

## OCCULTISM AND MEDIUMSHIP IN FERNANDO PESSOA

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## ABSTRACT

This work is the result of a research on the influence that the occultism had on the work of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. To delimitate the study, we selected papers of Fernando Pessoa, which suggested that the poet considered himself medium, and hence influenced his work, building his depersonalization. This work presents, thus, as main objective to analyze personal papers of Fernando Pessoa, whose outstanding characteristic is the presence of occultism and the supposed mediumship defended by him in response to non-literary and heteronymic manifestations. To this

end, I focused on specific objectives, which are: a) to study the speech of Fernando Pessoa on his supposed mediumship / occultism b) to analyze specific texts that are, for the poet, mediumistic manifestations c) to study excerpts from a set of personal letters in which Fernando Pessoa suggested being a medium. It is true that this dissertation will address many discussions already made by scholars and specialists in Fernando Pessoa, but we consider the possibility to deepen issues and contribute to the critical fortune of the poet.

**KEYWORDS:** Occultism, Fernando Pessoa, heteronym, mediumship

## OCCULTISMO E MEDIUNIDADE EM FERNANDO PESSOA

## RESUMO

Este trabalho trata-se do resultado de uma pesquisa sobre a influência que o Ocultismo teve na obra do poeta português Fernando Pessoa. Para delimitarmos o estudo, selecionamos documentos de Fernando Pessoa, os quais vieram a sugerir que o poeta se considerava médium e isso pode ter influenciado sua obra, a construção de sua despersonalização. Este trabalho apresenta, assim, como objetivo principal: analisar documentos pessoais de Fernando Pessoa, cuja característica marcante é a presença do ocultismo e da suposta mediunidade defendida por ele como resposta a manifestações não-

literárias e heteronímicas. Para tanto, concentrei-me em objetivos específicos, quais sejam: a) estudar o discurso de Fernando Pessoa sobre sua suposta mediunidade/ocultismo; b) analisar específicos textos que são, para o poeta, manifestações mediúnicas; c) estudar excertos de um conjunto de cartas pessoais em que Fernando Pessoa sugeria ser médium. É certo que essa dissertação tocará em muitas discussões já postas por estudiosos e especialistas de Fernando Pessoa, mas consideramos a possibilidade de aprofundar questões e contribuir para a fortuna crítica do poeta.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Ocultismo, Fernando Pessoa, heteronímia, mediunidade.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The genesis of this research starts outside of the academic context, in contact with the work of the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa. This fact occurred in the year 2003 – informally – and is extended to the present days – now in more academic format. These ten years of studies on Fernando Pessoa showed much discovery and theoretical-philosophical concerns, on which I will detail more below.

As well as all readers of Fernando Pessoa, I took advantage of moves that mark the "depersonalization" of the Portuguese author. However, still in 2003, I read a book about occult texts from Fernando Pessoa that aroused in me the interest of later doing a research about the occultism's influence on the personal work. Therefore, the research has began with the reading of the work of author Fernando Pessoa until then published and accessible to me. Books, such as *O Livro do Desassossego*, *O Eu Profundo e os Outros Eus*, *Poesias Ocultistas de Fernando Pessoa*, *Escritos Autobiográficos*, *Automáticos e de Reflexão Pessoal*. Prose writing, such as *A procura da Verdade Oculta: textos filosóficos e esotéricos*, *Escritos Íntimos*, *Cartas e páginas autobiográficas*, *O esoterismo de Fernando Pessoa*, *Fernando Pessoa e a Filosofia Hermética*, *Fernando Pessoa: o Ocultismo na Ótica Poética* – were important tools in this research phase. It is reasonable to perceive that, as books with unpublished texts of Fernando Pessoa were published, these were acquired.

It is noteworthy that, as a way to strengthen the main purpose of the survey, some biographies were acquired, such as *A Vida Plural de Fernando Pessoa*, by Ángel Crespo and *Fernando Pessoa: uma quase autobiografia*, by José Paulo Cavalcanti Filho. This last acquired more recently.

Completed these steps, it became imperative to deep into the world of the *occult sciences*, in order to understand this mystical bias of the poet. I used works such as *A Voz do Silêncio*, by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky - translated by Pessoa – *A Doutrina Secreta*, *O Livro de Dzyan*, *A Visão Teosófica das Origens do Homem*, by the same author, and *Ocultismo, Semi-ocultismo e Pseudo-ocultismo and Os Ideais da Teosofia*, both works by Annie Besant. In the meantime, through the readings made, I realized that many scholars left aside the membership questions of Fernando Pessoa to the occult thought, what seemed a kind of marginalization to which the poet's scholar could not allow. I am not defending here that any scholar of Fernando Pessoa has to concentrate at that point, but that the literature on the poet must also embrace this issue, by being present in his own writing of the Portuguese. The readings made are, in its great majority, the same as Fernando Pessoa said to have performed.

In this work, we run away to the classic model of exposing theories that would be used in the analysis of the selected documents. There is a mixture between the used theories and data that compose our work. Thus, we will avoid a repetition, sometimes unnecessary. In the theoretical foundation, we are going to do an exhibition about the occultism and theosophy to understand the relationship of Fernando Pessoa with them, bringing then analyses on texts called "automatic writing". Therefore, we will reserve in the section of results and discussion, a higher questioning of the poet's personal mail.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

We decided in this work for a documentary-interpretative research, since the research studies the texts (documents) of Fernando Pessoa that have a relationship with the occultism and points to the poet's imaginary, who claimed being a medium. We think reasonable to call the Pessoa texts of "documents", because it would fit into the concept presented by Houaiss (2008), which would be any object that demonstrate, clarify, prove or register a fact, and by Phillips (1974) *apud* Sá-Silva; Almeida; Guindani (2009): "Any written materials that could be used as a source of information about human behavior" (p. 23). Bravo (1991) also conceives to the word *documents* "all the achievements produced by the human that evidence their action and may reveal their ideas, opinions and ways of acting and living" (p. 57). Thereby, the documents elected to this work are composed by a set of texts in which Fernando Pessoa talks about himself.

We followed the paths of the qualitative research that, according to Marconi and Lakatos (2010) "is concerned with analyzing and interpreting deeper aspects, describing the complexity of human behavior. Provides more detailed analysis about investigations, habits, attitudes, behavioral trends, etc" (p. 269). In this way, I begin glimpsing this work is a research of qualitative nature, because it will not concern about the amount of facts, but with a complex analysis of the selected data for the research.

The data for analysis form a set of documents. The basis for consultation is not available in a specific book, but permeates the entire work of Fernando Pessoa. This is justified because we decided doing a thematic approach, not from a specific book or text genre. As follows in Table 1.

**Table 1: Elected documents for analysis. Caicó, June 2013.**

Letter to aunt Anica - 6/24/1916	Personal correspondence
Texts called "automatic writing"	Drafts
Personal notes	Texts

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Words as occultism, esotericism and theosophy should no longer be exploited, even minimally, because with them our poet formed an imaginary around mediumship.

The occultism, according to Ribeiro (2009), as its self-meaning impose to us, is related to the study of what is hidden, what cannot or should not be explained by science. Thus, it studies since phenomena related to physics, biology, chemistry and natural sciences as a whole, and even religions, mythologies, witchcraft, numerology, astrology, palmistry and all existing or upcoming esoteric phenomena. In the occult sciences, in a little more restricted sense, the word "occult" refers to an "undisclosed knowledge" or "secret knowledge", as opposed to "orthodox knowledge" or that is associated to conventional science.

Ribeiro (2009) states that the esotericism, in turn, is a doctrine that seeks to reach the truth, which is not limited to the religious truth, but covers the scientific and philosophical fields. Despite being fetched, this fact should be restricted only to a few people who come into initiation process or preparation for, through varying initiation degrees, being able to keep in touch with the truth, which would let the human being to the self-knowledge, supreme wisdom and enlightenment. This

last is religious: heaven, for Christians; Nirvana, for some Eastern religions, such as Buddhism; and enlightenment, for esotericism.

Theosophy, according to Ribeiro (2009), refers to a set of religious and philosophical doctrines teachings that would lead the human being to contact with increasingly evolved beings, which would lead to the evolution of own supporter, which would seek always the enlightenment, even if, for that, he/she has to abstain from a mundane and futile life. According to Theosophy, planetary chains would exist and evolve, and such chains have spirits with different development levels, in that the most evolved "reincarnate" from time to time in order to guide others to the evolution (enlightenment). Helena Petrovna Blavastky, whose work *The voice of the silence* was translated by Fernando Pessoa, was the founder, or probably the systematizer of Theosophy in the West.

Concluded this brief history, it is necessary to clarify about the concept of mediumship, since this work uses this expression as a subject of study and research in the writings of Fernando Pessoa. Such use will be done in the sense used by Klimo (1998), which states that mediumship is "communication coming from a source that is considered existing on a whole different level or dimension beyond the physical known reality and neither would come from the mind of the medium" (p. 78). Therefore, it is inferred from the quote of Klimo that the mediumship process is inserted within the context of the occult sciences, recognized as possible also in Theosophical philosophy.

The occultism was object of study for Fernando Pessoa, as he said supporter of astrology and secret societies, besides considered assiduous practitioner of other philosophical and religious currents, such as Theosophy. It is worth pointing out that talk about occultism does not mean talk about a religion, as argues Mesquita (1996):

Another aspect that should be clarified regarding the occultism is that it is not confused, at any time, with religion. Its fundamental difference lies in the fact that religions have rigid dogmatic structures attached to any ideology that supports it, with allegorical explanations about the universe, while the occultism seeks an individual truth for man, free from dogma or specific mythology. Unlike religions, the latter can only be used as a symbolic stimulus for a ritual. (MESQUITA, 1996, p. 19)

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon realizing the conclusions suggested by some texts left by Fernando Pessoa, we began to understand some of the main fantasies of life of this enigmatic poet: he represented himself as a medium and defended this position as responsible for his literary creation, at certain moments. But it is very interesting to go back a while to the poet's childhood, in order to seek not only a relationship between the poet's life and his art, but the phenomena that disturb his reading about the creative process.

According to Jung (1991), the *identity* of a human being is due to your genealogical descent or, at least, is influenced mainly by the grandparents. On this basis, we must not neglect the presence of the great-aunt (Anica) in the life of Fernando Pessoa. That is what it is deduced from some texts stored in the famous Pessoa's ark, in which the poet relates about mediumistic practices of his great-aunt. The letter directed to *Aunt Anica* dates from June 24, 1916, and cannot

be unreported, mainly because it was written at a time when, coincidentally or not, the heteronymic production has been intensified:

Towards the end of March (or thereabouts), I began to be a medium. Imagine! I, who (as you will remember) was basically a hindrance in the quasi-séances we used to hold, have suddenly become a novice at automatic writing. (...) That first session began with me writing the signature (which I know quite well) of 'Manuel Gualdino da Cunha'. I wasn't thinking in the least of Uncle Manuel. (...) rarely are the 'communications' intelligible. (...) And there's a very odd, irritating tendency for my questions to be answered by *numbers*; and also a tendency to *draw*. (...) The drawings aren't of objects but of Masonic and Kabbalistic signs, occult symbols and the like, which I find a bit unsettling. It's nothing like yours or Maria's automatic writing, which comes out as a smooth narrative, a series of answers in coherent language. Mine is less clear, but much more mysterious. (...) (QUADROS, 1986, p. 127-131)

It is hardly understandable the concept of being "hindrance in the quasi-séances", but it is, in fact, noted that his aunt Anica was reputedly medium. Suddenly, the poet started being a medium, through what is known as "automatic writing". However, the mediumistic manifestation were mysterious and totally different from his aunt's writing. An interesting question is the fact that the 'communications' were rarely understandable and the presence of numbers and drawings related to Freemasonry and Kabbalah, what makes us recall the *religious position* already assumed: faithful "to the secret tradition of Christianity, which has intimate relations with the secret tradition in Israel (the Holy Kabbalah) and with the hidden essence of Freemasonry". There is a mixture of currents – not naively – and it seemed that Fernando Pessoa "took" the best there was in one and another.

We highlighted here (Figure 1) one of these manifestations. It is one of the manuscripts signed by Balsamo – Count of Cagliostro-(partly in French and partly in English) found in mythical Pessoa's ark. The manuscript – here with our emphasis – is found in PESSOA, F. (1987, p. 221)

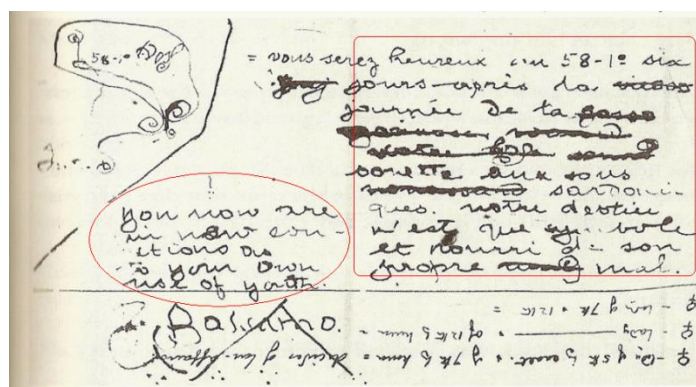


Figure 1 – Automatic writing signed by count of Cagliostro.

It is significant to note that, as well as in most automatic writings, this manuscript presents a predominantly non-literary dialog sequence, however, there are only answers - questions are not written because it is like the poet asked orally and the answers come written and signed. Another relevant point is the non-literality of these manuscripts. They present loose or empty answers sometimes, and others with everyday content ranging from what the poet did or advices on

publication date of texts until predictions about a woman who would maintain a sexual relationship – ritualistic with Fernando Pessoa.

And proceed the letter to "Aunt Anica":

I should say that the presumed spirit of Uncle Manuel has not reappeared in writing (or in any other way). The communications I get now are, so to speak, anonymous, and whenever I ask "Who is speaking?" I'm answered by drawings or numbers. (...) Don't imagine that I'm going mad. No: I feel mentally more stable than I ever have. (...) This isn't how the powers of a medium usually develop. I know enough of the occult sciences to realize that the so-called higher senses are being aroused in me for some mysterious purpose and that the unknown Master (...) I haven't told you everything, because not everything can be told, but I've told enough for you to have a rough idea. Maybe you think I'm just crazy, though I suspect not. These things aren't normal, but they aren't *unnatural*." (PESSOA, 1996, p. 10-12)

Such reports suggest the influence that the great-aunt of Fernando Pessoa had about the "identity" construction of the young Pessoa: marked by the presence of others. He grew up believing owning characteristics of an authentic medium, believing to communicate with deceased spirits, receiving message from superior *Masters*, accomplishing missions while publishing writings and "instructions arising from their lips", as stated in the poem *Unknown king's emissary*:

An unknown king's emissary,  
I meet instruction reports from beyond,  
and the severe sentences that come to my lips  
Sound me to another and anomalous sense...

Famous "automatic writings" – that would be alleged writings directed by spirits - are cited by scholars of Fernando Pessoa. Zenith (2006), for example, states about these alleged spirits:

All these and other communicating spirits (for example Henry Lovell or Marnoco e Sousa) wrote with children's handwriting that had little in common with the usual letter of Pessoa. This made them questions, which we can often suggest based on received replies. (ZENHIT, 2006, p.210)

Maybe Pessoa was, based on children's writing, seeking what he followed next to the aunt Anica in childhood. To relate, on his clipboard, all trace of his "hindrance" in the sessions. Let us observe some of them, whose effort of Pessoa's "spirit" was in the writing process, in the writing content, in the writing emptiness, in the symbolic cracks of the manifestation of a presumed mediumship.

Certainly some people do not see in these manuscripts a literary value - we also do not assume they have – but it is worth for us to evaluate through the wires that interconnect them to the mediumship theme and, almost covertly, to the heteronym.

An example of these automatic writings is below, which are in PESSOA, F. (1987, p. 221):

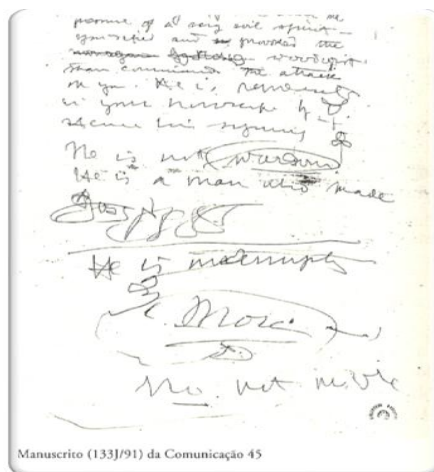


Figure 2 – Automatic writing signed by More.

"You're not crazy, you don't even look to be. You're under pressure of a very evil spirit - you have challenged and provoked the voodoo believer who heads the attack against you. He is represented in your horoscope by ?. Hence your signature ?.

He is the man who made  
Joseph,  
He's interrupting me\*.  
More  
No. Nothing else.

*\*Interrupting the handwriting, which at this point of the manuscript becomes very erratic.*" (PESSOA, F. 1987, p.221)

It is worth pointing out that these automatic writings were not published by Fernando Pessoa, but by scholars who were, little by little, "discovering" texts from the poet in a chest, which was in possession of his family.

We see, in the manuscript, a dialogue between Henry More and Fernando Pessoa. In that, the "spirit" of More communicates to Pessoa that is being interrupted in its communication by other "spirit", the voodoo believer, and the writing seems to be a little difficult to be realized. According to Crespo (1990), "the Henry More subscriber this mediumistic communication seems to be the famous 17th century English philosopher who dabbled of the witchcraft phenomena and occultism and that was reputed to belong to the Rosicrucian fraternity" (p. 153). About Henry More, Zenith (2006) states that it is "Dr. Henry More (1614-1687), one of the so-called Platonic of Cambridge. In the last years of his time on Earth, the Dr. More was really interested in the Kabbalah, being even a supporter of Rosy Croix, according to the book about this order that very impressed Pessoa" (p. 210). It seemed, therefore, to be considered by Fernando Pessoa, maybe, a great master, once it was a "spirit" very present, based on we see in other manuscripts?

We see by the masterful hands of Fernando Pessoa a special summary of how a "started by direct communication from master to disciple, in three smaller degrees of (apparently extinct) Knights Templar of Portugal" was described (QUADROS, 1986, p. 252).

These are followed by other manuscripts no less curious, like this, that has, in a single piece of paper, totally different handwritings and with responses, from which infers that Fernando Pessoa would have made questions, as described in PESSOA, F. (1987, p. 224)

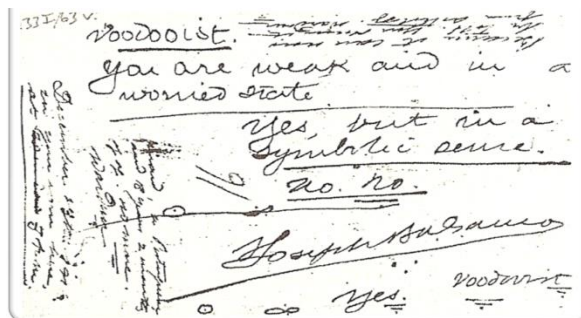


Figure 3 – Automatic writing signed by More.

We could imagine that there would be no doubt for Fernando Pessoa that the phenomena that was affecting him would be of mediumistic order, also recognizing that such phenomena would not be normal, but also would not be unnatural.

The fact of Fernando Pessoa "reveal" this tendency to his aunt is justified by the fact that she also considers herself medium, so the poet would not be stigmatized, and would not be ridiculed being called schizophrenic.

These *communications*, authentic or not, are evidence of how much was strong in the poet the idea of being a medium, because he wrote from him to him about banal things, customary, about the occultism, intimacy, as if the caller was a spiritual being. Richard Zenith (2006), in a preface to the book "Fernando Pessoa: autobiographical, automatic and personal reflection writings" says:

Although it is likely that some less automatic writings and more developed of Pessoa (...) have been produced for the benefit of future readers, the vast majority was spiritualist, without literary pretensions. (ZENHIT, 2006, p.209)

To announce that "was spiritualist" does not mean they were true spiritist communications. With this, Zenith makes us discuss a matter, that Fernando Pessoa was medium of himself, there were no messages for others. It seemed like an internal fight, whose resolution could be the one known later, a subject marked by the presence of a poetic manifestation that haunts the world.

In the case of our poet, his mediumship was, imaginarily, of generational order, originating from his aunt. Noting that Fernando Pessoa "considered" himself medium – in the sense that he behaved like one – is important, since we can thus understand some creations. Therefore, it is necessary to present some intriguing "creations" of the poet, such as the own mother's heteronym [D. Maria Magdalena Pinheiro Nogueira Pessoa](#), who wrote a signed letter addressed to her son, who treated soon to scratch the mother's name, as described in the video released by Globo News to commemorate the 120th anniversary of Fernando Pessoa's birth.

For the literary criticism, the concept of "heteronym" is an artistic process that consists in creating different personalities of the author and write in their names, so the writings of D. Magdalena, Uncle Cunha and Henry More, Frei Maurice, and Cagliostro do not frame under such concept, because these people demonstrably existed, which could not be framed only as a



heteronym phenomenon in service of literary creation. The cited cases are said by the poet as mediumship cases.

## 5 CONCLUSION

An author's work is influenced by his life, his lectures, his religious beliefs, his historical context. We know, for example, how the historical and social context of the religious contradiction in Europe in the 15th and 16th century have influenced baroque art. The fact Fernando Pessoa has aroused the idea of being a medium since early age and this has accompanied him until his last days had great importance in his work. This occurs since the "creation" of heteronyms, passing by the occultist trend until the orthonymous work, which is, basically, the search for authenticity, of being himself, the acceptance of a painful mission given by Masters.

It is obvious that the Pessoa's work is not only related to the interpretation that the poet considered himself a medium. He has transcended these limits, as made art from his interior, and art and poetry do not belong whose make it, but whose needs it. For that reason, Fernando Pessoa never belonged to himself, but became to the world, to the others in every sense. And if, to find ourselves, we have to lose the real Fernando Pessoa, let's do it, because he never made it a point to be found; and like all mystery, he left footprints to the readers follow these paradoxical tracks, because then we could go on the other bias, for example psychiatric and so many other possible, to increasingly (un)know(n) Fernando Pessoa more closer.

Would have been Fernando Pessoa a medium? To whom it may concern, the forcefulness and the likely inappropriate question is required.

Fernando Pessoa is not finalized, because he places the man in his proper place. An internal chaos, transfigured as an unit.

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