

***Heteronymic Translation Project:
The Translator as Experimenter in Fernando Pessoa's
"Lisbon. What the Tourist Should See"***

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Abstract

This article examines the translation of Fernando Pessoa's guidebook, focusing on the translator's innovative approach that transcends traditional fidelity to the source text. By employing a heteronymic method inspired by Pessoa's literary technique of creating multiple, distinct personas, the translator re-imagines the original work, introducing new layers and perspectives. The translation transforms the guidebook from a simple reproduction into a dynamic narrative in which Lisbon itself becomes a heteronym—an active participant who speaks about Pessoa rather than merely being described by him. This article explores the implications of this creative translation, emphasizing the interplay between the visibility of the translator and the production of new meanings within the text, and demonstrates how the introduction of additional textual elements enriches the original narrative, offering readers a fresh, interactive engagement with both the city of Lisbon and Pessoa's literary world.

Fernando Pessoa is a unique and complex poet, torn between different identities, whose work seems to reflect his inner fragmentation. The poet's life and writings, filled with contradictions, constantly raise questions about the boundaries of authenticity, identity, and literary coherence. Pessoa never

created a singular, closed-off vision—instead, he left behind a mosaic of fragments: scattered thoughts, notes, sketches, and projects that never reached full realization. This “incoherence” in Pessoa’s work is not accidental; in fact, it forms its very foundation. His writings remain unfinished and suspended in the space between what is possible and what is unattainable. While at first glance this may seem like a lack of consistency, in reality, it is a deliberate rejection of the need for completeness—as if the author knew that fully understanding oneself and the world is impossible. The multitude of voices that speak through Pessoa’s work is nothing less than an attempt to capture a fragmented reality that refuses to be confined within any boundaries.

Pessoa was born in 1888, and Roman Jakobson rightly included him on the list of world-class artists born in the 1880s—alongside Stravinsky, Picasso, Joyce, Braque, Khlebnikov, and Le Corbusier. As a “poet and writer, not by profession, but by calling”¹, he devoted his entire life to literature. As a result of his devotion, when he died of liver cirrhosis in a hospital on November 30, 1935, readers in Portugal were bidding farewell to an already well-known and great Portuguese poet—one who, in time, would also come to be recognized as one of the greatest prose writers of the 20th century.

One of the most fundamental ideas present in Pessoa’s works is the belief that someone who is only themselves is, in fact, no one at all. Someone who lives only outwardly, in the world as we know it, merely exists—but does not and cannot truly *be*.

How, then, can these two existential demands – namely the need to be someone other than oneself and the need for an inner life – be reconciled? Pessoa offers a solution: *to truly exist is to exist in multiple ways within oneself*. One can only be oneself by inventing oneself.

In a poem from 1933, Pessoa wrote about his unusual way of traveling, referencing his belief in a “multiple existence”:

To travel! To change countries!
 To be forever someone else,
 With a soul that has no roots,
 Living only off what it sees!
 To belong not even to me!
 To go forward, to follow after
 The absence of any goal
 And any desire to achieve it!²

Pessoa travelled without moving; his landscape was the shifting nature of his inner world. At any moment, he would become someone else—one

¹ Pessoa, F., *Księga niepokoju*, Warszawa 2013, p. 52.

² Pessoa, F., [in:] Richard Zenith, *Pessoa. An Experimental Life*, London 2022, p. 253.

time Albert Caeiro, another Álvaro de Campos or Ricardo Reis. He was also a defender of the mysteries of Sebastianism and the vision of the Fifth Empire, and at times, a seeker of spiritual truths. Years earlier, when asked about the source of his multiplicity, he admitted that his constant answer to the question *Who am I?* was the result of a dissociation of personality. His world was filled with dozens of fictional authors who populated his writing—and, in a way, his life. Some became lasting figures, “heteronyms” with their own biographies, while others quickly faded from memory.

What is a heteronym? It is not a made-up name (that would be a pseudonym) used by a writer to conceal their identity. It is not an abstract persona adopted as a literary trick. Instead, it is another name behind which stands a completely different person—with a distinct biography, a different appearance, entirely separate views, and even a published bibliography of their own. Pessoa created his heteronyms with greatest detail.

The first one, Caeiro, was born a year after Pessoa, was self-taught, wrote poems resembling Buddhist koans, and died young, in 1915, of tuberculosis. Reis, the melancholy Epicurean, was a doctor, one year older than Pessoa, who emigrated to Brazil in 1919. Campos was born in 1890, studied naval engineering in Glasgow, was a dandy who smoked opium, drank absinthe, and imitated Whitman. Campos lived the longest—until Pessoa’s own death—but he was also the only one who could afford to warn a certain woman against any contact with Fernando Pessoa, whose views he didn’t much respect³.

For most of his life, Pessoa remained in a deep depression, from which he could only be lifted by his two passions: alcohol and literature. He was unable to write larger works, jotting down his thoughts and plans on random scraps of paper, napkins, and envelopes. He would often hastily type out everything that pierced his mind. In this way, over several decades, he created *The Book of Disquiet*—a collection of fragments, notes, excerpts from an intimate journal, and letters, which Pessoa never gave a final form. Similarly, he wrote a guide to Lisbon titled *Lisbon. What the Tourist Should See*—the only work he ever wrote in English. It was meant to be part of a much larger and more ambitious project, *All About Portugal*—a comprehensive compendium for foreign businessmen and tourists, which Pessoa planned for over ten years but never completed.

When the Lisbon guide was finally published in 1992, many Pessoa scholars remained sceptical, suspecting it was a translation rather than an original work⁴. Unlike his other great writings, in this one, Pessoa used a plain and expressionless style. Many sentences in the book undoubtedly sound better

³ Zenith, R., *Pessoa, An Experimental Life*, London 2022.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 671.

in translation. Adjectives like *remarkable*, *fine*, and *magnificent* appear repeatedly, posing a challenge for translators. Their frequent and somewhat mechanical use makes it difficult to maintain the fluidity and naturalness of the text in the target language. A translator must be creative in avoiding excessive repetition—either by using synonyms or restructuring sentences to keep the text dynamic. However, the fact that this was an original work by Pessoa is confirmed by the preserved typescript, on which he made handwritten corrections affecting both content and style. These very revisions, an integral part of the text, can also influence a translator's decisions, requiring a delicate balance between faithfulness to the original and readability in translation. Despite that, since Lisbon is now a major tourist destination and Pessoa is a writer of global renown, his travel guide sells well and has been published in many languages.

Written in early 1926, Pessoa's Lisbon guide drew almost all of its technical information from an authoritative travel guide to the city, published in Portuguese just two months earlier⁵. His failure to bring to life descriptions of art museums, public monuments, churches, and other landmarks had less to do with weaknesses in his English prose—which could be brilliantly expressive—and more with his relative lack of interest in the material world. Indifferent to art and architecture, he remained unmoved by their details.

Although most of Pessoa's travel guide is dull to read, it features a clever framing structure and a promising first page. The author invites the tourist to join him in his automobile for a drive through the city, while an experienced guide points out all the landmarks.

Before that, however, he offers his ideal tourist—arriving in Lisbon by ship—a radiant, almost initiatory vision of the city.

Over seven hills, which are as many points of observation whence the most magnificent panoramas may be enjoyed, the vast irregular and many-coloured mass of houses that constitute Lisbon is scattered. For the traveller who comes in from the sea, Lisbon, even from afar, rises like a fair vision in a dream, clear-cut against a bright blue sky which the sun gladdens with its gold. And the domes, the monuments, the old castles jut up above the mass of houses, like far-off heralds of the delightful seat, of this blessed region⁶.

Na siedmiu wzgórzach, punktach obserwacyjnych, z których można podziwiać najwspanialsze panoramy, rozrzucona jest ogromna, nieregularna i wielobarwna masa domów. To Lizbona. Dla podróżnika, który przybywa od strony morza, Lizbona, nawet z daleka, wyłania się jak piękna wizja we śnie, wyraźnie zarysowana na tle jasnego, błękitnego nieba, uszczęśliwionego

⁵ Zenith, R., *Pessoa, An Experimental Life*, London 2022, p. 671.

⁶ Pessoa, F., *Lisbon. What the tourist should see*, Swindon 2008, p. 1.

złotem słońca. Kopuły, pomniki, stare zamki wyrastają ponad masę domów, jakby były odległymi zwiastunami tej wspaniałej siedziby, tego błogosławionego regionu⁷.

This “vast, irregular, and many-coloured mass of houses” is a characteristic statement by Pessoa, reminding us of similar fragments about the capital in *The Book of Disquiet*⁸. The visionary Lisbon, built on seven hills like Rome, was the city Pessoa loved, not its museums or other tourist attractions. As soon as he leaves the hills, on the second side of the book, to meet the ideal tourist, the guide shifts into a dull and lifeless description of places to see.

Translating a text by an author who became renowned as one of the most important modernist poets of the 20th century presents significant challenges. There are questions about the “visibility” of the translator⁹, their role as a creator rather than a mere reproducer of the source text¹⁰, and the possibility—or even necessity—of manipulating the original, meaning the extent of the translator’s intervention.

In the case of this new translation¹¹ of Pessoa’s guide into Polish, the translator decided to go beyond a traditional, faithful reproduction of the source text. Using a heteronymic approach, inspired by Pessoa’s technique of creating multiple distinct literary personas as discussed above, allowed for the creation of a text that introduces new layers and becomes an interesting reference to the author’s work. The translation is not just a reproduction of the original but a transformed version, where Lisbon becomes a heteronym—an active participant in the narrative, telling us about Pessoa, rather than just being described by him. In this new version, the city takes on the status of a character that engages with Pessoa’s creativity and offers a different perspective on the city. The heteronymic translation technique in this new version of the book involves introducing “notes on Pessoa”—short descriptions related to the writer’s life, woven into the text as accounts of events from his life linked to specific places in Lisbon¹². This technique breathes life into the monotonous guide text, engaging the reader in a kind of game where they discover not only the city but also the secrets of Pessoa’s life.

⁷ The excerpt comes from a new translation of *Lisbon. What the Tourist Should See* by Hanna Mijas, commissioned by the publishing house Ameliówka: Ogród Wydawniczy. The book is scheduled for publication in June 2025.

⁸ Zenith, R., Pessoa. *An Experimental Life*, London 2022, p. 670.

⁹ Venuti, L., *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London, New York 1995.

¹⁰ Jarniewicz, J., *Gościnność słowa. Szkice o przekładzie literackim*, Kraków 2012.

¹¹ Scheduled for publication in June 2025.

¹² Here are two examples of such notes (of which there are 20 in total) inserted into the original text:

Lisbon tells the story of Pessoa, recalling his presence in the places where he lived, wrote, and walked. The cafés where he spent his time, the trams that travel the same routes as they did a hundred years ago, and even the sounds of the city seem to still carry traces of his thoughts— as if the poet never left the city.

These short “insertions” created by the translator give the text an intimacy, making Pessoa feel closer to the reader, allowing for a better understanding of his writing, creative impotence, madness, relationships with others, and dedication to literature.

However, the reader of this translated version of the original might ask not so much about the validity of such a translation technique, but about the translator’s right to intervene in such a way. What are the limits of manipulating the source text?

The well-known radical heterogeneity of languages, thoroughly explored by philosophers and linguists since the 19th century and used as a key argument in favour of the concept of untranslatability, extends to individual uses of language, including Pessoa’s original, questioning the very notion of translation and communication. In *The Book of Disquiet*, Pessoa wrote about it in the following way:

The true substance of whatever I feel is absolutely incommunicable, and the more profoundly I feel it, the more incommunicable it is. In order to convey to someone else what I feel, I must translate my feelings into his language¹³.

Café Martinho da Arcada

Kawiarnia Martinho da Arcada – solidna i elegancka, z boazerią na ścianach i kilkoma szerokimi łukami podtrzymującymi sufit – w czasach Pessoa straciła dawną popularność i często świeciła pustkami. Mimo to każdego popołudnia poeta spędzał tam co najmniej godzinę, otoczony gronem przyjaciół i sporadycznymi gośćmi, którzy zjawiali się, by z nim porozmawiać. Do swoich ostatnich dni siadał przy tym samym stoliku, przy którym spisywał swoje myśli.

Rua Coelho da Rocha

Mała sypialnia Pessoa, znajdująca się w sercu mieszkania ukochanej siostry przy Rua Coelho da Rocha, była zasypana książkami i papierami – papiery leżały w drewnianej skrzyni, a książki i dokumenty piętrzyły się na stole, komodzie i nocnym stoliku obok łóżka. Kiedy przebywał w mieszkaniu sam, jego książki i papiery rozprzestrzeniały się także na jadalnię. Popielniczki przepełnione niedopałkami papierosów. Tu i ówdzie pusty kieliszek wciąż pachniał brandy. Późno w nocy, po zakończeniu picia, Pessoa chodził w tę i z powrotem po mieszkaniu lub siedział nieruchomo, w ciemności, paląc.

¹³ Pessoa, F., [in:] Keating, E., *Vanishing Boundaries: Fernando Pessoa and His Translators*, How Peripheral is the Periphery? Translating Portugal Back and Forth Essays in Honour of João Ferreira Duarte, eds. Rita Beno Maia, Marta Pacheco Pinto, Sara Ramos Pinto, Newcastle 2015, p. 8.

and:

No one understands anyone else. We are, as the poet said, islands in the sea of life, between us flows the sea that defines and separates us. However much one soul strives to know another, it can only know what is told by him by a word – a shapeless shadow on the ground of his understanding¹⁴.

In the case of working with a source text as complex as *Lisbon. What the Tourist Should See*, the translator finds herself in a situation where she is forced to reorganize the original, repeatedly review and edit the English edition, and create her own new version of the text. In addition to the task of (re)constructing the source text, the translation of this book involves challenges related to Pessoa's unique style, both at the level of syntactic construction and semantic repetitiveness. The issues with the original text of the Lisbon guide lead to a dilemma: should one stay closer to Pessoa's awkward text, risking criticism from readers, or try to avoid that criticism by creating an acceptable, normalized translation? The translator chooses a different solution—she creates a hybrid text, enriched with elements that do not appear in the original.

The problem faced by the translator is the traditional conflict between adequacy and acceptability¹⁵. This conflict forces her to consciously define certain translation options and carefully manage the “difficulty of serving two masters: the foreignness of the original and the reader's desire for appropriation”¹⁶. This, in turn, blurs the boundaries between the author and the translator.

The discussed heteronymic translation points to a significant shift in understanding the role of the translator in contemporary culture. While it is hard to speak of equal partnership between the author and the translator as co-authors in the translation, it is clear that the translator stops being invisible and breaks with the traditional understanding of literary translation, which most often hides its translational status.

The issue of the ideal of the invisible translator, who on one hand deceives the reader into thinking they are engaging with the original text, while on the other hand hides various interventions in the text, was most extensively ad-

¹⁴ Ibidem p. 8.

¹⁵ Nida, E., *Towards a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*, Leiden 1964.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, P., *Sur la traduction*, Paris 2004 [in:] Keating, E., *Vanishing Boundaries: Fernando Pessoa and His Translators*, [in:] *How Peripheral is the Periphery? Translating Portugal Back and Forth Essays in Honour of João Ferreira Duarte*, eds. Rita Beno Maia, Marta Pacheco Pinto, Sara Ramos Pinto, Newcastle 2015, p. 13.

dressed by Lawrence Venuti¹⁷. Fortunately, this transparency of the translator is rarely required today. If the translator's work is to make sense, it must only do so when it enables the "experience of the foreign"¹⁸ In the new translation of *Lisbon...*, the translator establishes a relationship between the familiar and the foreign, neither erasing the foreignness (after all, the text of Pessoa's guide is almost literally translated) nor allowing it to be absorbed by what is already familiar. One could say that by becoming a visible translator who added original notes into the Pessoa's guide, she becomes the advocate of that foreignness, reminding readers that the text they are reading in translation has been taken from a foreign culture.

The presented heteronymic translation opens the way to yet another important issue – namely, the situation in which the translator becomes the author of the translated text. According to Jerzy Jarniewicz:

Tłumacz literatury pięknej staje się drugim autorem przekładanego tekstu (...) gdy uznaje on przekład za działalność tożsamą z twórczością. (...) Koncepcja tłumacza jako drugiego autora budzi opory, ale to przecież tłumacz nadaje ostateczny kształt dziełu w przekładzie. On nam tekstu nie przekazuje ani nie przepakowuje, on go przeksztalca, tak jak autor nadaje mu kształt¹⁹.

In summary, the article explores the effects of this innovative translation approach, focusing on how the translator's visibility influences the creation of new layers of meaning within the text. By treating Lisbon as a heteronym, the translator transforms the static city guide into a multi-dimensional story, where both the city and its creator are reimagined. The analysis shows how the addition of new elements enriches the original narrative and allows readers to engage more interactively with both Lisbon and Pessoa's literary world. The article also touches on broader theoretical questions about translation and authorship, particularly in the context of modern translation theory, which emphasizes the translator's role as an active creator of meaning. It examines how the translator's presence is revealed in the text, not through di-

¹⁷ Venuti, L., *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London, New York 1995.

¹⁸ Berman, A., "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign", trans. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, London and New York, 2021, p. 284-297.

¹⁹ Jarniewicz, J., *Gościnność słowa...*, Kraków 2012, p. 10. Translation into English provided by the author of the paper: A translator of literary works becomes the second author of the translated text (...) when they consider translation to be an activity identical to creation. (...) The concept of the translator as the second author raises objections, but it is the translator who gives the final shape to the work in translation. They do not simply convey the text to us or repack it; they transform it, just as the author shapes it.

rect intervention, but through the introduction of new voices and narratives that blur the boundaries between the original and the translation.

Translation, especially when approached through the lens of *heteronymic translation*, is an act of creative authorship, in which the translator is not merely a conduit for the original work but a re-creator, a co-author, and an essential participant in the production of meaning. In this sense, the translator's work on *Lisbon. What the Tourist Should See* exemplifies a new model of translation, one that acknowledges and embraces the translator's agency and creativity, turning the act of translation into a process of literary transformation rather than mere transference. This *heteronymic* translation serves as a powerful example of how translation can be a site of innovation, where new texts emerge from the interaction between the original work and the translator's vision.

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