked "good;" "Song" is said to be "nonsense, but pretty;" the poem "Fragments" is "true and painful," and "Written on the Blank Space of a Leaf at the End of Chaucer's 'Tale of 'The Flower and the Lefe'" is judged "good, very painful, very sad." Poe's "The City in the Sea" is "very euphonious," while "Dream-Land" is deemed "spiritually stupendous." Finally, the poem titled "The Lake – to" with its theme of loneliness ("So lovely was the loneliness | Of a wild lake, with black rock bound, | And the tall pines that tower around.") is impressed as "Wildly spiritual and greatly characteristic of Poe."

As a reader, Search becomes aware of individual styles among the romantics. In the margin of a stanza of Tennyson's poem "The Two Voices" ("Like an Aeolian harp that wakes | No certain air, but overtakes | Far thought with music that it makes"), Search writes "Shelleyan." Section V of Keats' "Ode to Apollo" is considered to be "Reminiscent of Gray" ("Thou biddest Shakspeare wave his hand | And quickly forward spring | The passions—a terrific band— | And each vibrates the string"); section VII is marked "Reminiscent of Dryden" ("Next thy Tasso's ardent numbers | Float along the pleased air, | Calling youth from idle slumbers, | Rousing them from Pleasure's lair: –"); and in "The Eve of Saint Mark" Search writes "Reminiscent of Milton in 'Allegro' or 'Penseroso'" ("All was gloom, and silent all, | Save now and then the still foot-fall | Of one returning homewards late, | Past the echoing minister gate."), adding a comparison with Espronceda's Spanish verse, "tácitas pisadas huecas" (cf. BARBOSA LÓPEZ, 2016; WIESSE, 2016). Search becomes aware of how one writer can contain and overlap with another. His commitment to the formal traditions of genre is best expressed in parenthetical notes written in the margins critical of Poe's use of italics and quotations in the poems "To Helen" and "To – –": "(Italics and other infusive devices, of the printer, are entirely out of place in poetry [...])" and "(Quotations such as here in 3 places, in inverted commas, are inadmissible in poetry)." Search's formal demands long predate and contradict the use of graphics in Álvaro de Campos' odes, even though one may classify Campos'

use of graphics for effect more of a satire, or performance than an endorsement of graphic expression.

Search absorbs the romantic poets he is reading and models his poetry after them. Once he grasps the romantics' stylistic conventions, Search can imitate them in his own words. His poems exploit romantic conventions as summarized by Freire and expressed in many opening lines of his poems: "How great a thing is thought!" ("Thought," 1904); "My soul — what is my soul?" ("Soul-Symbols," 1906); "Lady, believe me ever at your feet" ("Sonnet," 1907); "I would that I were again a child" ("Regret," 1907); "I feel a rage — ay, a rage!" ("Rage," 1907); "Farewell, farewell for ever" ("Farewell," 1907) (PESSOA, 1999: 32, 84, 106, 108, 168, 132). While repeating these conventions, Search successively alters their content toward a more neo-baroque epistemology, as in the metaphor of life as a play or dream ("think of life but a play," in "Epigram," undated), the mystical and unknowable nature of reality ("Thou wast not put on earth to ask | If there by God, or life, or death," in "Work," 1904), extreme skepticism, the irrationality and confusion of life ("A non-existence deeply within Being," in "Nirvana," 1906), and a nothingness beyond being ("That Nothingness can give a fear, | A sorrow nothing can give here," in "The Curtain," 1906). The longer poems are particularly philosophical and searching: "To a Hand" (1906), "Epitaph" (1907), "In the Street" (1907), "My Life" (1908), "Prayer" (1908), "Flashes of Madness" (1908), "A Winter Day" (undated), and "The Woman in Black" (undated).

Search's excursion through the romantics underlies the depth of his discontent and explores their most expressive dark themes —melancholy, loneliness, delirium, isolation, disillusion, mystery, inaction, horror, death, dreams, pain— accompanied by a special interest in the immaterial or sublime, all that may be unthought, unspoken, and out of space and time. Search employs the metaphor of a street or road to describe his readings of English and American poets as an excursion. In the poem "On the Road," while crossing valleys and plains with the turning of a cart wheel, does Search perhaps foreshadow the screeching wheels of an unseen cart at the end of the play *O Marinheiro*, the flywheel in "Ode Marítima," or the "carroça de tudo pela estrada de nada" [*the cart of everything down the road of nothingness*] in the poem "Tabacaria?" Here, Search idealizes movement as an end in itself, and because the road is infinite the simple cart accelerates on a fast and endless journey in the sun, "A freshness whose soul is motion!" His poem "In the Street" begins with an epigraph from Carlyle's novel *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834) in which the essayist distinguishes himself from Goethe's suicidal hero Werther: "But I, *mein Werther*, sit above it all; I am alone with the stars." Search finds himself cold and alone on "close & sad & solitary streets," isolated from the life he observes in the houses he passes. While admiring the contented families he sees in the windows, Search confesses his difference and exclusion:

But oh! I have within my heart
 Things that cannot keep still –
 A mystic and delirious smart
 That doth a restlessness impart.
 An ache, a woe, an ill;
 A wearied Sisyphus I groan
 Against the world's ironic stone.

(PESSOA, 1997: 112; Nov. 12th, 1907)

He rejects the simple family existence he observes, dreading its restrictions and sense of finality. While questioning his path ("I know not to what I aspire, | Yet know *this* I cannot desire."), Search finds a remarkable ability to perceive and feel what society cannot. Like Coleridge, he exclaims "[...] and in the wind | I wander without cease." In Search's poem "Never have I so deeply felt my exclusion from mankind" (1907), he laments his difference ("At no time have I felt so deep the gulf between me and men") asking, "Is it idiocy, madness or crime, or genius —or what is this pain?" before singing his ignoble, mysterious, and mad song of hopelessness:

Song of the hatred of customs, of creeds, of conventions, of institutions
 Song of madness unpondering to human prostitutions;
 Song of one that better were dead, song of one set aside,
 Song of one that hell and earth conspired and combined to deride.

(PESSOA, 1997: 111; Oct. 16th, 1907)

In "The Woman in Black," Search retraces his life's trajectory ("Too young I learnt to reason coldly") and commutes the romantics' sense of isolation into a modern perception of the absurd: "Find all the world a thing absurd | Because myself, a part of it | Am an absurdity unfit." Yet the quest for the absolute and for occult truths and forces carries Search into another realm, that of "The dream of time and the dream of space [...] in the sense of what more than seems to be," from the poem "To a Hand." Search admits to seeing deeply into the meaning of all things, in this case by examining a hand in which he perceives hidden mysteries: "This hand has a meaning thou doest not know." The wind is raging and streams are flowing, as in Coleridge's evocation of the old ballad, and the examined hand becomes a synecdoche for ultimate mystery in an occult world. With Poe, Search exclaims "What bells are those that say HAND in * | That traverse impossible infinities?" The poem "To a Hand" illustrates how Search appropriates stereotypes, the giving of a hand as a greeting, and attributes to them an adverse meaning. The hand unexpectedly propitiates a metaphysical confrontation with eternal mysteries, the augur of a realm beyond sense and thought. As if transfixed by what he sees in the hand, Search enters a strange and unnatural land of dreams ("Whose waves are hands, whose banks of hands, | Of gardens with trees whose leaves are hands | And a white stiff hand covering the sun's gleam"). His uncanny perception of the absolute – "By a sudden portal in the Visible | I have a glimpse of the Absolute."

(PESSOA, 1997: 63) – foreshadows the revelatory “Ascension of Vasco da Gama” in *Mensagem* (1934), the only full-length book in Portuguese Pessoa published during his lifetime. Search’s esoteric quest for mystical and divine truths both condemns and elevates the poet to an interminable search beyond the everyday world and firmly establishes the theme of mystery and the absolute in his poetry.

By 1908-1909 Search composes more impish, wry, and at times absurdly humorous poems, as in “Trifles – To a Moralist”:

Thou dost say that too soon we grow old,
That all pleasure of earth is but air;
Ay, but tell me, oh moralist cold,
Besides pleasure what pleasure is there?

(PESSOA, 1997: 54; Mar. 1st, 1909)

Or in “The World Offended”:

I said unto the World one day:
“I suspect thee of existence!”

(PESSOA, 1997: 72; Jan. 10th, 1908; cf. Fig. 6)

Another angle of his wry, skeptical humor is found in a few poems exploiting nonsense or absurd humor in a popular style, which will be continued in Pessoa’s *Quadras* [Quatrains] (PESSOA, 1965) as in “The Story of Solomon Waste”,

And things begun and never ended,
And much undone and much intended,
And all things wrong yet never mended:
This is all the story of Solomon Waste.

(PESSOA, 1997: 211; Au. 11th, 1907)

and “Old Jemmy Jones”:

Old Jemmy Jones lived by the docks
Because he had a boat
He wore his boots over his socks
His shirt beneath his coat. [...]

He never spoke but when he talked
When not right he was wrong
When he learnt he knew & when he walked
He was seen to move along.

(PESSOA, 1997: 244; c. 1907)

Search’s usefulness fades with the limitations of decadence, despair, and solitude as aesthetic ideals in the face of radical skepticism, fragmentation, and pursuit of the absolute. As a poet with considerable writings, an adverse style, and

a philosophical position, Search is in a position to join the triumvirate Caeiro-Campos-Reis as a major heteronym, but does not. By 1910, Pessoa brings his poems to an end. And thus also the adverse application of the English poets who supply from the beginnings through the verses of his "irregular shadow," Alexander Search, a repertoire of rhythm, imagery, vocabulary, and theme that continues to be developed by Pessoa after 1910.

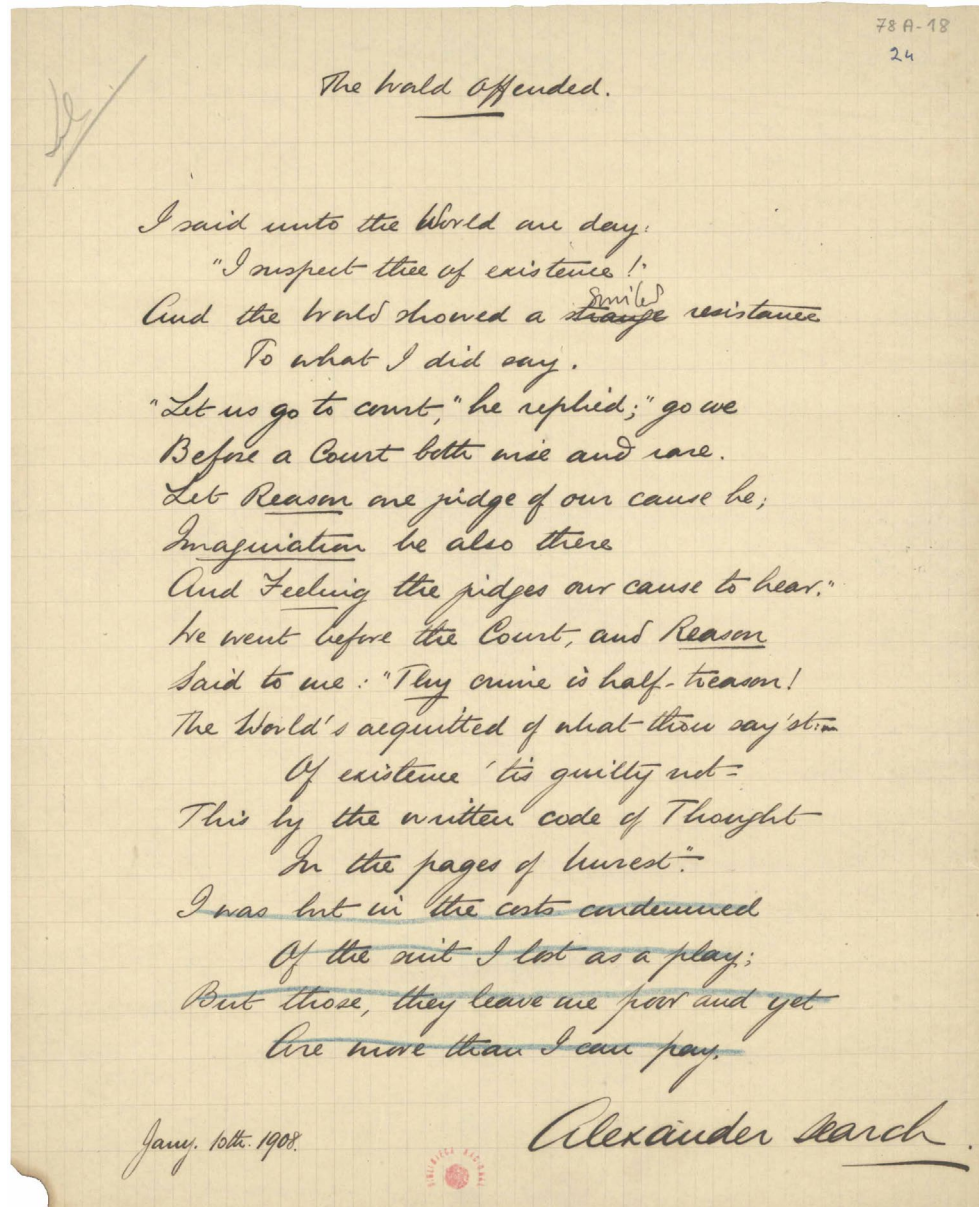


Fig. 6. "The World Offended" (BNP/E3, 78A-18).

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