

## **“Liberdade” by Fernando Pessoa: a parodic re-writing of “The Tables Turned” by William Wordsworth in a context of censorship**

Teresa Líbano Monteiro  
*University of Lisbon*

### **Abstract**

This article argues that the poem “Liberdade”, by Fernando Pessoa, written in a context of censorship, is a parody of the poem “The Tables Turned”, by William Wordsworth. The apology of nature opposed to culture presented in Wordsworth’s lines is resumed by Pessoa, but with a very different purpose. Pessoa, in a seemingly light tone, uses the contrast between nature and culture to adapt it to the ideology of Salazar, the Portuguese dictator, which narrowed the intellectuals’ freedom of speech. Whereas Wordsworth praises nature as the source of ethics, Pessoa empties the nobility of this encomium while praising nature for merely being the opposite of human obligations (such as reading). Pessoa’s subject, indolent and insouciant, seems to occupy the place which Salazar destined to the intellectuals: the one of critical acephaly. Yet, there are elements in the poem that show the underlying irony of the role played by the subject. The use of irony, one of the techniques of parody, implies not a connivance with Salazar’s politics of censorship, but a harsh criticism of it.

**Keywords:** Fernando Pessoa; William Wordsworth; parody; political criticism; Salazar.

### **Resumo**

O artigo defende que o poema “Liberdade”, de Fernando Pessoa, é uma paródia do poema “The Tables Turned”, de William Wordsworth, escrita num contexto ditatorial. A apologia da natureza, por oposição à cultura, apresentada neste último poema é retomada em Pessoa, mas com um propósito muito diferente. Pessoa, num tom aparentemente leve, serve-se do contraste entre natureza e cultura para o adaptar à ideologia de Salazar, o ditador português, que restringia a liberdade de expressão dos intelectuais. Enquanto em Wordsworth a natureza é laureada como fonte



de ética, Pessoa esvazia a nobreza deste elogio ao louvar a natureza por ser apenas o oposto das obrigações humanas (como, por exemplo, ler). O sujeito pessoano, indolente e despreocupado, parece ocupar o lugar a que Salazar destinou os intelectuais: o da acefalia crítica. Porém, há elementos do poema que dão conta da ironia subjacente ao papel representado pelo sujeito e a partir dos quais podemos ler não uma convivência com a política censória de Salazar, mas uma feroz crítica à mesma.

**Palavras-chave:** Fernando Pessoa; William Wordsworth; paródia; crítica política; Salazar.

Fernando Pessoa was a William Wordsworth’s reader. Scholars such as António Feijó (1996), George Monteiro (2000) and Mariana Gray Castro (2015) have accurately shown the effect that some Wordsworthian poems had on Pessoa’s compositions (for example, “A ceifeira” [“She sings, poor reaper”] is a response to “The lonely reaper” [vide Feijó, 1996 and Monteiro, 2000] and “Lisbon Revisited (1926)” is strongly influenced by “Tintern Abbey” [vide Castro, 2015]). Yet, curiously enough, to my knowledge, there are still no shared thoughts on the remarkable similitude between Wordsworth’s “The Tables Turned” and Pessoa’s “Liberdade.” In this article, I would like to explore the impact that the poem by Wordsworth had on Pessoa’s, and to suggest that these two poems should best be read in the light of each other – more specifically, that “Liberdade” should be understood as a parodical re-writing of “The Tables Turned.” In his poem, Pessoa repeats some ideas, words and sounds that exist in Wordsworth’s lines in order to adapt and distort them to a whole new situation, Portugal at the beginning of Estado Novo. This distortion reveals the obsolescence of Wordsworth’s old romantic forms to answer Portuguese national politics and the need to create a different, sharper speech – such as “Liberdade” – that may fulfil that role. It is my opinion that taking all this into account will enrich the meaning and intensify the irony of “Liberdade”, already underlined by some critics, as we will see further down.

The Tables Turned; an Evening Scene, on the Same Subject by W. Wordsworth

Up! up! my friend, and clear your looks,  
Why all this toil and trouble?  
Up! up! my friend, and quit your books,  
Or surely you'll grow double.

The sun above the mountain's head,  
A freshening lustre mellow,  
Through all the long green fields has spread,  
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife,  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music; on my life,  
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!  
He, too, is no mean preacher;



Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,  
Our minds and hearts to bless—  
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,  
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;  
— We murder to dissect.

Enough of science and of art;  
Close up these barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives.

(Wordsworth, 1986a: 105-106)

“The Tables Turned” answers the poem “Expostulation and Reply”, which appears immediately before it in *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>1</sup> In the latter poem, Matthew reprehends William (William Wordsworth’s representation) for sitting quietly on a grey stone, instead of studying, since books are “that light bequeathed / To Beings else forlorn and blind!” (*ibid.* 104, second stanza). William answers him that the life of the surrounding nature can also “feed this mind of ours / In a wise passiveness” (*ibid.*, sixth stanza). Nature is a source of knowledge as well, and should be seized with all our senses.

The title of the following poem, “The Tables Turned; an Evening Scene, *on the Same Subject*” (my underlines), already indicates the continuation of the previous ballad. In the poem, William (who continues the reply he previously gave Matthew) urges his friend to leave the books and contemplate

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is a declared response to “Expostulation and Reply” in “The Tables Turned,” the latter is also deeply connected with other poems by Wordsworth. Needless to say, nature is frequently the subject of the Romantic poet. Yet, the poem that most resembles “The Tables Turned” is “Lines written at a small distance from my house”. In this ballad, the speaker invites his sister to leave home and go with him to the fields “[a]nd bring no book; for this one day / We’ll give to idleness” (Wordsworth, *s.d.*: 46-47).

nature instead. There is a reversal of roles – which is already announced in the poem's title, for the expression "turning the tables" means, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to reverse the relation between two persons or parties, so as to put each in the other's place or relative condition; to cause a complete reversal of the state of affairs".<sup>2</sup> In "The Tables Turned", William, who was reprehended by Matthew in "Expostulation and Reply", puts himself in his friend's shoes and reproaches him for being indoors reading, while nature outside looks so inviting.

The poet passionately passes an encomium on nature. He considers books to be "toil and trouble" (l. 4) and a source of bad health (they will make the listener "grow double") (l. 2). He prompts Matthew to get up and appreciate nature instead – "Come forth, and bring with you a heart / That watches and receives" (l. 31-32). Compared to the vitality of nature, books only have "barren leaves" (l. 30). The poem is written in iambic meter, and with a simple rhyme scheme of *abab*. Metrically stressed words accentuate the variegated marvels of nature – "sweet (...) music", "wisdom", "blithe", "light", "teacher", "world", "wealth", "bless", "spontaneous", "health", "cheerfulness", "moral", "good", "lore" – whereas the qualifiers of books, equally stressed, only emphasize their gloominess – "dull" and "endless strife". Unlike books, which are static and tedious, nature is vibrant, rich and the true source of knowledge. In the sixth stanza, nature is even acknowledged to be the origin of ethics. Knowing that the poet identified himself with the speaker, it seems pertinent to recall Wordsworth's ideas about nature.<sup>3</sup> In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet states:

Low and rustic life was generally chosen [as the object of the poems], because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily

<sup>2</sup> "table" *OED* online, Oxford University Press, December 2020. Available in <https://www.oed.com/oed2/00245848> (accessed January 13, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> It is well-known that, in Romantic poetry, the identification between the poet and the speaker was quite common – and Wordsworth was one of its precursors. Specifically, the sole speaker of "The Tables Turned" overlaps with the last speaker of "Expostulation and Reply" – William, who shares the author's first name and his love for nature, opposite to human artificiality. What is more, contrarily to what happens in "Expostulation and Reply", in "The Tables Turned" there are no inverted commas to present the speech of its only speaker – which I believe was purposely done to give the impression of a direct, unmediated speech of the author.

comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions (Wordsworth, 1986b: 245).

In his ballads, Wordsworth prefers to portray rustic life since, due to its proximity to nature, it is more authentic than the vain life led by urban people. What is more, people who live closer to nature develop more mature passions, their language is more genuine, and their lives are free from the social constraints that exist in the city. It seems that nature heals all the human vices and that our qualities are, in fact, derivatives of nature. All these ideas are in perfect consonance with the advocacy of the contact with the natural world in “The Tables Turned”. This poem is a rhetorical discourse in which the speaker tries to persuade his listener of the marvellous powers of nature. In order to elaborate his speech, he not only gives arguments (nature is the source of health, wisdom and ethics) but also uses examples, such as the visual ones of the setting sun and the “long green fields” (second stanza) and the auditive ones of the singing birds (stanzas 3-4). However, the conclusion, in the seventh stanza, is stained by death:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Misshapes the beautiful forms of things:—  
We murder to dissect.

In opposition to the knowledge created by nature, our intellect is “meddling” – it cannot lie still and simply enjoy things. As it involves itself with the erroneous sources of knowledge – such as books – it “[m]is-shapes the beautiful forms of things”. The terrible inference appears in the final line: “[w]e murder to dissect”. The excess of analysis destroys the sage passiveness which the poet defends in this and in the previous poem.

It would be important to recall that Wordsworth does not celebrate nature per se; he rather celebrates it as a medium to an end: the stimulation of our senses. Nature allows us to have a purely sensorial experience, if we are disposed to watch and receive it in a state of “wise passiveness”.



Nevertheless, would our attitude towards nature be one of “meddling intellect” (which is the exact opposite of the “wise passiveness”), we would interfere in it instead of simply but sagely enjoying it, and the result would be the death of our senses. On the other way around, good results would come out of the opening of our senses allowed by the sensorial contact with nature. Poetry, famously defined in Wordsworth’s preface as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (*ibid.* 246), surely was, to the poet, one of them.

In the poem “Liberdade” (“Liberty”) Fernando Pessoa adopts Wordsworth’s speech in “The Tables Turned”, but in a parodic way. It would be useful to remember that “parody”, a literary technique, “searches out, by means of subversive mimicry, any weakness, pretension or lack of self-awareness in its original [work, the one it pretends to mimic]” (Childs, 2006: 166-167). What is more, “[t]he parodist is often an ironist, affecting admiration of the style borrowed and *distorted*” (*ibid.*, my underlines). Let us carefully see how Fernando Pessoa borrows and distorts Wordsworth’s poem, often with irony, in order to accomplish political criticism.

## LIBERDADE por Fernando Pessoa

(Falta uma citação de Séneca)

1      Ai que prazer  
       Não cumprir um dever,  
       Ter um livro para ler  
       E não o fazer!  
 5      Ler é maçada,  
       Estudar é nada.  
       O sol doira  
       Sem literatura.  
       O rio corre, bem ou mal,  
 10     Sem edição original.  
       E a brisa, essa,  
       De tão naturalmente matinal,  
       Como tem tempo não tem pressa...

## Liberty by F. Pessoa

*(with a citation from Seneca missing)*

Ah, how delightful  
 Not to do one’s duty,  
 Having a book to read  
 And not read it!  
 Reading’s a bore,  
 Studying’s worthless.  
 The sun gilds things  
 Without literature.  
 Willy nilly runs the river  
 Without an original edition.  
 And the breeze, this very one,  
 So natural, matutinal,  
 Since it has time, is in no hurry...



	Livros são papéis pintados com tinta.	Books are papers daubed with ink.
15	Estudar é uma coisa em que está indistinta A distinção entre nada e coisa nenhuma.	Study's the thing where the distinction Is unclear between nothing and nothing at all.
	Quanto é melhor, quanto há bruma, Esperar por D. Sebastião, Quer venha ou não!	When there's fog, so much the better To wait for King Sebastian's return – Whether he comes or not!
20	Grande é a poesia, a bondade e as danças... Mas o melhor do mundo são crianças, Flores, música, o luar, e o sol, que peca Só quando, em vez de criar, seca.	Poetry is grand, and goodness too, and dancing... But best of all are children, Flowers, music, moonlight, and the sun That sins only when aborting and not bearing.
	O mais do que isto	And more than all of this
25	É Jesus Cristo, Que não sabia nada de finanças Nem consta que tivesse biblioteca... (Pessoa, 1973: 246-247)	Is Jesus Christ, Who knew nothing of finances Nor ever claimed he had a library... (Pessoa, 1998: 177 [translated by Edwin Honig])

The poem starts with an expression of relief. The speaker – who never uses personal pronouns nor conjugated verbs in the first person singular – acknowledges, with the interjection “Ah”, that it is a pleasure not to fulfil a duty. Afterwards, he provides an example of a duty unfulfilled: “having a book to read / And not read it!”. The tone seems to be triumphal, which is emphasized by the exclamation mark at the end of the first four lines (l. 4). The word “duty” is the closest allusion there is to ethics in this poem. Duty is reading a book – which is considered “a bore” (l. 5). It seems that, contrary to what happens in “The Tables Turned”, in this poem ethics is not part of the splendour of nature – it only concerns tedious moral obligations.

The other lines of the first stanza provide a poor imitation of Wordsworth's description of nature. The speaker bestows a brief encomium on nature, whose elements are always free from lifeless human affairs – the sun does not depend on literature to shine, and the river does not need



any original edition to flow. Literature is useless: the world goes on without it. As in Wordsworth, Pessoa’s speaker also endows the natural elements with visual (“[t]he sun gilds things”) and auditive (“runs the river”) sensations.

Mentioning the river is, I believe, not just a coincidence. It is true that no rivers are mentioned in “The Tables Turned”. Yet, there are so many poems by Wordsworth that describe and praise rivers or streams, that this natural element is mostly associated with him and, by extension, with English Romantic poetry. Pessoa was well acknowledged with Wordsworth’s oeuvres and greatly admired “Tintern Abbey”, perhaps his most well-known riverside poem (*vide* Castro, 2015). So, I believe that the choice of the river as an example of a natural element in “Liberdade” is not innocent. When the speaker qualifies the flowing of the river with indifference – “[w]illy nilly” – he is being parodical, for this qualifier of carelessness withdraws all the magnificent beauty of the romantic rivers. In this line (l. 10), there evidently is the mimicry with critical distance which is characteristic of parody.<sup>4</sup> This critical distance not only produces a comical effect but also, more importantly, it draws the reader’s attention to the inadequacy of the old Romantic speech on nature to the situation that the poet is living. This inadequacy will be emphasized in the poem’s next stanzas.

After presenting arguments in favour of nature in the first lines, the following ones provide arguments directly against literature. The speaker minimizes books to “papers daubed with ink”. Studying seems to be pointless. Conversely, the great things are enumerated in the fourth stanza: poetry,<sup>5</sup> goodness, dancing, children, flowers, music, moonlight and the sun. The reference to two immensely renowned persons – one, King Sebastian, at a national scale; the other, Jesus Christ, at an international one – introduces a great difference between this poem and Wordsworth’s, where there is no naming of (famous) people.

The allusion to Jesus Christ seems to be, at first reading, the poem’s climax. Jesus Christ, who was this extraordinary human being, did not have a library and knew nothing about finances. It is the ultimate example of how it is not human knowledge that makes people great. Yet, a closer look at the

<sup>4</sup> Linda Hutcheon defines “parody” as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (1985: 6).

<sup>5</sup> Poetry is a great thing and books are dull, argues the speaker. There seems to be a contradiction here, for poetry surely exists in books. Yet, the oral origin of poetry and its deep connection with music, which is also praised as great, may explain why it is luckily excluded from the dullness of books. What is more, poetry may be the result of a disinterested observation of nature, as Wordsworth’s “The Tables Turned” confirms.



historical context in which Pessoa wrote this poem may make these same lines acquire an utterly different tone. As the critics Luís Prista and Jerónimo Pizarro have noticed (*vide* Prista, 2003 and Pizarro, 2017), the lightness of this poem and its childish tone are only apparent.<sup>6</sup> The poem is, in fact, a ferocious criticism of Salazar and particularly of the censorship implemented by him. Pizarro gives two arguments to support this thesis. The first one is an explanation of the mysterious epigraph – “(with a citation from Seneca missing)”. At first sight, it seems to be only a carelessly forgotten note. Yet, when we learn more about the poem’s context, we realise its sharp connotation. “Liberdade” was written in March 16, 1935. Some weeks before, on February 21, Salazar, Portugal’s Prime-Minister, gave a speech on the responsibilities of the country’s *intelligentsia*, in which he tightened the censorship on the artists’ works. In his speech, Salazar quoted a passage from Seneca’s *Of Peace of Mind* to support his idea that writers should write less and better (in other words, they should restrain the topic of their books to the praise of the nation).<sup>7</sup> Seneca’s passage cited by Salazar would be, according to Pizarro, the quotation that Pessoa would like to include in his epigraph, if there was freedom of speech – which there was not. Now, it is impossible not to be suspicious of the title’s meaning, which perhaps is not so much a reference to the joyful movement of nature, as opposed to human duties, as it is an ironic allusion to the lack of what it states – the lack of liberty imposed by Salazar.

The other argument that Pizarro presents relates to the reference to Jesus Christ, in the last stanza. Jesus Christ was great and (or because) he knew nothing about finances. He is in straight contrast with Salazar, who had been Portugal’s Minister of Finance from 1928 until 1932. The choice of the word “finances” was so ostensibly connected with Salazar that this poem’s publication was rejected by a censor (*id.* 155). The poem could only be published posthumously.<sup>8</sup>

There is yet another subtle contrast between Jesus Christ and Salazar in the poem. Salazar was known to be a devout Catholic: his public image was of a caste, austere leader. He would then be regarded as a prominent follower of Jesus Christ’s teachings. Yet, Pessoa tells us that the holy

<sup>6</sup> The poem was included in several poetry books for children (*vide* Prista, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> According to Luís Prista (2003: 237), this is the passage quoted by Salazar: “[t]hus in the houses of the laziest of men you will see the works of all the orators and historians stacked upon bookshelves reaching right up to the ceiling” (Seneca, 1900).

<sup>8</sup> It was first published in September 11, 1937, in the magazine *Seara Nova*, nr. 526, almost two years after Pessoa’s death. To the author’s misfortune, the first censor was apparently stricter than the second one (*vide* Prista, 2003: 223-225).



dictator was, on the contrary, a sinner: he sins and dries (l. 22-23). Obviously, Jesus Christ was “mais do que isto” (l. 24).

I am interpreting the word “sun” in the poem, mentioned twice in the poem, as the Portuguese dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar. The sun not only dries cultures (ll. 22-23), but it also “gilds things / Without literature” (ll. 7-8). These last lines could again be a reference to the censorial power of Salazar, which shines the better when the intellectuals’ production (“literature”) is restrained. According to the Portuguese dictionary *Houaiss*, one of the metaphoric definitions of the noun “sun” (“sol”) is “what illuminates, directs, leads; lighthouse, torch, guide” (Houaiss, 2002, my translation). The person who is at the head of a country could be an instance of this definition. It is also quite interesting to notice that the swastika, which was adopted in 1920 by the Nazi Party, being henceforth deeply connected with right-wing dictatorships, was an ancient symbol of the sun.

Regarding the mention of Portuguese King Sebastian, *The Desired* (l. 18-19), it manifests indifference – we shall wait for him “[w]hether he comes or not!”. The indifference, of course, has comical effects, for it (as happened with the previous reference to the river) downgrades the mysticism of the Sebastianist myth. Yet, the lines referring to King Sebastian are also imbedded in irony if we read them as an answer to Salazar’s speech. As Salazar was able to balance the Portuguese public finances when he was Portugal’s Minister of Finance, at the beginning of *Estado Novo* he was acclaimed as a national hero and the nation’s saviour – he would be the desired, the reincarnation of the lost monarch, in light of Sebastianism. The irony in Pessoa’s lines lies in the suggestion that Salazar could (or, in this case, could not) embody the mythical Sebastianist figure.

Comparing the end of Wordsworth’s poem to the end of Pessoa’s, we find undeniable similitudes. “Enough of science and of art” echoes in the words “finances” and “library,” both of which had nothing to do with Jesus Christ, the prime example of what liberty means. His life was guided by a unique sacred mission, which was far above human knowledge and societal organization. Moreover, the most powerful line in Wordsworth’s poem – “— We murder to dissect” – strongly reminds us of Pessoa’s lines “(...) e o sol, que peca / Só quando, em vez de criar, seca” (ll. 22-23). Notice the rhyme in the syllables ending in “eca,” which is so close to the sound *ect* in “dissect”. The rhyme occurs in the two darkest – hence, the most striking – words in Pessoa’s poem: “peca” (sins) and “seca” (dries). Both the words “seca” and “dissect” are the last words in their lines and the



closing words of the most significant stanzas in the poems. Besides the coincidence of their place in the lines and of the sound *sec*, both also conclude the climax of the poems.<sup>9</sup> What is more, as it happens in Wordsworth's line "We murder to dissect", Pessoa's lines "(...) e o sol, que peca / Só quando, em vez de criar, seca" are the only ones in which we find some sense of gloom. Whereas the English poet states that death comes from overanalysis, the Portuguese poet alludes to the death of nature when the sun, being too strong, dries it instead of giving it life. In both cases, excess induces death.

Let us bear in mind that "Liberdade" was written as a hot reaction against Salazar's dictatorship. Hence, the poem's strongest lines cannot refer to the excess of intellectual effort alluded to in Wordsworth's corresponding lines. On the contrary, they ironically refer to just the opposite of that kind of excess: they rather imply that the excess of censorship imposed by the dictator kills intellectual flourishing.

Pizarro claims that in the poem "Pessoa ironically plays the role of the 'lazy' one mentioned in Seneca's passage quoted by Salazar" (Pizarro, 2017: 159, my translation). Later, he adds: "the poem 'Liberdade' turns into a provocative compliment to laziness, a flaw that Salazar accuses the opposition intellectuals of having" (*ibid.* 160, my translation). Therefore, the parody of "The Tables Turned" in "Liberdade" surely has ironic intonations. Wordsworth's speech is repeated in a deflated manner, so as to comply with Salazar's indications – which is just the opposite of Fernando Pessoa's intention when writing the poem. The ethics attached to nature in Wordsworth's poem, where the natural world is praised as the source of wisdom and glory, do not exist in Pessoa's. Here, nature's and Jesus Christ's merit is just not having to work nor study – they escape doing degrading human obligations, such as reading books. Of course, this first reading is in line with Salazar's programme. Yet, the final lines, which disguisedly but sharply distinguish Jesus Christ from Salazar, carry an epigrammatic *punctum* and cast off the superficial lightness of the previous stanzas.

There is yet another ironic element in Pessoa's poem. Pessoa chose to sign it with his own name (and not with the name of one of his heteronyms), with the plausible intention of assigning to himself the words of the speaker. Nevertheless, the difference between Pessoa's urban, intellectual, depressive personality, expressed in most of his *orthonym* (i.e. signed by himself) poems, and this

<sup>9</sup> This, of course, entails that the true climax of "Liberdade" occurs before the reference to Jesus Christ.



speaker’s light, lazy mood is astonishing. Of course, this is in part explained by the underlying criticism of Salazar. Still, I believe there is more to it. In a brief essay, Pessoa explains that there are four levels of lyric poetry, and the fourth is the one where “the poet (...) fully undergoes depersonalization. He not only feels but lives the states of soul that he does not possess directly” (Pessoa, 1966: 67, translated by Edwin Honig in Pessoa, 2001: 66).<sup>10</sup> For Pessoa, lyric poetry at its highest level was, in fact, dramatic poetry – in the sense that, although it does not present a dramatic form, it is suffused with many different voices. When a poem reaches this state, the sincerity of the poet is no longer a question – for he sincerely feels, with thought and imagination, the characters whose voices he plays. In a letter addressed to the literary critic João Gaspar Simões, Pessoa affirms:

The main point of my personality as an artist is that I am a dramatic poet; I continuously have, *in everything I write*, the poet’s intimate exaltation and the dramatist’s depersonalization. I fly other – this is all (Pessoa, 1999: 255; my underlines, my translation).

Even when signing the poems with his own name, conveying the impression that he was closely identified with the speaker, Pessoa would be forging. The poet is the speaker, for he is able, as an actor, to depersonalize and (pretend to) be another person; yet, this dramatization at the same time entails an evident separation from actor and character. This prevents readers from guessing who is actually speaking.

Irony pervades Fernando Pessoa’s work in such a way that it is difficult for his critics to categorically state anything about it. As he writes on this subject, recalling the research done by Caio Gagliardi on the Portuguese poet, Mateus Lourenço notes:

(...) [there is in Pessoa’s work] a pronouncedly modern irony in several aspects. It is a figure of speech, but it also implies a complex and subtle questioning of the bases of individuality, the expression of the subject and the limits that separate the categories of reality and fiction (Lourenço, 2017: 79, my translation).

In the essay “O provincianismo português” [“The Portuguese Provincialism”] Pessoa affirms that “[t]he essence of irony lies in being unable to discern a text’s second meaning through its words, but in being aware of said second meaning on account of it being impossible for the text to actually

<sup>10</sup> The referred essay, “O primeiro grau da poesia lírica”, was only published posthumously.



be saying what it reads” (Pessoa, 2006: 12, translated by Filipe Faria in Cavalcanti Filho, 2019). Irony forces us to question our first reading of a poem, in order to grasp its underlying meaning. Following Pessoa’s argument, “Liberdade” – a frivolous repetition of William’s laudation of nature in “The Tables Turned”, at first reading – cannot “be saying what it reads”. What it truly says – a critique of Estado Novo’s politics of censorship – can only be understood if we read the poem in light of two texts: Salazar’s speech delivered on February 21, 1935 (as was wittily noticed by Luís Prista and Jerónimo Pizarro), and William Wordsworth’s “The Tables Turned”. If Wordsworth’s poem replies to another poem, “Expostulation and Reply”, in which the poet is reprehended, Pessoa’s “Liberdade” also answers another text, Salazar’s speech. This entails that Salazar is in the same position as the short-sighted friend that reproves William in “Expostulation and Reply”. Besides mimicking the main topics and even some sounds of “The Tables Turned” in “Liberdade”, Pessoa also takes from Wordsworth the desire to affront the recommendations of a second person, the Portuguese dictator.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this work was to show how the poem “Liberdade”, by Fernando Pessoa, was inspired by “The Tables Turned”, by William Wordsworth. It was argued that the former is a parody of Wordsworth’s poem, for Pessoa mimics and ironically subverts Wordsworth’s speech with a critical purpose.

The first evident similitude between the poems is that both present an encomium of nature. However, there is a great difference in the intonation the speakers give to their words. Whereas Wordsworth makes, in his poem, a sincere hymn to nature, regarded as the source of knowledge and ethics (contrasting with culture, which is but “toil and trouble”), Pessoa’s laudation of nature does not have that passionate, moral intensity. The same praising speech is repeated, but with an (apparently) less noble intent. At first – in a superficial reading – it seems that Pessoa’s speaker is only an indolent person who hates books and the moral obligation their reading implies, and who loves nature for being the opposite of that.

The dichotomy between nature and culture underlies “The Tables Turned” and is central in this poem, which has no political resonance; Pessoa reproduces the same discussion in “Liberdade”,



in which it is not the core, but the façade of the poem. The traditional discussion works here only as a disguise for a sharp critique of Estado Novo – its real subject. In his poem, Pessoa assumes the position to which Salazar relegated the Portuguese intellectuals, because of censorship. Yet, two subtle indications – in the epigraph and in the lines that allude to Jesus Christ – suggest to more attentive readers that it is impossible for the poem to express what it literally means. The poem is not an encomiastic speech on nature and it neither represents a subservience to Estado Novo’s censorship programme. It is rather a condemnation of Salazar’s policy of censorship – announced in the speech delivered on February 21, 1935.

Wordsworth’s encomiastic speech on nature is repeated and subverted in “Liberdade”, but this is not the only tie between the poems. Both also seem to agree on one topic: excess kills. This idea is present in the strongest lines in the poems, which also resemble in the striking sound *ec*: “We murder to dissect”; “(...) e o sol, que *peca* / Só quando, em vez de criar, *seca*”. “Liberdade” equally replicates some vocabulary about nature which was typical of Wordsworth and Romantic poetry, such as the words “sun” and “river.” In Pessoa, the sun is a reference to Salazar and to his sin of drying the intellectuals’ production, and the river is described in such a manner that it, by extension, downgrades Romantic poetry. In fact, Pessoa seems to imply in his poem that the Romantic diction was no longer suitable to poets, specially to the ones that, as himself, lacked freedom of speech.

The icing on the cake is that, as Wordsworth answers to his annoying friend in “The Tables Turned”, Pessoa replicates this model in “Liberdade”, where he also answers someone whose speech has not pleased him at all.

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**Teresa Líbano Monteiro** graduated in Arts and Humanities from the University of Lisbon (FLUL) and received her Master in Culture Studies from the Portuguese Catholic University (UCP). Her MA thesis is about the short stories by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen and Mary Lavin. At this moment, she is preparing her doctoral thesis in Theory of Literature on José Régio. She also teaches Portuguese as foreign language at UCP.

