Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley: New discoveries and a new analysis of the documents in the Gerald Yorke Collection

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Keywords

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Abstract

The documents concerning the relationship between Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley preserved in the Yorke Collection at the Warburg Institute (London) have been known for some time. However, recent new findings have prompted a new analysis of the dossier. The purpose of this article is to have a new look at the documents that were already known and introduce the documents that have been recently found. The analysis will also be based on a comparison with the related documents from the “Magick” collection, now part of Pessoa’s Archive at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal in Lisbon. Photographic images of the documents, together with a new edition of the texts, are also included.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Aleister Crowley, Yorke Collection, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal [Espólio 3], Colecção “Magick”, Correspondência, Edouard Roditi

Resumo

Os documentos relacionados com a relação entre Fernando Pessoa e Aleister Crowley guardados na Yorke Collection do Instituto Warburg em Londres são conhecidos desde há algum tempo. Contudo, descobertas recentes exigem uma nova análise deste arquivo. Pretende-se com este artigo regressar com um olhar renovado ao material já conhecido e apresentar os documentos recentemente encontrados. A análise será complementada com uma comparação destes com os documentos da colecção “Magick”, actualmente pertencente ao espólio de Pessoa à guarda da Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal. Serão incluídas imagens fotográficas dos documentos, bem como uma nova edição dos textos em questão.

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The documents concerning Fernando Pessoa’s relationship with Aleister Crowley are preserved in two major collections. One represents Pessoa’s side, and it remained in the hands of his family until recently. It seems likely that originally Pessoa’s family – and particularly his step-sister Henriqueta Madalena Nogueira Rosa Dias – considered these documents as being too sensitive, because of Crowley’s dubious morality and his reputation as a black magician.\(^2\) Probably, and mostly for this reason, they were kept unpublished and remained virtually unknown for many years. Consequently, they were not included in the main collection of documents that was acquired by the Portuguese State in 1979, and which would become Pessoa’s Archive. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s the family decided that the time had come to publish this material and that one of the heirs, Pessoa’s nephew Luis Miguel Rosa Dias (writing under the pseudonym of “Miguel Roza”) would be directly in charge of preparing the book for publication. The project took longer than expected, but it finally materialized in 2001, when a first edition of the documents was published (Pessoa and Crowley, 2001). In 2010 a second, improved and expanded edition was published (Pessoa and Crowley, 2010).\(^3\) In the meanwhile, in November 2008, the original documents belonging to this collection were put on sale by the family through a public auction (P4 Live Auctions, 2008).\(^4\) The collection was purchased by the Portuguese company Redes Energéticas Nacionais and donated to the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, where it joined the rest of Pessoa’s papers. Although this smaller collection has now merged, for all intents and purposes, into the larger one, it is still both useful and historically sound to consider it as a separate set with its own specific identity.\(^5\)

The other collection represents Crowley’s side and is the Yorke Collection (YC) held at the Warburg Institute in London.\(^6\) Although the Pessoa “Magick” Collection (PMC) is by far, with respect to the Crowley-Pessoa relationship, the most complete of the two, the Yorke Collection does include some important documents as well, such as the originals of some of the letters Pessoa sent to Crowley and some of the carbon copies of the letters Crowley sent to Pessoa.

\(^2\) In the preface of an edition of these documents, Pessoa’s nephew, Luis Miguel Rosa Dias noted that “as cartas de Aleister Crowley e as cópias da correspondência de Fernando Pessoa […] não foram publicadas há mais tempo porque a irmã do poeta (minha Mãe) [i.e., Henriqueta Rosa Dias] se opôs a tal, enquanto fosse viva” (Pessoa and Crowley, 2010: 16).

\(^3\) The first edition was anything but rigorous from a philological point of view, and contained a large number of mistakes and problems, which have been only partly solved in the second edition. The lack of expertise of the editor remains however evident in both editions.

\(^4\) The stormy debate raised by the auction in Portugal, with echoes in the international press, lies beyond the scope of the present article.

\(^5\) It should be noted that the collection sold through the auction in 2008 included not only the documents concerning Pessoa’s relationship with Crowley but also other unrelated Pessoa documents still held by the family. The Crowley-related documents were all included in lot n. 39 (P4 Live Auctions, 2008). Since the lot is now part of Pessoa’s Archive without any particular qualification and is divided into several folders (with call numbers going from 190 to 389), the catalogue of the auction still offers a precious testimony of its contents and specific identity, further supported by the two editions of Miguel Roza’s Encontro Magick (Pessoa and Crowley, 2001 and 2010). We can refer to it as the Pessoa “Magick” Collection.

\(^6\) Concerning the Yorke Collection and its history, see Pasi’s other article in the present issue.
Marco Pasi included these letters first in his Laurea dissertation (Pasi, 1994) and then in the book stemming from it (Pasi, 1999). Other interesting documents that had until now eluded Pasi’s researches were the three books of English poetry that Pessoa had sent Crowley in December 1929, and which were known to have been part of the Yorke Collection at one point. During a recent visit to the Warburg Institute, Patricio Ferrari has been finally able to locate these books and inspect them. On the same occasion, he has also taken the opportunity to further inspect and take photographs of the Pessoa letters in the Collection, whose reproduction is here presented for the first time.

The purpose of this brief note is not to engage in a deep analysis of the whole Crowley-Pessoa affair, based on a detailed comparison of the documents from the two collections, but rather to have a new look at the documents that were already known (i.e., the letters), and introduce the documents that were thought to be missing (i.e., the books). In both cases, the inspection will provide some interesting new elements for a better assessment of the Pessoa-Crowley relationship. Pasi’s edition of Crowley’s diary for his Portuguese trip (also in the present issue of Pessoa Plural) will offer further elements in the same direction.

As it is known, on 18 November 1929 Fernando Pessoa contacted The Mandrake Press, the London-based publishing house that had just put out Aleister Crowley’s Confessions (1929). Shortly afterwards a correspondence between the two men began. By the time the British occultist set for Lisbon in the company of Hanni Jaeger to meet Pessoa, in September 1930, they had exchanged a total of seven letters and a telegram. Two of the three letters that Pessoa addressed personally to Crowley before his Portuguese trip (dated 6 January and 25 February 1930) are found in the Yorke Collection (see Letters II and III). As for the letters Pessoa sent to The Mandrake Press only the one dated 4 December 1929 is extant in

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7 These documents were made available to Portuguese readers even before the publication of Pasi’s book, when Victor Belém included significant parts of Pasi’s dissertation in his booklet O Mistério da Boca-do-Inferno (Belém, 1995: 11-17, and 60-64). Pasi’s book has also been published in an expanded, updated German edition (Pasi, 2006). An English and a Portuguese edition are now in preparation.

8 As Marco Pasi has noted elsewhere (Pasi, 2001: 698-699), this was not the first time that Pessoa had bought a book by Crowley. We know in fact that, already in 1917, Pessoa had ordered 777, the dictionary of occult correspondences that Crowley had published a few years before (Crowley, 1909). Pessoa ordered the book through Frank Hollings, a London bookseller then specializing in the occult, and one of the main distributors of Crowley’s works. See Pessoa’s letter to Hollings, dated 6 March 1917 (Pessoa, 1999b: 245). It should be noted, however, that 777 was published by Crowley anonymously, so Pessoa was not aware of who the author was when he ordered the book. Apparently, he remained in the dark about Crowley’s authorship until 1929, as he makes clear in his letter to The Mandrake Press of 18 November (Pessoa and Crowley, 2010: 307). Curiously, he found out about it in the same prospectus of The Mandrake Press which informed him of the release of The Confessions. Pessoa mentions Crowley in relation to 777 in at least one fragment from the Archive (BNP/E3, 54A-43; see also Dix, 2009: 73). According to Jerónimo Pizarro (personal communication to the authors, 1 May 2012) the fragment probably dates from around 1931, so from after Crowley’s trip to Portugal.

9 See Annex 1 for a general timeline of the correspondence between Pessoa and Crowley.

10 A typewritten version of the letter to Crowley dated 29 May 1930, originally part of the PMC, is now in Pessoa’s Archive (BNP/E3, 207). The autograph version of this letter has not been found in the Yorke Collection.