

Waiting for Pessoa: The Works of Fernando Pessoa in Turkish

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Fernando Pessoa would perhaps deeply appreciate at least three decisive and one accidental quality of Turkish literature if he had the chance to learn about them. Firstly, Turkish is the only language that has been written in as many as eight different alphabets.¹ Anatolia is still like a palimpsest, each layer of which is filled with figures of disparate scripts. Secondly, throughout its history, it has at least twice witnessed the endeavor to encompass all literary activity available of the era. Once, in the late 15th and early 16th centuries when the Ottoman Turkish literature tried to gain its legitimacy, poets and writers of Anatolia (or *Rum* as it was called back then) had aspired to appropriate the entire literary traditions of the Near and Middle East. And a second time, in the late 19th century, there was a gold rush among the Ottoman literati to exhaust all the possibilities of European literatures by turning into authors who could write in every possible genre with every possible style, much in the same manner of the literary movement Pessoa conceived in the 1910s, which he called Sensationism and promoted through the Portuguese modernist magazine *Orpheu*: “‘Orpheu’ is the sum and synthesis of all modern literary movements; [...]. Each number adds a new interest to this marvellous synthetic movement” (PESSOA, 2009c: 218-220).

Thirdly, following the collapse of a great empire and the loss of self-confidence, peoples forced to turn back to (or expelled from) Anatolia to set up a new identity sought refuge in a grasping nostalgia called *hüzün* in Turkish. It is, quite like the Portuguese *saudade*, a term referring to the paradoxical sadness that could solely be experienced by joyful and provincial people, as Pessoa would put it.²

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¹ Sevan Nişanyan, the author of one of the most comprehensive etymological dictionaries of Turkish language, states that Turkish is the first on the list of languages expressed in numerous writing systems, Farsi/Persian coming second as it has been written in four different scripts (NİŞANYAN, 2009).

² For instance, Pessoa makes the following remark in a short note entitled “O Fado e A Alma Portuguesa” (‘Fado and the Portuguese Spirit’): “Toda a poesia – a canção é uma poesia ajudada – reflecte o que a alma não tem. Por isso a canção dos povos tristes é alegre e a canção dos povos alegres é triste” (‘All the poetry – and song is a kind of assisted poetry – reflects that which the soul does not have. That’s the reason why the songs of sad peoples are joyful and the songs of the joyful peoples are sad’) (PESSOA, 1979: 98).

And here is the accidental quality: five years before the name Fernando Pessoa and one of the heteronymous works made their debut in Turkish letters, a piece of photograph taken in Pessoa's adolescent days showed up in an influential literary journal called *Gergedan* ('Rhinoceros') in 1988 (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Pessoa's picture in the 15th issue of the journal *Gergedan* (1988, p. 27)

The photo was not accompanying a text by Pessoa but instead a poem by Reşit İmrahor (İMRAHOR, 1988: 27). He was the Turkish equivalent of the Portuguese names like Carlos Fradique Mendes and Luiz de Borja, who existed only as the collective literary invention of actual poets and writers.³

A year or two after the photo appeared two Turkish editors paid a visit to their translator friend who was in jail at the time.⁴ They were excited to present a bilingual edition of Pessoa's *A Hora do Diabo* to Işık Ergüden as a gift. He then

³ Reşit İmrahor was a fictional author created collectively by the poets Enis Batur, İzzet Yasar and Ahmet Güntan. In a letter that he sent to his creators, which can be found in his second book, *Kuvve'den Fiile* ('From the Potential to the Actual'), the imaginary poet reacted against the way in which he was associated with the likes of Pessoa: "Panoyef'miş, Pessoa'ymış, takma isimmiş etrafı bulandıran bu gayriciddi kumarbazlıklardan hoşlanmam ben, edebiyat oyuna gelmeyecek kadar önemli bir iştir" ('Panoyef, Pessoa, the pseudonyms, these are nothing but inutile and superfluous mumbo jumbo which I absolutely detest. Literature is a serious business which cannot be taken lightly as if it were a child's play or something') (İMRAHOR, 1993: 13).

⁴ The visitors were Müge Gürsoy Sökmen and Semih Sökmen, who are still the editors of Metis Yayınları.

translated it in 1989 and 1990 only to see it published in 1993 as *Şeytanın Saati* by Metis Yayınları following his release from the prison (PESSOA, 1993b; Fig. 2).⁵



Fig. 2 & 3. Covers of the first edition of *Şeytanın Saati* [*A Hora do Diabo*] (1993) and of its last available edition, published jointly with the translation of *O Banqueiro Anarquista* [*Anarşist Banker*] (2006)

Işık Ergüden, who is a graduate from an English Literature department, and who has been translating texts mainly from French⁶ and Spanish, has gradually become the central figure in the reception of Pessoa's oeuvre in Turkish: not only did he make the first translations of Pessoa's poems in the years ensuing the appearance of *Şeytanın Saati*,⁷ he was also the first translator announcing his plans to see to the

⁵ I learned about this anecdote through personal correspondence with Mr. Ergüden, who was kind enough to share the story of his first encounter with Pessoa upon my request.

⁶ French became the main vehicular language among the Turkish *hommes des lettres* starting from the 19th century until the 1950s when English slowly began to gain the upper hand like it did almost everywhere else in the world.

⁷ Işık Ergüden, with the collaboration of Enis Batur, a modern poet, essayist, and one of the three creators of *İmrakor*, published their translations of three poems by Pessoa in a poetry magazine called *Sombahar* in its July-August issue of 1993: first two poems, translated by Batur, were Pessoa's "Sou um evadido" ("Bir kaçığım ben") and Ricardo Reis' last ode, "Vivem em nós inúmeros" ("Sayısız insan yaşar içimizde") (PESSOA, 1993a: 24). The one translated by Ergüden was Pessoa the orthonym's "Tudo que faço ou medito" ("Yaptığım ya da tasarladığım her şey") (PESSOA, 1993c: 25). Two years after that, in 1995, Ergüden went ahead and published a short compilation of poems by Pessoa, entitled *Sırların Cebri* (*The Algebra of the Secrets*) (PESSOA, 1995b). At the very beginning of this book there was a list of the heteronymous names created by Pessoa and the book sections were so organized to reflect the influence of the main heteronyms separately. First section was

publication of Pessoa's complete works in Turkish as he made it quite clear in his foreword to *Pessoa Pessoa'yı Anlatıyor* ('Pessoa Tells About Pessoa') (Fig. 4), an edited volume containing excerpts from the author's prose works, autobiographical writings, personal correspondences and some heteronymous interventions (PESSOA, 2012a: 9).

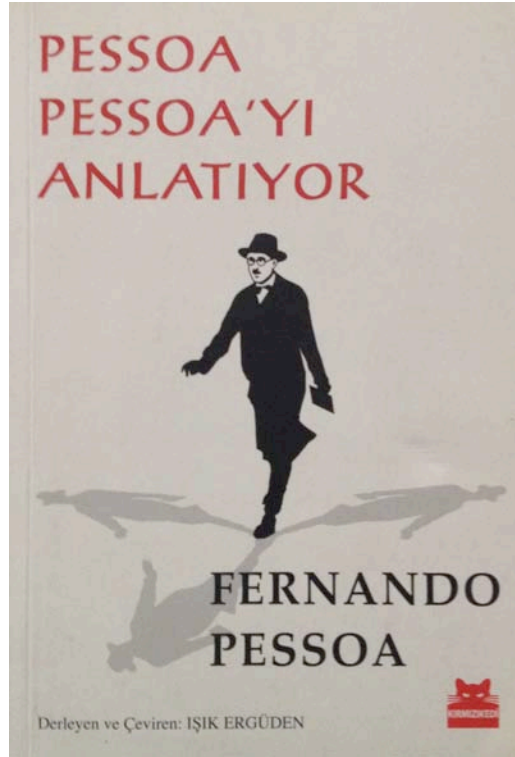


Fig. 4. The cover of Pessoa's *Pessoa Pessoa'yı Anlatıyor* ['Pessoa Tells About Pessoa'] (2012)

In 1995, Cevat Çapan, a modern poet and one of the most famous poetry translators in Turkey, took on the task of creating a Turkish rendition of Campos' seminal poem, "Ode Marítima" ("Denize Övgü") (PESSOA, 1995a). He, then, was to add this translation into an anthology entitled *Düşsel ve Gerçek* ('Imaginary and Real'), including nine poems each from the works of Caeiro, Reis and Pessoa himself respectively (PESSOA, 2004). And in 2009, he published a more extensive anthology with the title *uzaklıklar, eski denizler* ('distances, old seas'), presenting his translations of forty-seven poems by four main names of the "drama em gente" (i.e., Caeiro, Reis, Campos and Pessoa the orthonym) (PESSOA, 1928). This last compilation still stands out as the most comprehensive anthology of Pessoa's poetry in Turkey (Fig. 5).⁸

devoted to Campos, the second to Reis, the third to Caeiro and the last one to Pessoa the orthonym. This was presumably the first time when the richness of heteronymous world came close to be presented to the Turkish readers in its full extension.

⁸ Since he is a professor of English literature, Çapan's translations are more likely to be based primarily on the English versions rather than the Portuguese originals. At this point, let me name a



Fig. 5. The cover of *uzaklıklar, eski denizler* ['distances, old seas'] (2009)

Besides Çapan's endeavors to deliver the poetic complexities of the author in Turkish as completely as possible, Adnan Özer and Rüstem Aslan's edited volume published in 2000, *Fernando Pessoa: 20. Yüzyılın Yalnızı* ('*Fernando Pessoa: The Desolate Man of the 20th Century*'), requires special mention (PESSOA, 2000): Özer, a well-known poet who has translated the works of great bards of the Spanish language like Lorca and Paz, and Aslan, whose language of reference is German, put together a list of works among which there are biographical notes for some of the heteronyms, translations from their works and short essays written by various literary critics on Pessoa's projects. The book also contains the translation of Marina Tavares Dias' guidebook to the city of Lisbon as it was during Pessoa's lifetime, supplemented with a detailed photobiography (PESSOA, 2000: 153-181).⁹ Such resourcefulness in terms of the utilization of visual material strikes attention in another edited volume published in 2004 as a bilingual catalogue of a special

few of the other important translations from Pessoa's poetry: "Chuva Oblíqua" ("Eğik Yağmur") was translated by the author of this essay (PESSOA, 2011), accompanied with a detailed reading of the poem, entitled "Bir Yüzeybilim Araştırmacısı Olarak Fernando Pessoa ve 'Eğik Yağmur'" ('Fernando Pessoa as a Surveyor of the Surfaces and the "Slanting Rain"') (ATAY, 2011). Can Alkor's anthology of poems, *Bulunmuş Çeviriler* ('*Found Translations*') includes three of the not-so-far-translated works by Campos (ALKOR, 2012: 47-51). And Nil Toker translated some of Caeiro's *O Guardador de Rebanhos* poems and edited them under the title *Teslis'in İkincisi* ('*The Second of the Trinity*'); it was the first time that the notorious eighth poem appeared in Turkish (PESSOA, 2013c).

⁹ Guidebook in question is the 1999 edition of *Lisboa: Nos Passos de Fernando Pessoa* (DIAS, 2011).

exhibition on the life and works of Pessoa. Yapı Kredi Yayınları, an Istanbul-based publisher, collaborated with the Portuguese Embassy in Ankara, Fernando Pessoa House and the Municipality of Lisbon for a one-month exhibition which took place in a gallery at the heart of Istanbul between December 2004 and January 2005 (ÖZPALABIYIKLAR, 2004). In the catalogue there are short essays by Clara Ferreira Alves, Güven Turan, another well-known poet in Turkey, Richard Zenith and João Francisco Vilhena, next to several poems and an essay by Pessoa, published both in English and Turkish.

It won't probably be an exaggeration to claim that the greatest Pessoa event that has taken place in Turkey so far was the translation of *Livro do Desassossego* in 2006 by the prolific translator Saadet Özen, who also happens to be the translator of José Saramago's novel, *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis* ('*Ricardo Reis'in Öldüğü Yıl*'), which was published three years prior (SARAMAGO, 2003; Fig. 7).



Figs. 6 & 7. Covers of *Huzursuzluğun Kitabı* ['*Livro do Desassossego*'] (2006) and of Saramago's *Ricardo Reis'in Öldüğü Yıl* ['*O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*'] (2003)

As it is the case for Ergüden, Özen's work relied heavily on the existing French and English translations with constant reference to Portuguese original.¹⁰ In the ten years that have passed since then, *Huzursuzluğun Kitabı* – the Turkish title of this

¹⁰ Saadet Özen, as her primary source, used Françoise Laye's French translation with the title *Le Livre de l'intranquillité*, which was based on Richard Zenith's Portuguese edition. Özen also states in a translator's note that she referred, for crosscheck, both to Zenith's original edition and the English translation that he himself made based on this edition (PESSOA, 2006b: 10).

curious project by Pessoa, which he entrusted it first to Vicente Guedes, and then to Bernardo Soares – has seen fourteen editions, which secured for it an unprecedented place, if not in the bestseller list, surely in the long seller list in the Turkish book market (PESSOA, 2006b; Fig. 6). Readers in Turkey don't seem to get enough of it: they are constantly making references to the Book on every occasion and in all possible media.¹¹

That year, 2006, was also the year when the Turkish translation of *O Banqueiro Anarquista* with the title *Anarşist Banker* appeared (PESSOA, 2006a; Fig. 3).¹² Not surprisingly perhaps, the translator was Işık Ergüden again. The fact that these two works got to be published in the same year by the same publisher (Can Yayınları) doubled the impact felt by the Turkish readership. When they read the “accounts” of the assistant bookkeeper and the anarchist money keeper side by side, the people must have realized that Pessoa's drama had the potential to reach a level of great allusiveness, which compelled them to ask for more of heteronymous adventure. In 2013, a year after he edited *Pessoa Pessoa'yı Anlatıyor*, Işık Ergüden translated three of the detective stories by Quaresma in his edition *Bulmaca Meraklısı Quaresma: Dedektiflik Öyküleri* ('Quaresma the Puzzle Buff: Detective Stories') (PESSOA, 2013a).

The growing interest in the life of Pessoa led to the publication of the love letters that he sent to his only *namorada*, Ophélia Queiroz. In the appendix of Sema Rifat's translation of these personal correspondences, Queiroz's account of the relationship was also included in a chapter entitled “Pessoa ve Ben” ('Pessoa and I') (PESSOA, 2009a: 89-107). Among the other interesting publication events concerning Pessoa's works, the translation of Nuno Ribeiro's compilation of the

¹¹ Let's give two examples illustrating the range of such interest: in a popular website called *ekşi sözlük* ('the sour dictionary') where a great number of people write down their ideas and observations on a variety of subjects, there are hundreds of entries on Fernando Pessoa in general and on *The Book of Disquiet* in particular: <https://eksisozluk.com/fernando-pessoa--132706> (Web, consulted 18 April 2016). And at the end of last year, a group of people organized on the Facebook – among whom there are the author of the present essay and the translator of the Book, Saadet Özen – turned a bookstore – by the name of Nuhun Gemisi ('Noah's Ark') – situated at the center of the capital city of Turkey into the third Livraria do Desassossego – Huzursuzluğun Kitapçısı in Turkish – for a two-day event. The first two bookstores, where only the copies of *The Book of Disquiet* were shelved and sold, had been opened up by the Norwegian publisher Christian Kjelstrup in Oslo and Lisbon respectively. Although Mr. Kjelstrup was not able to join us physically, he was among us with his full support. There was, by the way, one important idiosyncratic quality of the third store; its owner, Huzursuzluğun Kitapçısı ('O Livreiro do Desassossego'), forced his way into becoming the latest heteronym: he translated several works of Pessoa such as his static drama *O Marinheiro* for the first time into Turkish and he conversed openly with the main heteronyms of Pessoa. To be a part of this event, the interested readers may check out the Facebook page of the bookstore: <https://www.facebook.com/huzursuzlugunkitapcisi?ref=hl> (Web, consulted 18 April 2016).

¹² Engin Süren made a second translation of this monetary emancipation novella, and it was published by Palto Yayınevi in October 2014 (PESSOA, 2014).

author's philosophical essays that he had written down earlier in his writing career was especially remarkable: the Turkish translation appeared just a year after the original book was published in the United States.¹³

It seems that we are at a certain threshold with respect to the Turkish edition and translation of Pessoa's oeuvre. The two books bearing Fernando Pessoa's name, which were published in 2015, are considerably weak in structure. They are both short collections of famous quotes from different works of Pessoa. Işık Ergüden's *Başboş Bir Yolculuktan Notlar* ('Notes from an Idle Journey') offers a somewhat better selection (PESSOA, 2015a); however Hakan Akdoğan's *Hiçbir Şey İstememenin Mutluluğu* ('The Happiness of Not Wanting Anything') does not seem to serve any particular purpose mainly because the selected texts give us the impression that they have been taken out of their contexts at random, without a genuine literary concern (PESSOA, 2015b). On a hopeful note this might very well be marking a turning point: it is now more apparent that the readers of Pessoa in Turkey are experienced enough to expect some new translation projects which should be based on the work done with the critical editions in Portuguese. And in line with this expectation, Saadet Özen, the Turkish translator of *Livro do Desassossego* has just decided to translate the Book again from the scratch, using the available Portuguese editions as her main reference sources. To sum up, let me state that we are, in Turkey, waiting for Pessoa, in disquiet, to observe a one-of-a-kind literary experiment, thanks to which there is a chance that we can experience the wonders of trying to become the whole literature once again. The results of such an encounter are hard to predict; but it is unquestionably exciting to just imagine what may possibly come out of it in the future.

¹³ Ribeiro's edition was published in 2012, with an afterword by Paulo Borges (PESSOA, 2012b). Ümit Şenesen's complete translation of the work came to the fore with the same cover design in 2013 (PESSOA, 2013b). By the way, it may interest some readers to know that Bartholomew Ryan challenges Ribeiro's claim that this is a "critical edition." For Ryan, Ribeiro's work falls short of fulfilling the requirements of a proper critical edition, as it does not include some essential texts belonging to this formative period (RYAN, 2015: 319-320).

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