

Pessoa and Keats

ABSTRACT: This article examines the dialogue between Fernando Pessoa and the English romantic poet John Keats (1795–1821). It begins by exploring Pessoa's poetic engagement with Keats's verse, before moving on to an analysis of his assimilation of Keats's most influential aesthetic ideas, above all those of the *chameleon poet* and *negative capability*, which I argue were a significant, yet hitherto largely unexplored, influence on Pessoa's heteronymic invention.

KEYWORDS: influence, Pessoa, Keats, private library

Several of Fernando Pessoa's poems, particularly his adolescent production in English, as well as his ideas about poetry, are indebted to his immersion in English Romantic era literature during his formative years. This article will explore Pessoa's creative and theoretical debt to the poet-critic John Keats (1795–1821), following in the footsteps of pioneering studies about this fertile dialogue by such critics as George Monteiro, Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, and António M. Feijó.¹ It will begin by examining an instance of poetic influence, before going on to consider Pessoa's wider assimilation, in the context of his thinking on the heteronyms, of Keats's aesthetic ideals.

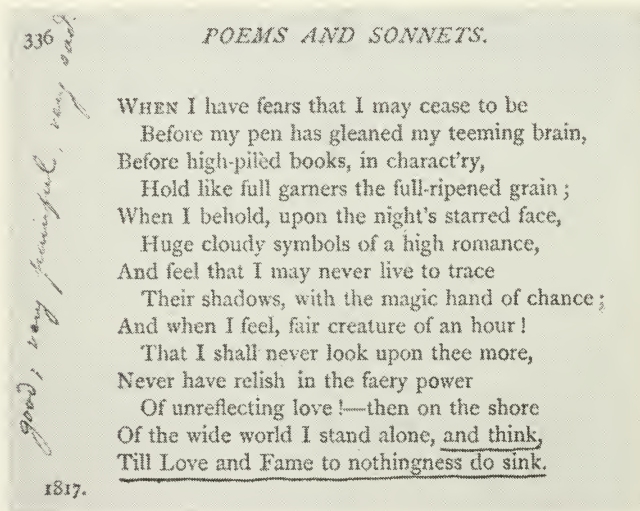
Pessoa's reading diary of 1903, when he was fifteen and sixteen years old, reveals his voracious consumption of Keats over several months, and in the same year he selected Keats's *Poetical Works* as part of a school prize.² This book is still present in his personal library, together with a number of critical studies of romantic literature, plus a biography of Keats.³

Pessoa's marginalia in these books, together with his few existing writings about Keats, reveal that he was particularly drawn to his famous odes and to his long poem "Hyperion"; Pessoa listed three of Keats's odes in a poetry anthology, partially translated at least one of them into Portuguese,⁴ and used "Hyperion" as a model for his own epic poem *Mensagem* (*Message*),⁵ as Santos and Feijó have shown.⁶

The earliest Portuguese example of Pessoa's poetic engagement with Keats is his 1908 poem "A Keats," ("To Keats") which provides us with a good window into his appraisal of Keats's art. "A Keats" bears the note, or subtitle, "Depois de ler o seu soneto: 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'" (After reading his sonnet: "When I have fears that I may cease to be").⁷

Here is Keats's relevant sonnet, of 1818:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
 Before high-pilèd books, in charact'ry,
 Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain;
 When I behold upon the night's starred face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
 And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
 And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
 That I shall never look upon thee more,
 Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting Love!—then on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
 Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.



Keats, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," *The Poetical Works*, 1898, 336.

Keats's use of capitals and punctuation is notoriously haphazard; this is the version of the poem as it appears in Pessoa's personal copy of his verse. In it, Pessoa underlined the the final words: "and think, / Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink," and he wrote what is for him strong praise in the margin next to the poem, describing it as "good; very painful, very sad."⁸

Pessoa responded to Keats's good, very painful, very sad sonnet with a poem of his own:

A KEATS

(Depois de ler o seu soneto:

"When I have fears that I may cease to be")

Estatuário da poesia, tu disseste:

"Ah, se eu morrer sem pôr em verso ardente
Tudo—sim, tudo—que a minha alma sente!"

E morreste, e em pouco! Súbito horror!

Se comigo assim for!

Se eu também não puder dizer ao mundo

O meu sentir atónito e profundo!

Se eu morrer dentro em mim guardando fria

A minha inspiração e a minha dor,

Como tu, Estatuário da poesia!⁹

(TO KEATS

[After having read your sonnet:

"When I have fears that I may cease to be"]

Sculptor of poetry, you said

"Ah, if I die before I put into ardent

Poetry all—yes, all—that my soul feels."

And you died—right afterwards. Sudden horror!

If that's the way it will with me!

Of my astonished and profound feelings!

If I die holding coldly within me

My inspiration, my pain,

Like you, Sculptor of poetry!)¹⁰

The way in which Pessoa addresses Keats, in this poem, is representative of his attitude toward Keats, as evidenced in his prose texts and marginalia. Keats is, according to Pessoa, a great “*estatuário da poesia*” (statuary sculptor of poetry), whose carefully crafted, formally constructed odes he will later praise in “*Erostratus*” (late 1920s), an essay about artistic greatness and what will survive into succeeding ages.¹¹ Keats’s odes were created with the same attention to form that one might use in creating statues, and in this light they are similar to many poems penned by the orthonym and heteronym Ricardo Reis. “*Autopsicografia*” (“*Autopsychography*”)¹² famously speaks of the poet as being a “*fin-gidor*” (feigner), but the Latin word *ingere*, at the root of the Portuguese verb *ingir* (to feign), also refers to molding or forming, thus carrying with it a subsidiary meaning as applicable to the art of sculpture as to the art of poetry.

At the same time, Pessoa is attracted to what he considers to be the moving, sensuous, emotional charge of Keats’s poetry, as his attempt to inject strong feeling into his own poem makes clear. This is corroborated by a prose text he wrote in the same year:

I cannot think badly of the man who wrote the “*Ode to a Nightingale*,” nor of him who, in that “*to the Grecian Urn*,” expresses so human an idea as the heart-rending untimeness of beauty. We all have felt that tearful sensation. Mothers, how many of ye, in looking at your bright children and at their heavenly fairness, have not wished such small, lovely forms could be preserved for ever and unchanged. Lover, when looking upon the form of thy mistress hast thou not felt thy heart oppressed because such beauty should one day be no more, nay, should grow old and, may hap, unbeautiful. Have we not all wished the immortality of someone that we know, have we all not felt that same pain at feeling that none are immortal.¹³

One might be forgiven for thinking these words must have come from the pen of a romantic poet, rather than a budding modernist one—further evidence of Pessoa’s literary diet during his teenage years.

In his poem to Keats, Pessoa ponders the anguishing thought that he, too, may die before being able to transform all of his thoughts and feelings into poetry, which is a common romantic topos.

Keats, in his sonnet, appears to tragically foretell his early death:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain

Pessoa translates Keats's opening lines:

Ah, se eu morrer sem pôr em verso ardente
Tudo—sim, tudo—que a minha alma sente!

However, as Monteiro points out, Pessoa makes no genuine effort to translate Keats's actual words.¹⁴ He replaces the mind with the soul; Keats's "teeming brain" becomes "tudo que a minha alma sente" (everything which my soul feels), even though ending the line with "mente" (mind) would have provided just as good a rhyme for "ardente" (ardent).

Throughout his poem, Pessoa addresses Keats directly and informally, employing the second person singular (*tu*) to establish a personal, familiar connection between the two men, not only in relation to their desire to glean poetry from their teeming brains (Keats) or the emotion in their souls (Pessoa), but also in the context of Pessoa's fear that he too may succumb to his predecessor's fate:

E morreste, e em pouco! Súbito horror!
Se comigo assim for!

As we can see from these lines, Pessoa's poem is melodramatic in tone. It also lacks subtlety: notice how Keats expertly avoids the word *death*, while Pessoa directly refers to dying three times. Pessoa's poem is self-aggrandizing and self-indulgent. It carries undertones of what George Orwell calls, in reference to some of T. S. Eliot's poetry, a "twilight-of-the-gods feeling," and a soppy emphasis on the speaker's personal emotions: "O meu sentir atónito e profundo! [. . .] A minha inspiração e a minha dor" (my astonished and profound feelings! [. . .] My inspiration, my pain). This is poetic egotism of the sort Keats vehemently condemned in writers such as William Wordsworth, as we shall see. An uncharitable reader might conclude that in his poem, Pessoa is attempting to outdo the power of emotion present in Keats's heartbreaking sonnet, while a more charitable reader may consider his poem the immature product of a promising young poet who has not yet struck the ideal balance he so admires in Keats—the art of crafting a sculptural poem and infusing it with just the right amount of sentiment.

Interestingly, Pessoa's poem to Keats does not mention love, which in Keats's sonnet is one of the two things (the second being literary immortality) that the speaker fears he may not fully experience before he dies (see the second half of the sonnet, from "fair creature of the hour" onward).

In Pessoa's poem, the speaker's "sentir atónito e profundo" (astonished and profound feelings), his "inspiração" (inspiration) and "dor" (pain), the things his "alma sente" (soul feels), may well be the feelings traditionally stirred by a love object, but they may simply be the necessary raw materials for the making of romantic poetry, mere objects to be transformed into the "verso ardente" (ardent verse). In other words, these powerful emotions may here be chiefly of interest to Pessoa as themes and subjects for poetry, rather than, as in Keats's poem, desirable feelings to be experienced in real life. (T. S. Eliot, who shared so many of Pessoa's aesthetic beliefs, agreed with him on this point: "impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man."¹⁵)

Twenty years later, Pessoa would explain to his girlfriend Ophélia Queiroz that everything assumed second place in his life, relative to his literary ambition:

A minha vida gira em torno da minha obra literária—boa ou má, que seja, ou possa ser. Tudo o mais na vida tem para mim um interesse secundário: há coisas, naturalmente, que estimaria ter, outras que tanto faz que venham ou não venham. É preciso que todos, que lidam comigo, se convençam de que sou assim, e que exigir-me os sentimentos, aliás muito dignos, de um homem vulgar e banal, é como exigir-me que tenha olhos azuis e cabelo louro.

(My life revolves around my literary work—good or poor as it may be, or might be. Everything else in life is of secondary importance to me: there are things, of course, I would like to have, others I don't mind whether or not they come to be. All those who deal with me must accept that this is the way I am, and that demanding me to have the feelings of a common, ordinary man, however worthy they may be, is like demanding me to have blue eyes and blond hair.)¹⁶

On the evidence of these words, harsh when addressed to a supposed beloved, together with the absence of any direct reference to love in Pessoa's poetic response to Keats's sonnet, it would appear that as a young poet, Pessoa already considered earthly love and artistic success to be incompatible, perhaps even mutually exclusive, at least in his own case. "A Keats" therefore supports the widely held notion that, for Pessoa, the world of literature was always more worthy of investment than his actual day-to-day life, just as artistic emotion was

more important than real-life passion. (Keats's life story, which fascinated Pessoa, appears to highlight the dangers of a life lived with too much real emotion: toward the end, his doctors urged him not to overexert himself by reading and writing poetry, or seeing his girlfriend Fanny Browne.¹⁷)

Monteiro, in his book *Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*,¹⁸ suggests a further instance of Pessoa's poetic engagement with Keats, his even earlier poem "On Death" ("Sobre a morte"), written in 1904. Monteiro analyzes this poem as a response to not only Keats's "When I have fears that I may cease to be," but also John Milton's "On His Blindness" and Emily Bronte's "Last Lines."¹⁹

It is conceivable that "Tabacaria" ("Tobacco Shop"), written over twenty years later and attributed to the heteronym Álvaro de Campos, also contains a teasing echo of one of Keats's poems.

Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" explores the themes of transience and mortality, like "Ode on a Grecian Urn."²⁰ In the poem, the speaker's sense of his inevitable demise is contrasted with the nightingale's immortality ("Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!"). The bird is thus a portal to immortality, a land of fantasy and imagination, via its eternal song, which through the ages "Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

"Tabacaria" is also concerned with the speaker's mortality versus the immortality of art; in this case, poetry rather than music. It contains no birdsong; instead, when the speaker himself sings the "cantiga do Infinito" (song of the Infinite), he does so, ironically, in a "capoeira" (chicken coop), which does not even appear to be populated with chickens: "Serei sempre o que [. . .] cantou a cantiga do Infinito numa capoeira" (I'll always be the one who [. . .] / sang the song of the Infinite in a chicken coop).²¹ Pessoa may here be transposing the nightingale's song, which is the bird's way of achieving immortality, into the poet's art, which the speaker, arguably like all artists, banks on for his own immortality.

Granted, the speaker declares that his poetry will, like everything else, eventually cease to exist:

[o dono da tabacaria] morrerá e eu morrerei.

Ele deixará a tabuleta, eu deixarei os versos.

A certa altura morrerá a tabuleta também, os versos também.

Depois de certa altura morrerá a rua onde esteve a tabuleta,
E a língua em que foram escritos os versos.

(the tobacco shop owner will die and I will die.
He'll leave his signboard, I'll leave my poems.
His sign will also eventually die, and so will my poems.
Eventually the street where the sign was will die,
And so will the language in which the poems were written.)²²

However, as these lines make clear, the speaker is convinced that his poetry will outlive him. "A caligrafia rápida destes versos," like the nightingale's song, opens "magic casements" to an imaginary, everlasting world ("faery lands") beyond the death of the speaker and the physical world around him. Poetry becomes, in Pessoa's poem, another "pórtico partido para o Impossível." (broken gateway to the Impossible).²³

Pessoa not only made good use of Keats as a model for some of his poems; more significantly, he also assimilated his predecessor's most influential ideas about poetry for his thinking on the heteronyms.

Keats's aesthetic ideals appear chiefly in his striking letters. Unlike Pessoa, Eliot was never a huge fan of Keats's poetry, yet he wrote that these letters were "the most notable and most important ever written by any English poet," because he considered that they contained hardly a statement about poetry that was not "true."²⁴

In one letter, Keats proclaims his longing for feeling over intellect: "O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" These words are cited in a book Pessoa owned, and he underlined them.²⁵ Sensacionismo (derived from *sensação*; sensation), the modernist movement Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro adapted from Futurism, has more than a little in common with Keats's romantic plea for feeling over intellect. Keats's words foreshadow the sensationist experiments of the heteronyms Álvaro de Campos and Alberto Caeiro, who both attempt to lead a life of sensations rather than thoughts, with very different results. Caeiro's life of sensations is experienced through his eyes: he desires to depend on his sense of sight, almost exclusively, to show him things as they truly are. He consequently wishes to see only what is shown to him through his senses, probing no hidden or symbolic interpretations in the world around him: "O meu olhar é nítido como um girasol" (My gaze is as clear as a sunflower).²⁶

Campos's sensationist goal, in contrast, is not to see things as they are, but as they make him feel: he wishes to feel through his five senses, Walt Whitman-like, often simultaneously, and through every nerve in his body.

Pessoa, like Keats, is averse to excessive intellectual thought, which he cannot, unfortunately, escape. This leads to the "dor de pensar" (pain of [over]thinking) that infuses so much of his poetry. Unfortunately, however desirable it may be to lead a sensationist life rather than an intellectual one—the orthonym—Campos and Soares find it ultimately impossible to escape their rational makeup: their neurasthenic introspection leads to a Hamlet-like melancholy.²⁷ This is precisely what Keats had warned against in "Ode to a Nightingale": "to think is to be full of sorrows / And leaden-eyed despairs."²⁸

Keats's model for the ideal poet was the same as Pessoa's: William Shakespeare.²⁹ His vision of Shakespeare was profoundly informed by that of his fellow Romantic era poets and critics, most notably Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and William Hazlitt (1778–1830).

In a letter from 1802, Coleridge had written of Shakespeare's uncanny ability to imagine himself as someone else: "It is easy to clothe Imaginary Beings with our own Thoughts and Feelings; but to send ourselves out of ourselves, to think ourselves in to the Thoughts and Feelings of Beings in circumstances wholly and strangely different from our own / hoc labor, hoc opus / and who has achieved it? Perhaps only Shakespeare."³⁰

Hazlitt, in his first London lecture on Shakespeare in 1817 (which Keats did not attend, but later heard about), described Shakespeare in similar terms, as being "just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egoist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their possible ramifications, through every change of fortune, or conflict of passion, or turn of thought [. . .] When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects."³¹

In his *Characters in Shakespeare's Plays*,³² Hazlitt went on to venture that Shakespeare's ability to travel through his dramatic characters at will left him with a "scarcely [. . .] an individual existence of his own."³³

Inspired by these words, a year later Keats coined the memorable image of the “chameleon poet” who was “continually in for and filling [sic] some other Body,” the effect of which was to leave him with “none, no Identity” of his own.³⁴

Various critics have mentioned Keats’s chameleon poet in the context of Pessoa’s work, but always in passing, and without drawing attention to the direct nature of his influence on Pessoa’s heteronymic theory and practice. Pál Ferenc, for instance, touches on the connection when he writes that Keats’s idea of the chameleon poet prompted Pessoa to don his heteronymic masks: “É muito provável que [. . .] a ideia de ‘Camelion Poet’ de John Keats [. . .] o incitariam a ocultar-se atrás de figuras de poetas heterónimos” (It is very probably that Keats’s “Chameleon Poet” idea prompted Pessoa to hide himself behind heteronymic poet characters).³⁵ Ferenc does not appear to be aware, however, that Pessoa read this letter, or at least a part of it, and drew a line next to it in his copy of Colvin’s biography of Keats.³⁶

Colvin’s rendition of Keats’s letter is truncated, and it leaves out memorable lines and phrases from other editions, so it is worth citing a more complete version of Keats’s letter about the chameleon poet:

As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. [. . .] A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none, no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s Creatures. [. . .] It is a wretched thing to confess: but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature—how can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with People if I am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of

every one in the room begins to so press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children.

But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself; but from some character in whose soul I now live. I am sure however that this next sentence is from myself.³⁷

Such haunting words of authorial impersonality were instrumental in shaping the artistic ideals of the modernist generation to which Pessoa belonged, and consequently their literary practice too. The modernists came to regard impersonality as one of the hallmarks of artistic genius; Eliot's seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" argues that the best part of a poet's work is "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," and his own identity is so elusive in his poems that he was labeled "The Invisible Poet" by biographer Hugh Kenner in 1959.³⁸ James Joyce similarly envisions the perfect author as being "like the God of creation, [. . .] within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."³⁹ Pessoa's continual ontological meditations on the nature of his authorial existence—or, more commonly, nonexistence—is wonderfully illustrated when he has Álvaro de Campos declare, "Fernando Pessoa não existe, propriamente falando" (Fernando Pessoa does not, strictly speaking, exist).⁴⁰

Keats viewed the impersonality of the "poetical character" in dramatic terms—not least because his ideal poet, Shakespeare, was a dramatist. Such a character was adept at projecting itself into, or assuming, the identities of others: "[the poetical character] is not itself—it has no self [. . .] it has no character [. . .] It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen." Pessoa and his fellow modernists would also consider the greatest poetry to be necessarily dramatic, with all the impersonality the genre entails. Joyce, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, has Stephen Dedalus theorize that in the movement from lyric to epic to dramatic, the personality of the poet, "at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak."⁴¹ Pessoa similarly explains, in "Os graus da poesia lírica" ("The Levels of Lyric Poetry"), that the ascending progression of poetry, from lyric to dramatic, is characterized by increasing degrees of impersonality: "O quarto grau da poesia lírica é aquele, muito mais raro, em

of the poet's "want of decision of character and power of will," and says that "never for two days did he know his own intentions," his criticism is deserving of more attention. This is only Haydon's way of describing a fact in Keats's nature of which no one was better aware than himself. He acknowledges his own "unsteady and vagarish disposition." What he means is no weakness of instinct or principle affecting the springs of conduct in regard to others, but a liability to veerings of opinion and purpose in regard to himself. "The Celtic instability," a reader may perhaps surmise who adopts that hypothesis as to the poet's descent. Whether the quality was one of race or not, it was probably inseparable from the peculiar complexion of Keats's genius. Or rather it was an expression in character of that which was the very essence of that genius, the predominance, namely, of the sympathetic imagination over every other faculty. Acute as was his own emotional life, he nevertheless belonged essentially to the order of poets whose work is inspired, not mainly by their own personality, but by the world of things and men outside them. He realised clearly the nature of his own gift, and the degree to which susceptibility to external impressions was apt to overpower in him, not practical consistency only, but even the sense of a personal identity.

*Infirmity
of will.*

"As to the poetic character itself," he writes, "(I mean that sort, of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical sublime; which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade—it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated,—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence,

Annotated page from Sidney Colvin, *Keats*, London: Macmillan, 1899, 2nd ed., 215.

que o poeta, mais intelectual ainda mas igualmente imaginativo, entra em plena despersonalização. Não só sente, mas vive, os estados de alma que não tem directamente.” (The fourth level of lyric poetry is much more rare: when the poet, even more intellectual but just as imaginative, becomes completely impersonal. He not only feels, but lives, the states of mind he does not directly possess.)⁴²

Eliot, Joyce, and Pessoa are the all posthumous siblings of Keats’s chameleon poet, and in Pessoa’s case, the family resemblance is particularly striking. Many of his critical texts, describing himself as the creator of a “drama em gente” (drama in people), the heteronyms, as well as his letters, particularly those to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, call to mind Keats’s description of the ideal “poetical character,” which, having no ego or identity of its own, dramatically assumes, chameleon-like, the identities of other characters, whether imaginary or real (“Iago”; “every one in the room”). Richard Woodhouse, the recipient of Keats’s letter about the chameleon poet, made some notes later in the same year offering his interpretation of Keats’s meaning: “The highest order of Poet [. . .] will have so high an imagination that he will be able to throw his own soul into any object he sees or imagines, so as to see, feel, be sensible of or express—and he will speak out of that object so that his own self with the Exception of the Mechanical part be “annihilated.”—and it is of the excess of this power that I suppose Keats to speak, when he says he has no identity.”⁴³

Woodhouse reported that often, after Keats had written down some thought or expression, it “struck him with astonishment and seemed rather the production of another person than his own [. . .] It seemed to come by chance or magic—to be as it were something given to him.”⁴⁴ Compare this to Pessoa’s letter to Casais Monteiro about the genesis of the heteronyms, in which he claims to receive his fictional characters’ poems ready-made, as if he were not their author but their medium: “em tudo isto me parece que fui eu, criador de tudo, o menos que ali houve. Parece que tudo se passou independentemente de mim. E parece que assim ainda se passa. [. . .] Eu vejo diante de mim, no espaço incolor mas real do sonho, as caras, os gestos de Caeiro, Ricardo Reis e Álvaro de Campos.” (in all of this it seems that I, the creator of everything, was the least important thing there. It seems it all happened independently of me. And it seems to happen like that still. [. . .] I see before me, in the colorless but real space of dreams, the faces, the gestures of Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos.)⁴⁵

In the same letter, Pessoa claimed that he could sometimes feel imaginary passions more acutely than real ones: “ao escrever certos passos das *Notas para recordação do meu Mestre Caetano*, do Álvaro de Campos, tenho chorado lágrimas verdadeiras.”⁴⁶ (writing certain passages of the *Notes for the Memory of My Master Caetano*, by Álvaro de Campos, I have cried real tears). This curious phenomenon had been awarded fuller expression in an earlier letter to his future biographer João Gaspar Simões, in words that support the conclusion, based on my reading of Pessoa’s 1908 poem to Keats, that for him, imaginary passions—those contained in, and of use for, his poetry—held greater interest than real-life emotions:

Nunca senti saudades da infância; nunca senti, em verdade, saudades de nada. Sou, por índole, e no sentido directo da palavra, futurista. Não sei ter pessimismo, nem olhar para trás. Que eu saiba ou repare só a falta de dinheiro (no próprio momento) ou um tempo de trovoadas (enquanto dura) são capazes de me deprimir. Tenho, do passado, somente saudades de pessoas idas, a quem amei; mas não é saudade do tempo em que as amei, mas a saudade delas, queria-as vivas hoje, e com a idade que hoje tivessem, se até hoje tivessem vivido. O mais são atitudes literárias, sentidas intensamente por instinto dramático, quer as assine Álvaro de Campos, quer as assine Fernando Pessoa. São suficientemente representadas, no tom e na verdade, por aquele meu breve poema que começa, “O sino da minha aldeia . . .” O sino da minha aldeia, Gaspar Simões, é o da Igreja dos Mártires, ali no Chiado.⁴⁷

(I never missed my childhood; I never, in truth, missed anything. I am, by nature, and in the immediate sense of the word, a futurist. I don’t know how to be pessimistic, or how to look back. As far as I am aware or notice, only a lack of money [when it’s needed] or stormy weather [while it lasts] are able to depress me. From the past, I only miss people who are now gone, whom I loved; but I don’t miss the time when I loved them, I miss them, I would like them to be alive today, at the age they would be now, if they were still alive. Everything else is a literary pose, felt intensely by dramatic instinct, whether I sign the work Álvaro de Campos or Fernando Pessoa. These attitudes are sufficiently represented, in tone and in truth, by my short poem which begins, “Oh church bell of my village . . .” The church bell of my village, Gaspar Simões, is the bell of the Church of the Martyrs in the Chiado.)

Keats offers us a wonderful explanation, in one of his letters, of why fictional emotions may be felt more strongly than real ones: "I am as far from being unhappy as possible. Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones. [. . .] This is easily accounted for. Our imaginary woes are conjured up by our passions, and are fostered by passionate feeling; our real ones come of themselves, and are opposed by an abstract exertion of mind. Real grievances are the displacers of passion."⁴⁸

If real grievances are the displacers of passion, this would account for the otherwise surprisingly controlled tone of some of Keats's love letters to Fanny Brawne. Nichola Deane draws attention to the way Keats "plays the lover" with Fanny, dramatizing his feelings with literary allusions to Rousseau and quotations from Shakespeare.⁴⁹ Andrew Motion argues that Keats "used his separation from Fanny as a chance to dramatise his anguish [. . .] always mindful of the attitude he strikes."⁵⁰ Such role-playing resulted in delightfully humorous passages:

I have been writing with a vile old pen the whole week, which is excessively ungallant. The fault is in the Quill: I have mended it and still it is very much inclin'd to make blindness. However these last lines are in a much better style of penmanship though a little disfigured by the smear of black current jelly; which has made a little mark on one of the Pages of Brown's Ben Jonson, the very best book he has. I have lick'd it but it remains very purple—I did not know whether to say purple or blue, so in the mixture of the thought wrote purplue which may be an excellent name for a colour made up of those two, and would suit well to start next spring.⁵¹

Pessoa famously played the role of Hamlet when he met his Ophelia, declaring his love for the first time by usurping the prince's words.⁵² And he could be just as detached and jocular as Keats in his love letters—so much so that he signed some of these letters as Álvaro de Campos, referring to himself, Pessoa, in the third person.⁵³

In a letter, Keats mentions—for the first and only time—another essential attribute of the highest order of poet: "I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative*

Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritability reaching after fact & reason."⁵⁴ He coined the memorable phrase "negative capability" to describe the greatest artists' (such as Shakespeare's) receptiveness to the world and its natural marvels, separating these artists from those who, like Dilke, Coleridge (who was, Keats thought, too much of a critic), or Wordsworth (too much of an egotist), searched for a single, higher-order truth or unifying solution to the mysteries of the world. This idea, too, derived largely from Hazlitt, who believed the mind to be naturally "disinterested."⁵⁵ Primarily pitted against the writings of Hobbes, Mandeville, and others who argued that the basis of human action is self-interest, Hazlitt had claimed in his *Essay on the Principle of Human Action: Being an Argument in Favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind* (a book Keats owned at his death) that our ability to think about our future selves depends on a power of self-projection no different from that required to think ourselves into the lives of others.

Pessoa's heteronyms and other dramatic voices argue against each other and express alternative, often contradictory beliefs, penning radically different, often diametrically opposed bodies of work. The heteronymic universe is one with no final authority, least of all the authority of Pessoa "himself," whose lifelong distrust of any single, overriding, knowable truth is evidenced by his esoteric leanings, his ontological questioning, and his interest in many different strains of philosophy. Negative capability is required for the creation of the heteronymic universe, which embodies the same quality in its fictional existence.

Keats's ideal, chameleon poet, so impersonal and lacking in identity that he could expertly inhabit fictional others at will, and with a negative capability that meant he did not believe in any single truth, but rather explored different possible truths, was thus a further fertile source, to add to the long list of sources already documented by scholars, for the genesis of Pessoa's heteronyms.

NOTES

1. George Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Maria Irene Ramalho S. Santos, "A Hora do poeta: O Hyperion de Keats na Mensagem de Pessoa," *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra* 37 (1992), 389–99; and António M. Feijó, "Uma explicação de Mensagem" (unpublished article, 2013).

2. See Fernando Pessoa, *Cadernos*, I, ed. Jerónimo Pizarro (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2009), 217. For details of Pessoa's reading of Keats, see Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*, 45.

3. John Keats, *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (London: Frederick Warne, 1894); Sidney Colvin, *Keats*, ed. John Morley (London / New York: Macmillan, 1899).

4. See the translation section in this issue.

5. Pessoa, *Mensagem* (Lisbon: Parceria Antonio Maria Pereira, 1934).

6. See Patricio Ferrari, "Meter and Rhythm in the Poetry of Fernando Pessoa" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Lisbon, 2012), 385; Pessoa, *Fernando Pessoa poeta-tradutor de poetas: Os Poemas traduzidos e o respectivo original*, ed. Arnaldo Saraiva (Oporto: Lello Editores, 1996), 85; S. Santos, "A Hora do poeta"; and Feijó, "Uma explicação de *Mensagem*."

7. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

8. See Keats, *Poetical Works*, 336.

9. George Lind, "Die Englische Jugenddichtung Fernando Pessoa's." In *Portugiesische Forschungen des Görresgesellschaft* (Münster: 1966), 136.

10. Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*, 48. For a comparative rhythmic study of the two poems, see Ferrari, "Meter and Rhythm in the Poetry of Fernando Pessoa," 302.

11. "It does not take a very long consideration to perceive the immortality of Vigny's *Moïse*, *La Colère de Janson*, *La Mort du Loup*, nor of Keats' Odes to a Nightingale, to a Grecian Urn, to Autumn, to Melancholy. These poems are as fine as *Lycidas* and shall live when *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* shall have gone to human limbo to which all immature beauty is consigned" (BNP/E3, 19-83^v; Pessoa, *Páginas de estética e de teoria e crítica literárias*, ed. Georg Rudolf Lind and Jacinto do Prado Coelho (Lisbon: Ática, n.d. [1966]), 287. This fragment is part of "Erostratus." See the essays section in this issue.

12. *Presença*, 1932.

13. BNP/E3, 19-98; Pessoa, *Páginas de estética*, 331.

14. Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*, 48.

15. T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 50-51.

16. Pessoa, *Cartas de amor*, ed. David Mourão Ferreira (Lisbon: Ática, 1994), 23.

17. See, for example, John Keats, *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 338-39.

18. Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*.

19. *Ibid.*, 45-48.

20. John Keats, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 176–79.
21. Pessoa, *Forever Someone Else*, ed. and trans. Richard Zenith (bilingual edition) (Lisbon: Assíro & Alvim, 2008), 164–65.
22. *Ibid.*, 168–69.
23. *Ibid.*, 164–65.
24. Cited in Andrew Motion, *Keats* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), 577.
25. Colvin, *Keats*, 184.
26. Pessoa, “O Guardador de rebanhos,” in *Poemas de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. João Gaspar Simões and Luiz de Montalvor (Lisbon: Ática, 1993), 24.
27. See Mariana Gray de Castro, *Fernando Pessoa’s Shakespeare* (unpublished doctoral thesis, King’s College London, 2010), 107–8.
28. Keats, *Selected Poetry*, 177.
29. See Castro, *Fernando Pessoa’s Shakespeare*.
30. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 810.
31. Cited in Motion, *Keats*, 227.
32. Hazlitt, 1817.
33. Cited in Jonathan Bate, ed., *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992), 7.
34. Keats, *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147–48. This passage is sometimes rendered as “continually in, for, and filling” or “continually informing and filling.”
35. Fernando Pessoa, *Arc többes számban*, ed. Pál Ferenc, trans. Csaba Csuday, Endre Kukorelly, Ferenc Szőnyi, Zsuzsa Takács, and Szabolcs Várady (Budapest: Helikon, 1988), 37. Translation into Portuguese by Pál Ferenc.
36. These pages were first reproduced by Patricio Ferrari in notes that accompany the digital edition of Pessoa’s personal library. See Ferrari, “Anotações” [“Annotations”], in *Biblioteca digital de Fernando Pessoa* (2010). <http://casafernandopessoa.cm-lisboa.pt/bdigital/index/index.htm>.
37. Keats, *Selected Letters*, 147–49.
38. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 40.
39. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 2000), 233.
40. Fernando Pessoa (Álvaro de Campos), *Notas para a recordação do meu Mestre Caeiro*, ed. Teresa Rita Lopes (Lisbon: Estampa, 1997), 75. See also Pessoa, *Prosa de Álvaro de Campos*, ed. Jerónimo Pizarro and Antonio Cardiello, with the collaboration of Jorge Uribe (Lisbon: Ática, 2012).
41. Joyce, *A Portrait*, 214.
42. Pessoa, *Páginas de estética*, 67.

43. Cited in Motion, Keats, 228.
44. Cited in M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London / Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 214.
45. Pessoa, *Correspondência 1923–1935*, ed. Manuela Parreira da Silva (Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 1999), 342. See also Pessoa, *Cartas entre Fernando Pessoa e os directores da presença*, ed. Enrico Martines (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional–Casa da Moeda, 1998).
46. Pessoa, *Correspondência*, 343.
47. *Ibid.*, 253.
48. Keats, *Selected Letters*, 282.
49. Nichola Deane, “Keats’s Lover’s Discourse and the Letters to Fanny Brawne,” *Keats-Shelley Review* 13 (1999), 105–14.
50. Motion, Keats, 414.
51. Keats, *Selected Letters*, 334.
52. See Castro, *Fernando Pessoa’s Shakespeare*, 173–74.
53. See, for example, Pessoa’s letter to Ophélia of September 25, 1929, signed by “Álvaro de Campos, eng. Naval” [Álvaro de Campos, naval engineer], in Pessoa, *Correspondência 1923–1935*, ed. Manuela Parreira da Silva. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 1999), 164. See also Pessoa, *Prosa de Álvaro de Campos*, ed. Jerónimo Pizarro and Antonio Cardiello; with the collaboration of Jorge Uribe (Lisbon: Ática, 2012).
54. Keats, *Selected Letters*, 41–42.
55. See Motion, Keats, 218.

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