September 1930, Lisbon:
Aleister Crowley’s lost diary of his Portuguese trip

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Aleister Crowley, Hanni Jaeger, Raul Leal, Kenneth Grant, Yorke Collection, Gerald Yorke, Pessoa "Magick" Collection, Boca do Inferno affair

Abstract

Aleister Crowley’s diary for the period of his travel to Portugal and his meeting with Fernando Pessoa has long been considered lost or inaccessible. However, a copy has been finally found and is here presented and published for the first time. The analysis of the diary allows us to have a fuller knowledge of Crowley's movements and activities while in Portugal and especially of his meetings with Fernando Pessoa. It also clarifies some aspects of the famous Boca do Inferno suicide stunt in which Pessoa was directly involved and brings some new clues concerning a possible initiation of Pessoa in one of Crowley’s magical orders.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Aleister Crowley, Hanni Jaeger, Raul Leal, Kenneth Grant, Yorke Collection, Gerald Yorke, Coleção “Magick”, caso da Boca do Inferno

Resumo

O diário de Aleister Crowley referente ao período da sua viagem a Portugal e ao seu encontro com Fernando Pessoa considerava-se, há muito tempo, perdido ou inacessível. Porém, uma cópia do mesmo foi finalmente localizada e é aqui apresentada e publicada pela primeira vez. A análise do diário permite-nos ter um conhecimento mais completo dos movimentos e das actividades de Crowley aquando da sua estadia em Portugal e, nomeadamente, do seu encontro com Fernando Pessoa. Também esclarece certos aspectos da famosa encenação do suicídio de Crowley na Boca do Inferno, encenação na qual Pessoa esteve directamente envolvido, e fornece algumas novas pistas relativas a possível iniciação de Pessoa numa das ordens mágicas de Crowley.

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1 I would like to thank Martin P. Starr, William Breeze, Philip Young, Steffen Dix and Jerónimo Pizarro, for their invaluable help and advice. This article was supported by a Grant from the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS).
The meeting between Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley in Portugal in September 1930 is an episode that has attracted a lot of attention from Pessoa’s biographers and scholars. A bibliography of publications focusing on it would now include quite a few titles. And it is not only scholars who have been intrigued by this strange encounter. For example, no less than four novels have presented a fictionalized account of the events (Dell’Aira, 1993; Soares, 2007; Rico Gongora, 2009; Salgueiro, 2012), and it was only inevitable that a film would sooner or later follow them. Most Crowley biographers have also devoted some space to the affair (Symonds, 1989: 445-447, 452-456; Kaczynski, 2010: 449-452; Sutin, 2000: 354-355). One of the biggest problems in the study of this episode and its implications, is that very rarely researchers have tried to compare data and findings coming from the archives of both authors at the same time. Specialists of Pessoa would rely mostly on the documents preserved in Pessoa’s Archive in Lisbon, whereas Crowley specialists would rely mostly on the documents preserved in the Yorke Collection (YC) at the Warburg Institute in London. In most cases they would ignore, or pretend to ignore, even the existence of other archives. The most glaring example of this strange virtual barrier between Pessoa’s and Crowley’s archives can be seen in the publication, by Miguel Roza, of the documents from the Pessoa “Magick” Collection (Pessoa and Crowley, 2001; Pessoa and Crowley, 2010). Roza’s two editions of the papers from this collection can be considered as a real turning point in the study of the Crowley-Pessoa affair, because the collection includes a large number of documents, originally collected and preserved by Pessoa himself, that are essential for understanding what happened before, during, and after the encounter of the two men. However, apart from being regrettably amateurish, both editions fail to even mention documents from the Yorke Collection that were closely related to those included in the Magick Collection and that had already been published even in Portugal (Belém, 1995).

In some of my previous works, I have tried to bridge this research gap, by studying and comparing documents coming from various collections, based both

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2 See references in Pasi, 2006, 193-234. See also the bibliography in Dix, 2009.
3 The release of a docudrama film based on the Crowley-Pessoa encounter, directed by António Cunha and titled “Hino a Pã. O último Sortilégio,” has been announced for November 2012.
4 Both because Symonds was the only biographer who had access to Crowley’s diary for that period, and because of lack of familiarity with Portuguese sources, most Crowley biographers just content themselves with following more or less closely Symonds’s version of the events, without really bringing any new details in.
5 It should be noted that the Yorke Collection is not the only collection of Crowley papers, but is the one that preserves most of the material related to Crowley’s Portuguese trip and his relationship with Pessoa.
6 “Miguel Roza” is the pseudonym of Pessoa’s nephew Luis Miguel Rosa Dias. See also the article by Patricio Ferrari and myself in the present issue of Pessoa Plural (Pasi and Ferrari, 2012), where some aspects of the history of the Magick Collection, its contents, and Roza’s editions are discussed.
on Pessoa’s and Crowley’s personal papers (Pasi, 1999 and 2006; Pasi, 2001). The present contribution goes in the same direction and intends to add a most important piece to the knowledge we have of the affair.

One of the puzzling aspects of research on Crowley’s papers from the Yorke Collection was the unavailability of certain documents concerning his relationship with Pessoa that were known to have existed at some point, but seemed to have vanished. Among them, there were the books of English poems that Pessoa had sent Crowley in December 1929, and whose re-discovery is described in another contribution by Patricio Ferrari and myself for the present issue of this journal (Pasi and Ferrari, 2012). But there was at least another document that was potentially even more interesting and was eluding all my efforts to locate it: Crowley’s personal diary for September 1930, corresponding roughly to the period he spent in Portugal (Pasi, 1999: 153, n. 65). There was no doubt that this portion of Crowley’s diary existed. Not only because John Symonds quoted from it in his biography of Crowley,7 but also because there were traces of its past presence in the Yorke Collection itself. In order to understand this point, it is now necessary to make a digression both into Crowley’s use of his diaries and into the history of the Yorke Collection.

Aleister Crowley kept a diary for the most part of his life. The regular writing of a diary clearly had for him a magical purpose and was part of his system of spiritual realization (Asprem, 2008: 151-154; Pasi, 2004: 376-379; Wasserman, 2006).8 Depending on circumstances, his diaries would also fulfill more secular tasks such as writing down personal reflections about the most disparate subjects or simply keeping a record of significant daily events. Together with Crowley’s own autobiography (Crowley, 1989), his diaries offer the largest amount of biographical material for most periods of his life, and have in fact been freely used by his biographers, starting with John Symonds.

Precisely because of the magical significance of his diaries, Crowley himself began to publish portions of them, especially in his own periodical *The Equinox*, whose first series appeared between 1909 and 1913. Their publication could serve as a model for his disciples, who were also required to keep a regular diary recording their spiritual progress. A significant example of Crowley’s publication of his own diary is “John St. John,” describing a spiritual “retreat” in the city of Paris and published in the very first issue of *The Equinox* (Crowley, 1909; see also

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8 It is also noteworthy that one of the two novels he published during his life was titled *The Diary of Drug Fiend* (Crowley, 1922). In the novel the regular practice of the diary is emphasized for its spiritual value and is part of the teaching system of the community on which the plot centers (loosely based on the Thelamite community Crowley created in Cefalù, Sicily, in 1920).