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**TRANSCENDENT POETIC DWELLING:
EMERSON, CAEIRO, AND AN UNPUBLISHED
ENGLISH POEM**

Patricio Ferrari

Resumo: Quais as razões da atração de Pessoa por Emerson? Só poderemos especular. Seria o seu interesse comum em Thomas Carlyle, amigo de longa data do americano e seu devoto correspondente? Ou seria o conceito de imaginação e do papel do “Poeta” presentes em Emerson? Ou talvez o entendimento transcendentalista da “Natureza”, nas suas implicações radicais sobre a natureza da identidade pessoal? Um dos poemas ingleses, inédito, de Pessoa, escrito quinze dias depois do último poema datado da sequência dos quarenta e nove de Caeiro, ecoa estranhamente o tom, estado de espírito e imagética do poeta pastoril. Por sua vez, os poemas ingleses de Pessoa fazem-nos lembrar a cena no Boston Commons, incluída no primeiro capítulo da obra de Emerson, “Nature”, onde o ser e o ver são uma e a mesma coisa.

Palavras-chave: Pessoa, Caeiro; Arquivo; poesia inglesa inédita de Pessoa; transcendentalismo.

Abstract: We can only speculate as to what drew Pessoa to Emerson's work. Was it their common interest in Thomas Carlyle, the New Englander's life-long British friend and most devoted correspondent? Was it his concept of the imagination and the role of the "Poet"? Or was it perhaps his transcendental understanding of "Nature," with its radical implications for the nature of personal identity? An unpublished English poem written by Pessoa only fifteen days after the last dated poem from Caeiro's forty-nine poem sequence holds an uncanny echo in tone, mood, and imagery with the shepherd poet. In turn, Pessoa's English poem reminds us of Emerson's scene on the Boston Commons, in his first chapter of "Nature," where seeing and being are one and the same.

Keywords: Pessoa, Caeiro; Archive; Unpublished English poetry; transcendentalism.

The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Nature*)¹

¹ From *Nature* ([1836] 1902: 548). First editions are indicated in brackets. The book *Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is extant in Pessoa's private library.

In Pessoa's Archive at the National Library of Portugal, a stained manuscript in the neat legible hand of his schoolboy days in Durban lists a wide range of poets, playwrights, diarists, and letter-writers. Datable to circa 1903, it covers over thirteen centuries of Anglophone literature (English, Irish, Scottish, and American) and includes most of the poets he would discover in South Africa (e.g., Milton, Chatterton, Shelley)² along with some who would leave scant, if any, evidence of having been read during his short-lived prolific career (e.g., William Cullen Bryant and Bayard Taylor).

POETS (continued): - 14⁴.58
 Erasmus Darwin;
 Mrs. Hemans, Mrs. Landor; W. M. Praed; Hood; Sir H. Taylor; Philip Bayley; R. H. Horne;
 W^m Barnes; F. Locker; Tennyson; Browning; Clough; M. Arnold; C. D. Rossetti;
 Christina Rossetti; James Thomson; W^m Morris; Swinburne; Bryant (Wm. Cullen);
 Mrs. Browning; E. A. Poe; Whittier; Longfellow; Bogatzky; Sidney Dobell; Coventry
 Patmore; J. B. Lowell; Bayard Taylor; Sir Henry Taylor; Charles Wolfe; Anna
 Seward; Charles Gonyerson Turner; Sir Aubrey de Vere; Oliver Maddox
 Brown; W. M. Rossetti; Sidney Dobell; A. O'Shaughnessy; F. T. Palgrave;

Fig. 1. National Library of Portugal, Archive 3, 14⁴.58^r.

Erasmus Darwin;

Mrs. Hemans, Mrs. Landor; W[inthrop] M[ackworth] Praed; Hood;
 Sir H[enry] Taylor; Philip Bayley; R[ichard] H[engist] Horne;
 W[illia]m Barnes; F[rederick] Locker; Tennyson; Browning; Clough;
 M[atthew] Arnold; C. D[aniel] G[abriel] Rossetti, *Christina Rossetti*;
 James Thomson; W[illia]m Morris; Swinburne; Bryant (W[illia]m
 Culler); *Mrs Browning*; E[dgar] A[llan] Poe; Whittier; Longfellow;

² The list begins on ms. [14⁴.59^r]. Bogatzky is the only non-Anglophone writer on the list in fig. 1.

Bogatzky; Sidney Dobell; Coventry Patmore; J[ames] R[ussell] Lowell; Bayard Taylor; Sir Henry Taylor; Charles Wolfe; Anna Seward; Charles Tennyson-Turner; Sir Aubrey de Vere; Oliver Madox Brown; W[illiam] M[ichael] Rossetti; Sidney Dobell; A[rthur] O' Shaughnessy; F[rancis] T[urner] Palgrave.

By 1903 Pessoa had already been living in the subtropical British colonial capital of Natal for roughly seven years³ where, significantly, the literary and intellectual milieu he absorbed had been deferring to London for half a century, with firms such as John Sanderson & Co. offering rich, ample catalogues full of titles from the most acclaimed European and American writers – Charles Dickens ranking among the most popular (Christison 111, 114, 116). When Pessoa set sail for Portugal in 1905, inveterate autodidact that he was, he had become familiar with a great many British poets and prose writers as well as most of the eminent nineteenth-century American romantics – not just Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman,⁴ but Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and James Russell Lowell too. Evidence in the Archive and Private Library indicate that Pessoa

³ Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) lived in Durban, South Africa, from February 1896 to August 1905. In August 1901 he returned to Portugal where he remained until September of the following year, embarking once again for Durban. In December 1904 he completed his studies at Durban High School.

⁴ Poe is the only American poet whose complete works Pessoa chose when awarded the Queen Victoria Memorial Prize for Best English Essay on his entrance examination for the University of the Cape of Good Hope. The other volumes he selected were Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, *The Works of Ben Jonson*, *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, and *The Complete Works of Alfred Tennyson*. Although the Prize was designated for 1903, it was awarded on 24 February 1904. The name of Walt Whitman, the main figure of the American Romantic movement, appears marked in the *Nuttal Encyclopaedia* (cf. Wood 1900: 648 and 682). Regarding Pessoa's acquisition of Walt Whiman's poems in the Penny Poets edition as well as the marginalia in this book see Brown (1987) and Ferrari (2011).

eventually turned to specific works of these last three poets.⁵ In all likelihood his quotations, references, and translations occurred between 1910 and 1913. Yet these same New England poets had caught Pessoa's attention earlier, at least momentarily, as markings in his much-consulted *Nuttal Encyclopaedia* (Wood 1900) confirm.⁶

Of interest to me in the pages that follow is the name of another New England writer – Ralph Waldo Emerson – whose entry was also marked with a cross in the *Nuttal Encyclopaedia*. A memorandum headed “Take,” datable from the summer of 1905 – where we find “Emerson's Works” listed (cf. Annex 1) – suggests that the writing of the philosopher and poet from Concord (Massachusetts) accompanied Pessoa on the Herzog back to Lisbon. We can only speculate as to what drew Pessoa to his work. Was it their common interest in Thomas Carlyle, Emerson's life-long English friend and most devoted correspondent? Was it his concept of the imagination and the role of the poet? Or was it perhaps his transcendental understanding of Nature, with its radical implications for the nature of personal identity? Maybe it was nothing more – or less – than Pessoa's identification with the man himself as an extraordinary mind whose voracious reading habits and journal entries reveal so many affinities with Pessoa's own.⁷

⁵ The title of Longfellow's poem “The Jewish Cemetery at Newport” along with lines from the last two stanzas are marked in Pessoa's own hand (cf. Longfellow 8 and 302-304); Pessoa translated a phrase by Whittier and inserted it in a fragment destined to the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy (cf. *Escritos sobre Gênio e Loucura* II, 346); he also translated Whittier's “Barbara Frietchie” and Lowell's “On a Portrait of Dante by Giotto,” both of them published in *A Biblioteca Internacional de Obras Célebres* in 1911 (cf. Campos); Pessoa made a reference to Lowell in a comparative piece between Hugo and Poe (cf. *Apreciações literárias* 145).

⁶ Likely acquired between the end of 1901 and 1902. On page 409 we read the year “1902” in Pessoa's own hand.

⁷ Emerson's works circulated in Eastern Cape at least as early as the 1870s. The South African author and anti-war campaigner Olive Schreiner, for instance, referred to him in over twenty letters and postcards – in some cases even quoting passages from essays and lines of verse. See the Olive Schreiner Letters Online catalogue (consulted on 13 May 2015). It is not far-fetched to believe that public

Tantalizing as it is to speculate, in all probability we will never know. And yet we do know that Pessoa read the description of Emerson in the *Nuttal Encyclopaedia* as “the acknowledged head of the literary men of America” (Wood 1900: 221). Furthermore, we can make an astonishing inference based on the following diary entry that Pessoa jotted down as late as February 15th 1913: “Cheguei a casa pelas 2h. . . . Na cama quase que não li. Folheeii, sem ler, o Emerson” (*Páginas íntimas e de auto-interpretação* 1966: 33). A telling note from someone who rarely, if ever, reminisced about a reading experience so nonchalantly. It is as if Pessoa refers here to an old friend’s company whose writings he has read closely and felt deeply. Exactly what pages he browsed that Saturday winter night we may never discover. But of one thing we can be fairly confident – namely, that Emerson mattered.

Nearly three decades ago, Susan Margaret Brown claimed that Emerson – Whitman’s self-confessed Master – played a key role in the creation of Caieiro, suggesting that Emerson’s seminal essay “Nature,” with its Introduction and eight separate chapters, is an indispensable intertext for the shepherd poet’s sequence *O Guardador de Rebanhos*:

Emerson’s delineation of the new poet-God, as outlined in his essay “Nature,” is intimately connected to the kind of poet Caieiro is meant to represent. The link between Whitman and Caieiro therefore needs to be viewed in terms of their common roots in Emerson’s transcendental idealism; his vision of a fluid and spiritual Nature, continually in the process of transformation and transforming what comes into contact with it. Representing the new arrival of Adamic man, both poets teach the knowledge

readings and lectures held in different South African provinces evoked Emerson’s thought, particularly in regards to the philosopher’s stance on the abolition of slavery (cf. Turner).

of the Emersonian Gnosis which, as Bloom argues (1981: 177), is to deny one's belatedness by defying tradition in order to see the world as if for the first time. (Brown 157)

Alberto Caeiro – Emerson's "Orphic poet"⁸ – would possess an "original relation to the universe" (Emerson 547) by virtue of an absolute solitude within the pastoral oasis of his poems: the "menino Jesus" in Caeiro's Poem VIII being an inner companion, the self-reflecting image of his divine status as the newly resurrected pagan Orpheus. As Emerson reminds us in the closing chapter of "Nature": "Infancy is the perpetual Messiah, which comes into the arms of fallen men, and pleads with them to return to paradise" (*idem*: 563). The function of the "menino Jesus" as *infant Messiah*, as Brown points out, is to bequeath upon Caeiro the status of a transcendental (visionary) poet, making it possible for him to walk the earth *as if for the first time*, naming all he sees. In this sense Caeiro too is a "true re-commencer, or Adam in the garden," just as Emerson had described the *poet* in the essay "Poetry and Imagination" (heavily-marked in Pessoa's copy):

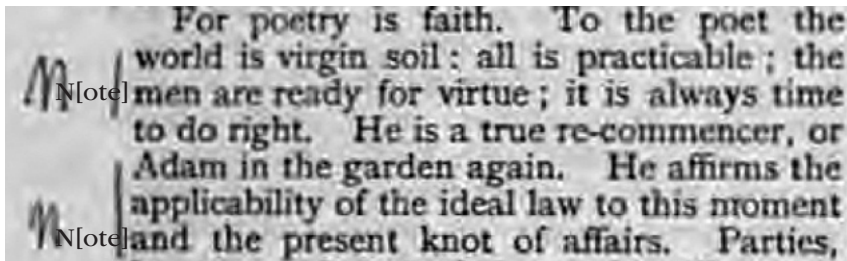


Fig. 2. *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1902. Detail of page 436. Marginalia and markings inscribed in Pessoa's own hand; "Poetry and Imagination," essay published in 1872.

⁸ The passage concerning the "Orphic poet," marked by Pessoa (cf. Emerson 563), was first mentioned by Susan M. Brown in her paper "O Deus que Dorme" given at the International Pessoa Conference held in Lisbon on 28-30 November 2013. For other approximations between Emerson and Pessoa see Edinger, Vieira, Monteiro, Ramalho, and Boscaglia.

The following previously unpublished English poem written by Pessoa and dated May 25th, 1914 (i.e., only fifteen days after the last dated poem from Caeiro's forty-nine poem sequence)⁹ holds uncanny echoes in tone, mood, and imagery with the shepherd poet as described above, in the light of Emerson:

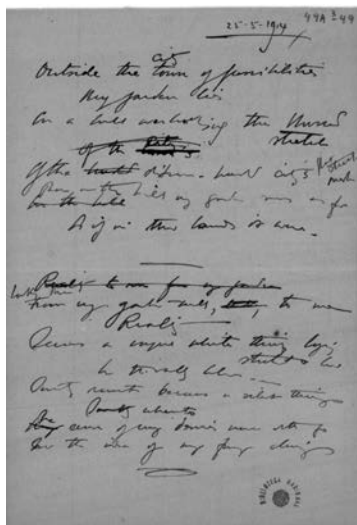


Fig. 3. National Library of Portugal, Archive 3, 49A³-49r.¹¹

Outside the city of possibilities
 My garden lies
 On a hill overlooking the blurred stretch
 Of the distance-hushed city's flat street-mesh
 There on the hill my garden seems as far
 As if in those lands it were.

—————

Looking down from my garden-wall to me
 Reality
 Seems a vague white thing lying stretched & low
 On the valley below. . .
 Something remote because a silent thing
 Something whereto
 The sense of my desires never doth go
 Nor the idea of my fancy cling.¹⁰

⁹ In Poem XLVI, the last one dated in the sequence, we read “Sou o Descobridor da Natureza. / Sou o Argonauta das sensações verdadeiras. / Trago ao Universo um novo Universo” (*Poemas de Alberto Caeiro* 63).

¹⁰ Only the last variant is given above: l. 1 *the town* [↑ *city*] of / l. 4 <Of the> <town's> [↑ <City's>]] Below this initial start the author penned the line *Of the <bushed> distance-bushed city's* [↑ *flat street-]mesh* / l. 5 <On the hill> [↑ *There on the hill my garden seems as far*] // l. 7 <Reality to me from my garden>] Below this line the author wrote [↑ *Looking down*] *From my garden-wall*, <to [illegible word]>, to me / l. 13 <My> [↑ *The*] sense.

¹¹ Specific places in Caeiro that parallel this garden scene on a hill occur in the opening poem of the sequence and then, further on, in poems VIII and XXX.

Alone at the top of the hill and gazing below from behind the wall of garden¹², the lyrical “I” erases everything from the horizon but a “vague white thing,” something “remote” and “silent.” This “something” (emphasized by its lexical repetition) is named “Reality,” even though its description suggests something dreamlike and unreal. It is into this “something” outside of space and time that the gaze of the speaker gradually dissolves, collapsing all boundaries and distinctions between inner and outer. Emerson enacts something similar in the first chapter of “Nature” where he gives an account of the scene on the Boston Common:

Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; *I am nothing; I see all*; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, – master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. (Emerson 548-549)
[Italics are mine]

In the latter, we find the following lines: “Vivo no meio d’um outeiro / N’uma casa caiada e sôsinha” (*Poemas de Alberto Caeiro* 54).

¹² In a letter to Carlyle, dated May 14th, 1846, Emerson writes: “I too have a new plaything, the best I ever had, – a wood-lot. Last Fall I bought a piece of more than forty acres, on the border of a little lake half a mile wide and more, called Walden Pond, – a place to which my feet have for years been accustomed to bring me once or twice a week at all seasons. . . . At a good distance in from the shore the land rises to a rocky head, perhaps sixty feet above the water. Thereon I think to place a hut; perhaps it will have two stories and be a petty tower, looking to Monadnoc and other New Hampshire Mountains. There I hope to go with book and pen when good hours come” (*Correspondence* 123-124). Emerson’s “plaything” is portrayed in “My Garden,” poem published a little over two decades after the letter, and included in the selection of poems in *Works*: “If I could put my woods in song, / And tell what’s there enjoyed, / All men would to my gardens throng, / And leave the cities void // . . .” (538). This garden on the hill was the secluded spot in Massachusetts where Henry David Thoreau lived for approximately two years. The name “Thoreau” appears in one of Pessoa’s notebook datable to 1911-1913 in what seems to be a list of books to sell or already sold (cf. Pizarro, Ferrari and Cardiello 121).

What makes “Outside the City of Possibilities”¹³ such a stunning discovery is its clarification of an ambiguity in the *Guardador de Rebanhos*: it makes the erasure of Reality explicit so that, if we read it in connection with the Portuguese poems, we are forced to recognize the transparent and ultimately unreal nature of everything related to Caeiro’s reality, including his own – the only real *thing* in the sequence, paradoxically, being the appearance of the “menino Jesus” in the dream at the outset of Poem VIII. The solitude of nothingness of the lyrical “I” – whether in the English poem above or in *O Guardador de Rebanhos* – strongly echoes Emerson’s experience as a “transparent eyeball,” in which being and seeing are one and the same. This is the stance of Caeiro, and it is brought into sharper focus in this one small poem here published for the first time.¹⁴

¹³ Pessoa had envisaged including this poem in a project entitled *Antinous and Other Poems* (cf. Annex 2).

¹⁴ A further remark on Emerson in Pessoa’s Private Library: In Robertson’s *Modern Humanists* there is an entire chapter dedicated to Emerson (cf. Vieira). In this book, signed “Fernando Pessoa” and purchased *post* early September 1916, we read the following passage underlined by Pessoa: “he [Emerson] is the most important English prose writer of the century” (129).

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Annex 1

[National Library of Portugal, Archive 3, 93A-67]

Take:

Boirac:

Laing: "Modern Science & Modern Thought."

Greg: "Creed of Christendom."

Haeckel: "Riddle of the Universe."

Darwin: "Origin of Species."

Drummond: "Natural Law in the Spiritual World."

Child:

Lewes: "Science and Speculation."
Vallet: "Histoire de la Philosophie."
Malapert: "Le Caractère."
Corra: "La Philosophie positive."
Emerson's Works.
Spectator.
Lawrence Sterne's Works.
Tennyson's Poems.

NOTES

Loose piece of paper written in black ink. Datable to February-August of 1905. Besides Emerson's Works, the following books from this list are extant in Pessoa's Private Library: Modern Science & Modern Thought by Laing, Creed of Christendom by Greg, Natural Law in the Spiritual World by Drummond, La Philosophie positive by Corra, the Spectator and Tennyson's Poems. Cf. Pizarro, Ferrari, and Cardiello (2010). Fac-similed without transcription in Severino (1983: 297).

Annex 2

[National Library of Portugal, Archive 3, 31-91]

ANTINOUS and Other Poems.

Antinous.
The Mad Fiddler: The Island.
Elsewhere.
...
O river too serene.

Songs for Panthea.

? Penthesilea.

Above the City:

Above the City of Possibilities. . .

. . .

Prothalamium.

A Summer of Ecstasy.

NOTES

Typescript in red (only the book title and question mark) and green ink. Project datable to 1916. 1915 was the year in which the first draft of Antinous was conceived and "Songs for Panthea" is dated 10 November 1916. The latter, eventually titled "Song," was included in The Mad Fiddler along with "The Island," "Elsewhere," "O River Too Serene," and "A Summer Ecstasy" (cf. The Mad Fiddler 1999). Above the City, just like The Mad Fiddler, was a title comprising more than one poem. Cf. dots below "Above the City of Possibilities." The title of the poem "Songs for Panthea," along with the titles The Mad Fiddler and Distant Music, appears crossed-out in an unpublished list [National Library of Portugal, Archive 3, 52-3]. "Penthesilea" (title and inclusion doubted) and "Prothalamium" have not been located in Pessoa's Archive. Typescript facsimiled in Terlinden (1990: 196) without a transcription.