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# Partial Answers

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dictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: . . . without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself — do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? — *This world is the will to power — and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power — and nothing besides! (1968: 550)

Though this was not exactly Pessoa's vision of the world — his terminology and symbols were different — the infinite, self-multiplied traveler who urged us all to be "plural like the universe"<sup>8</sup> was in effect a living picture of that world, with Caeiro as the calm place of simplicity from which issued the frenetic turbulence of Campos and the cold, crystalline classicism of Reis and to which those energies returned. And Pessoa was at the same time an exemplar of the higher man who has the inner resources to live in a world of such stark forces, forever flowing and flooding back on themselves. This discreetly immense poet that so often stood by the window, gazing at the stars without fear or mythologies, could be classed, *par excellence*, as one of those "best-concealed," "most intrepid," and "most midnightly men" — as one of those who realize the will to power in each moment of their endless becoming.

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<sup>8</sup>"Sê plural como o universo!" ["Be plural like the universe!"] is an isolated phrase scribbled with a flourish and left among Pessoa's thousands of unpublished papers (1966: 94).

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### Fernando Pessoa's *Lisbon*: Toponymy vs. Heteronymy

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The short text entitled *Lisbon*, which remained unpublished for a long time, occupies a special place in the protean work of Fernando Pessoa. It owes its distinctiveness to two reasons. First, Pessoa did not sign it with a heteronym; second, though not fictional, this text is suffused with the essence of the poet's personal mythology.

Paradoxically, *Lisbon* articulates two writing horizons: while it draws a descriptive itinerary easily accessible to the reader, it also marks out a prescriptive path, trailing the reader along in a singular vision of the city — singular because of the choice of the itinerary and also because in the eyes of the foreign reader, what *Lisbon* offers remains in the realm of the visible which, however, is never more than a suggestion. This book first seems to be in keeping with the aesthetics of *mimesis*. But its unfolding does not build up an exact copy or even an objective representation of the city. It resists the impression of realism that a superficial reading may evoke.

Here Pessoa certainly does not maintain the fascinating legend of a speaker who is hiding his presence — or revealing it indirectly, by a play of heteronyms. Here he is not Álvaro de Campos, or Ricardo Reis, or Alberto Caeiro, or Bernardo Soares. Neither pseudonymy nor heteronymy define the signature of this book; nor can this book be considered



Pessoa's early work, as it was probably written in 1925.<sup>1</sup> But *Lisbon* seems to have been written for publication, without language games in respect to its authorship.

Yet the scope of *Lisbon* is beyond the generally agreed adequacy bond that the author seals between his name and the work. Rather, a new kind of identity tension seems to take shape on its pages. Far from widening the gap between his real identity and his assumed literary identity, the poet appears to explore meaning of his name in an ingenuous operation in which he superimposed his name on that of his hometown (Lisboa). The result of this *literary rapprochement* is a new active identification.

The present essay argues that *Lisbon* unfolds the personal poetics of Pessoa in the light of an initiatory "return" to the places where he first struck his roots. To explain the mechanisms of this poetic construction, it presents three hypotheses — a stylistic, a linguistic, and a critical.

### 1. The Stylistic Hypothesis: Lisbon, a Prosopopoeia

The first hypothesis involves adopting a reading strategy according to which *Lisbon*, seemingly a piece of realistic prose, embraces the self-imposed principle of observing a prevalent rhetorical choice.

Fernando Pessoa's signing of this text with his official name may be read as a hint, a sign of a very specific enunciative intention. In a work composed against the general background of heteronymy, this choice is both aesthetically and ethically significant.

Moving through Lisbon — city turned into text — the first-person speaker engages with different faces, with different aspects of the city, but also with the different historical and cultural malleable strata of a native site, which turns into the place of a primordial claim.

Why, indeed, should Pessoa have used a heteronym to talk about his city? He wished to make people who do not know it love it, to reassert its value in the eyes of its inhabitants, as well as in the eyes of the whole Portuguese nation that its name suffices to evoke. Why should Pessoa have taken a detour outside of himself, to an identity other than his own, when it came to be Lisbon's spokesperson, to comprehend Lisbon through his

<sup>1</sup> Fernando Pessoa was born on June 13, 1888. He was thus already 37 when he wrote *Lisbon*, which was discovered after the poet's death among his numerous unpublished manuscripts. After the death of his father (1893) and his mother's marriage to a professional military officer (1895), the family moved to Durban, South Africa, where the future poet received an English-speaking education. He stayed there until 1905.

own voice, recognizing it as a metaphor, or perhaps an allegory, of his rootedness as well as his most eloquent commitment?

Pessoa is Lisbon's spokesman and megaphone, yet *Lisbon* is, in the very friezes of its textuality, Pessoa's stand-in. In the art of discourse there is a privileged stylistic device for rendering this kind of collision between the speaker and what is being spoken about and making it immediately tangible. This device, closest to the speaker's intentions, is the prosopopoeia.<sup>2</sup> By virtue of this macro-textual trope, *Lisbon*, this somewhat bewildering text in which Pessoa is more embodied than in any other (though without revealing his mystery), becomes an artifact of indirect utterance about oneself.

It would be too much to say, and yet with too little emphasis, that Pessoa makes Lisbon speak. Admittedly, the attributive movement remains uncertain and deliberately indistinct, as the speaker frankly conflates narrative levels, obtunding the source of enunciation. Indeed, in this discourse, the capital of Portugal is not the scene of a specific action. Rather, it represents itself as the scene of any possible action: it is both a setting segmented to fit each of its micro-worlds (each, in fact, a universe of discourse by itself) and a fictionalized observer willing to take part in whatever its nooks can offer.

Like a tourist guide, *Lisbon* sets the direction as well as the priorities of the visit; it reveals itself to the rhythm of movement along a path where toponyms are concatenated: *Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, Praça do Comércio, Ascensor de Santa Justa, Praça de Dom Pedro IV*, and so on. It constitutes an inverted prosopopoeia: it might not so much be Pessoa who makes the city speak and act but the city that gives body and voice to one who undertakes to let us hear its beats.

### 2. The Language Hypothesis: Lisbon, a Creature of Discourse

This second hypothesis consists in further developing the interpretive perspective of a Pessoa enunciating through Lisbon and, correlatively, Lisbon revealing Pessoa. One must look more closely and discern more precisely, or even measure in terms of specific recourses of writing, on which level of meaning — perception, orientation, signification, or all of them combined — the specular association Pessoa/Lisboa attains its best

<sup>2</sup> Prosopopoeia consists in granting speech and action to a person one recalls, an absent person, a dead person, an animal, or a personified object.



resolution. It is as if the sparkling of a nuanced color range were enriched by looking at it through a prism.

The reason why and the purpose for which Pessoa here dispenses with any part of the heteronymous parade or — which amounts to the same thing in his case — with any parodic identification, is associated with the fact that in Lisbon the poet finds a chain of reasons which suffice for explaining him, both to himself and to his readers, as *a creature of discourse*.<sup>3</sup>

Some readers, yielding to the demon of analogy or the more harmful (because restricting the perception of singularity) habit of homology, have taken hold of Pessoa's name to complete a triad of writers, each of whom is the bard of a single city: Joyce (Dublin), Kafka (Prague), Pessoa (Lisbon). This connection is not entirely irrelevant. The difference is that in *Lisbon*, Pessoa, unlike Joyce with his Bloom or Kafka with his K, does not, strictly speaking, portray any other character than the subtle (sagacious and intangible) one of his own taste, who is promptly attached to an elusive evocation of a "tourist" or a "traveler," as unlikely as he is conventional:

We shall now ask the tourist to come with us. We will act as his cicerone and go over the capital with him, pointing out to him the monuments, the gardens, the more remarkable buildings, the museums — all that is in any way worth seeing in this marvellous Lisbon. (2008: 12–13)

Pessoa remains present all along, as if next to the guide. His suggestions of the places that the tourist is encouraged to visit seem to be prompted by an attendant's concern with pleasing the traveler. Pessoa projects himself into a private chauffeur who drives his guest through the streets of the capital:

After his luggage has been handed to a trustworthy porter, who will deliver it at the hotel if the tourist is staying awhile, let him take his place with us in a motor-car and go on towards the centre of the city. On the way we will be showing him everything that is worth seeing. (13)

By contrast to Joyce's Dublin or Kafka's Prague, Pessoa's Lisbon does not amount to an initiatory event of pre- or post-modernity: the text of *Lisbon* displays neither the Odyssey of overbrimming subjectivity nor

<sup>3</sup>The notion of a creature of discourse was suggested by Emile Benveniste (1994: 258–66) to characterize the forms of deixis. Yet one can extend its application to an entire text if this text has a figural macro-textual construction — in the present case, prosopopoeia.

the drama of unhappy consciousness, nor a persistent questioning of the human condition. Yet one should read (one should learn to read) this short travel guide, addressed, as it were, to a fellow poet, as the unfolding of a voice on a quest for itself, a voice that is yet discreet enough — that is, empathic enough — to cede the floor to the world that has created it and has empowered it to speak.

One need not see the enunciation of *Lisbon* as one of the three harbingers of a new epoch (though Joyce, Kafka, and Pessoa were, indeed, contemporaries) in order to appreciate its innovativeness. Yielding to that temptation would be tantamount to using distorting spectacles for an accommodating "vision," or trying to reduce the perceived unfamiliar to a *déjà vu*. What kind of *déjà vu*? It is, indeed, tempting to think that, along with these two major European writers, through the mazes of shadows and sparkling light where any obvious trace of a "me" gets lost, Pessoa has configured Lisbon (perhaps successfully) as a scripted construction site from which there rises a presence-absence that, through the sovereign discretion of an integrative exteriority, approximates an anti-hero's way of being-in-the-world.

Unlike Joyce-Bloom in Dublin, or K.-Kafka in Prague, Pessoa is divested in Lisbon without exalting or tarnishing the human aura: the concatenation of signs is deployed in accordance with an individual sensibility that adjusts the sense of immediacy or of monumental thickness to fluctuations of its preference.<sup>4</sup>

Yet along with being a spatial evocation of monuments, *Lisbon* is also a history of Portugal's capital. The persistent presence, the permanence of the monumental buildings seems to get the better of the past. However, the narrator's memory does bring back some shadows of the past. History, with its pageant of irrepressible though sometimes repulsed violence, flows unexpectedly into the flat artificial linearity of tourist experience. Pessoa only mentions a part of it — a cursed part which bursts in at the corner of a street like some irrevocable Jewishness:

In this same spot stood once the church of the Convent of São Domingos, destroyed by the 1755 earthquake, where the Inquisition effected many of its *autos da fé*. It was also in this church that, in 1506, after divine service, many Jews were killed by the fanatical populace, the massacre spreading soon to other parts of the city. (35)

<sup>4</sup>In spite of the feigned objectivity characteristic of tour guides, *Lisbon* discreetly reveals its author's preferences. The information is comprehensive, but value judgments make themselves felt.



If a mystery is woven in this underrated little book, the role it plays has less to do with the story (or history) and more with the discourse,<sup>5</sup> and in particular with an intellectual and biographic historicity that plays ingeniously with its anchorage as well as with its motives. Pessoa unfolds himself both in time and in space within a closed corpus which, however, opens up to an infinite poetic potential. One can say that *Lisbon* is a *ny-momachia*, a prodigious unwinding of clashing names whose particularity is their incessant generation. Since they are, literally, named places, that is, places whose history and voice Pessoa elicits and revives as he approaches them and engages with them for us, *Lisbon* is an astounding ceremony of presentations: each place is "introduced" by its name, while each toponym is correlated to a double evocation. Each place is, indeed, the name of a space, or the name of a building, or even the name of a person, but above all it is the sign, or rather the signifier, of a vignette that Pessoa is pleased to visualize from his own standpoint, in a way that would sublimate to its quintessence the meaning it holds for him.

*Lisbon* is a virtuoso illustration of the poetics of proper name, patronym and toponym. Each nominal and denominative vignette creates a web, an extensive network of connections, certainly linked to the cartography but also to the poet's personal memory, enclosed within the older, almost hieratic memory of his hometown. For a reader, this may reverberate with echoes, even if fortuitous, of the aesthetic incursions of Pessoa's contemporaries. One is reminded of Max Jacob's 1922 *Art poétique* which states that the modern poem is "a whole world in a man" ("le monde dans un homme, tel est le poète moderne," 1922 : 27). One can also sense here an afterglow or perhaps a further development of the urban poetics inaugurated by Aloysius Bertrand's *Gaspard de la nuit* (1842) and by Charles Baudelaire,<sup>6</sup> and brought to its maturity by surrealism (see Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris*) in Pessoa's own times.

Such an almost monotonous plethoric recourse to this aesthetic line suggests not only the premonition of a code amenable to interpretation but also, especially owing to the referents of these loved words, the

<sup>5</sup>In terms of Benvéniste's distinction between discourse and story, *Lisbon* is dominated by discourse — the text is strongly marked by the presence of the speaker.

<sup>6</sup>In the preface to *Le Spleen de Paris: Petits poèmes en prose* Baudelaire notes Bertrand's influence on his project: "It was while I was leafing through the famous *Gaspard de la nuit* by A. Bertrand for at least the twentieth time . . . that I had the idea to try something similar, and to apply to the description of modern life, or rather of a modern and more abstract life, the process that he had used to depict ancient life" (2010: 8; our translation).

evanescent impossible presence of what is no longer there, of the "once" and the "old days" also sung by Oscar Vladislav Milosz.

When Pessoa came back to Lisbon which he had left as a child, he recognized some haunts of his childhood but did not find faces of the past or even a shadow of his childhood:

Once more I see you,  
City of my horrifyingly lost childhood...  
Happy and sad city, once more I dream here...  
I? Is it one and the same I who lived here, and came back,  
And came back again, and again,  
And yet again have come back?  
Or are we — all the I's that I was here or that were here —  
A series of bead-beings joined together by a string of memory,  
A series of dreams about me dreamed by someone outside me?  
Once more I see you,  
With a heart that's more distant, a soul that's less mine.  
Once more I see you — Lisbon, the Tagus and the rest —,  
A useless onlooker of you and of myself,  
A foreigner here like everywhere else,  
Incidental in life as in my soul,  
A ghost wandering through halls of remembrances  
...  
Once more I see you,  
But, oh, I cannot see myself!  
The magic mirror where I always looked the same has shattered,  
And in each fateful fragment I see only a piece of me —  
A piece of you and of me!

One could read *Lisbon* as a tragic confession which undertakes, with the meticulous obstinacy of the aesthete facing the vestiges of a lost existence, to ward off the effects of the inevitably neutralizing look that the stranger who does not owe anything to Lisbon can take at that city. Moreover, if one takes into account the tragic flavor of the experience behind it, the text that is named after the city and that is affiliated with the tour-guide genre, emerges, first and foremost, as a gesture of seduction. It seems to ask: how shall I find myself within this object that I lost and that lost me? Or else: how to be familiar and to acquaint my reader with the very same thing that I have been trying to "comprehend"?



### 3. The Critical Hypothesis : Lisbon, an Autonymic Place

The order of the above arguments leads to the third hypothesis: the literary-critical one. *Lisbon* may emerge as a testimony, or, more precisely, as a major stage of a circuitous identity quest. Since the "I" — as a sign of the classical subject — is here not an organizing focus of a homogenous vision of the self and the world, the poet formulates his quest of meaning in terms of diffraction and refraction. Hence the incessant nominal game, the sequence of toponyms and patronyms that converge in an historio-bio-graphy, that is, an autobiographical history. Since he cannot find himself anywhere, Pessoa looks for himself through the labyrinthine itineraries of an exhaustive visit of his capital. However, the reader to whom the poet confides his itineraries and detours does not see anything of what the guide wants to show him. At most (but this not little), the reader is in turn caught up, here or there, in identifying with the "tourist," his anonymous alter ego, Pessoa himself, his graphical other perhaps, in these autonymic places.

The capital that Pessoa reveals to us and through which he leads us for a promenade, appears as quite a monumental edifice of signs: names of streets and statues, names of kingdoms, names of libraries, and names of museums form a vast and ample autonymic territory that we have to decipher. Each of these places is named, first and foremost, for the sake of the love of its name. This is the agenda of the one who was able to write: "What happened to my abandoned goals and impossible dreams?" (de Campos 314).

Why, indeed, should Pessoa have adopted for *Lisbon* a supplementary heteronym? Composing this text was not about obtunding his voice or his true face. Nor was it about staging a new characterological joust, such as the one that marked his "Night of Pascal."<sup>7</sup> A long time after, in 1935, Pessoa confided to one of his close friends:

One day, when I had finally given up — it was on March 8, 1914 — I approached a high bureau and, taking a sheet of paper, started writing, standing, as I do whenever I can. And I wrote some thirty poems, in a sort of ecstasy whose nature I cannot really define. It was the most triumphant day of my life, and I will never experience anything similar. I started with a title: *The Herd Keeper*. And what followed was the apparition in me of someone to whom I soon gave the name of Alberto Caeiro. Pardon the

<sup>7</sup>The night of March 8, 1914, as evidenced by a letter sent 21 years later to his friend Adolfo Casais Monteiro (quoted by Armand Guibert in the Preface to Pessoa 2007: 10).

absurdity of the expression: my master had appeared to me. This was the immediate feeling I had. So much so that, as soon as I was done writing these thirty poems, I immediately took another sheet of paper and I wrote, in a row as well, the six poems that make up *The Oblique Rain* of Fernando Pessoa. Immediately and integrally. This was the comeback from Fernando Pessoa — Alberto Caeiro to Fernando Pessoa alone. Or, even better, this was Fernando Pessoa's reaction against his inexistence as Alberto Caeiro. (Quoted in Armand Guibert's Preface, Pessoa 2007: 11; our translation)

Pessoa's Lisbon is not a city of fiction — an enchanting or frightening city as presented in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. It is more an imaginary city, in the exact sense of the word — that is, a mosaic of visions put together according to the requirements of a singular poetics. Pessoa certainly did not need to don a new heteronym in order to display the secret inflexions of this poetics, or even to give citizen rights. Pessoa, who is not as a negation (*nemo*) but as a person (*persona*), reveals his own geography: "I am the outskirts of a city that does not exist, the prolix commentary of a book that no one has ever written. I am no one, no one. I am a character of an unwritten novel, and I float, aerial, dispersed without having existed, amid the dreams of whoever it is who didn't know how to complete me" (quoted by Antoine de Gaudemar 108).

Pessoa floats over Lisbon. One cannot read his work without thinking about Lisbon. While the city accumulates speaking signs, the poet multiplies blind alleys. His is the narration of the incompleteness, but not of the unfinished: *Lisbon* resonates as a virtual confession of a great "aristograph."<sup>8</sup>

### 4. Aesthetics and Informativity

The judgment that Teresa Rita Lopes, one of the major experts on Pessoa's work, passes on this text devoted to Lisbon is radically different from the interpretation I have just suggested. In the preface to the Portuguese edition of the book, she notes that *Lisbon*, like *All about Portugal*, was "intended to be written for the public at large and not for literati (the project will be 'connected with commerce, literature and art,' as he himself states). So readers should not think that they are going to be opening a guide written by Bernardo Soares who celebrated in prose the same

<sup>8</sup>This is the expression of Antonio Bras de Oliveira, director of Lisbon National Library, as quoted by Antoine de Gaudemar in *Libération* of April 28, 1988.



Lisbon which Álvaro de Campos exalted in verse" (12). Moreover,

while Sá-Carneiro and other fellow-travelers on the Modernist voyage eagerly imported foreign cultural influences, Pessoa occupied himself primarily with exporting ours — that is, making it known overseas. His guidebook [on Lisbon] is an example of this. Its matter-of-fact style, devoid of ornamentation and complexity, endeavors to exalt our cultural heritage — not only landmarks, museums and churches, but also the repertoire of the S. Carlos Opera House, and even our literary works — which he refers to cleverly when showing to the tourist the Lisbon's public libraries. (16)

Professor Lopes believes that the reader must understand that the voice in *Lisbon*

is that of the tour guide. It's certainly not the voice of Bernardo Soares, stammering on about his melancholic love for Lisbon — about the cozy embrace more often denied him by the city than offered. Neither it is the Lisbon of Álvaro de Campos, "with its houses of many colours," always near to both the Tagus river and sorrow. (17)

I believe that Teresa Rita Lopes's view — that *Lisbon* is primarily an informational text — short-shrifts relevant hermeneutical consideration, since it is based on two controversial assumptions.

The first assumption regards the status of *description*, and, more specifically, its importance in Pessoa's *Lisbon*. According to Lopes, the prevalence of description suffices to deny the poet's little book any aesthetic character. This claim neglects two parameters, one associated with developments in modern literature and the other directly linked to the place of Lisbon in Pessoa's poetics and existential experience.

Massive recourse to description characterizes not only the "informative" use of language, in the ordinary meaning of "informative function" as instrumental use of language for practical communication. Description was also a semiotic device greatly appreciated by the realistic aesthetics that flowered in the nineteenth century, in, for instance, the works of Gustave Flaubert and C. E. Gadda. Later, literary Modernism established itself by the plethoric use of the descriptive register through which the reader is literally immersed in an endless stream of information.

The wealth of detail that constitutes the encyclopedic character of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and of *La Mécanique* suggests that through an apparent narrowing of the plot, European literature is reaching a turning point. Precision turns into a form of preciousness, and the escalation of details turns into a travesty of transparency. Under the pen of these innova-

tors — which Pessoa tracks in his own poetic way — the informative use of the language becomes a means of subverting the canonicity of the genres, novelistic as well as poetic. The precursors of this turn have a significant line of descent, from *La Modification* (Butor) through *La Route des Flandres* (Simon) to *Le Planetarium* (Sarraute), in addition to *L'inquisitoire* (Pinget) or *La Jalousie* (Robbe-Grillet).<sup>9</sup>

And what is a tourist guide if not an abstract narrative framework in which the reader can project himself in place of the main character who has disappeared from the plot? Is this not the most suitable poetic mold for literary subversion?

Pessoa's *Lisbon* anticipates in many ways the current taste for the sociology and aesthetics of everyday, which help the individual subject to transform his consumption of the world into a consumption of signs, all at the whim of his hedonistic fancy and despite the impingements of the world with its constraints and predetermined circuits, tourist circuits included. Closer to our time, this aestheticization of everyday life, of the *always already*, reaches its climate with the master-story of the everyday paradigmatically attested to by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

The second assumption pertains to the definition of identity. T. R. Lopes subscribes to the widespread idea that Pessoa had a true identity (corresponding to his legal identity) and assumed identities under which he was free to create his works as a poet. In other words, under his true identity Pessoa would have stopped asserting himself as an artist and turned into a prosaic tourist-guide writer.

I believe that this opposition between two regimes of identities (the "true" Pessoa and Pessoa's "masks" of assumed names) omits a key parameter. Indeed, the awareness that the voice "is that of the tour guide" should not block remembering that Pessoa was an exile, or underestimate the fact that the uprootedness had weighed heavily in the genesis of his enhanced poetic sensitivity.

Indeed, the identity explosion in Pessoa's polymorphic and polycephalic poetry can be seen as the aesthetic means through which he reinvented for himself a sort of continuity of identity, perceptible only to himself.

<sup>9</sup>The theoretical statements on this literary movement (Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* and Nathalie Sarraute's *L'Ère du soupçon*) praise description and informativeness and represent them as appropriate rhetoric.



At the same time, the fact that he wrote an apparently prosaic book does not mean that he ceased to be the poet that he was elsewhere. On the contrary, a person whose identity was destabilized by expatriation — that is, by the deterritorialization of his linguistic being — has all the reasons to return openly to his first identity when he wishes to praise his land and his hometown. Lisbon, to adopt Eluard's words, is the book of a "capital of pain": it is in the culture of this great city that Pessoa has found the motifs of his imaginary. But Pessoa is not Proust: under his pen, this praise of Lisbon is less a search of lost time than a search of a *lost space*. By writing this polished little book with such minute and scrupulous attention to details, with the meticulousness of an investigator, Pessoa did not just seek to hypostasize Lisbon, but also to rescue it from his own oblivion. Where T. R. Lopes sees a document, one should, perhaps, see a monument.

*Lisbon* should be studied with the same care that critics have accorded to the poet's other works, for it is without a doubt one of Pessoa's more significant pieces, both because of the genre requirements and because of the concern for the restitution of a threatened presence. *Lisbon* is a poetic guide before being a tourist guide. The true reference aimed at on its pages is not to what can be found in the actual city but to what can be found in the techniques of its description, in its persistent informative poetics. *Lisbon* should be read as one reads the testimony of incurable nostalgia, as an arduous but ultimately successful attempt to rescue a subjective memory from drowning, a memory liable to get lost while in search of its own benchmarks.

## Conclusion

*Lisbon* is without doubt the work of an exile. The features selected here in order to delineate its *ethos* also point to its message: in stylistic terms, it is an indirect discourse about oneself; in terms of language it is a staging of a nymomachy, a battle of proper names, culminating in a tragic confession; finally, in literary-critical terms it is a historio-bio-graphy, since the "I" of the poet presents itself not as the center of a life story but rather as a ramification of a sensibility linked to places that give it meaning.

These three reading perspectives focus on the main crystallization points of the book's agenda — mainly descriptive, but also prescriptive, of its narrative marked by the absence of character or dialogue. They in-

dicating the possible anchoring points of a reading that responds with due seriousness to the sober unity of the tone of the text, the tone of a voice merging with a city in order to reveal it to the unseeing eyes of a stranger by virtue of signs alone.

If *Lisbon* participates, in its own way, in the new poetics of the subject that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is in order to equalize the expectations of a personal mythology with the potentialities of an urban neo-mythology, and to do so by means of an accurate narrative line. The semiotic variety of this text, a *hapax legomenon* in being as ironic as it is lyric, can be expected to inspire other perspectives as well, bringing us to a fuller appreciation of Pessoa's verbal genius.

*Lisbon* could, in fact, be Pessoa's true heteronym, not as a symbol of a poetics but as a clue to a writing practice — literally, a "city-person," revealed by its "guide" in too prolix a way not to contain, here and there, shadowy areas that still evade perception.

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Lisbon which Álvaro de Campos exalted in verse" (12). Moreover,

while Sá-Carneiro and other fellow-travelers on the Modernist voyage eagerly imported foreign cultural influences, Pessoa occupied himself primarily with exporting ours — that is, making it known overseas. His guidebook [on Lisbon] is an example of this. Its matter-of-fact style, devoid of ornamentation and complexity, endeavors to exalt our cultural heritage — not only landmarks, museums and churches, but also the repertoire of the S. Carlos Opera House, and even our literary works — which he refers to cleverly when showing to the tourist the Lisbon's public libraries. (16)

Professor Lopes believes that the reader must understand that the voice in *Lisbon*

is that of the tour guide. It's certainly not the voice of Bernardo Soares, stammering on about his melancholic love for Lisbon — about the cozy embrace more often denied him by the city than offered. Neither it is the Lisbon of Álvaro de Campos, "with its houses of many colours," always near to both the Tagus river and sorrow. (17)

I believe that Teresa Rita Lopes's view — that *Lisbon* is primarily an informational text — short-shrifts relevant hermeneutical consideration, since it is based on two controversial assumptions.

The first assumption regards the status of *description*, and, more specifically, its importance in Pessoa's *Lisbon*. According to Lopes, the prevalence of description suffices to deny the poet's little book any aesthetic character. This claim neglects two parameters, one associated with developments in modern literature and the other directly linked to the place of Lisbon in Pessoa's poetics and existential experience.

Massive recourse to description characterizes not only the "informative" use of language, in the ordinary meaning of "informative function" as instrumental use of language for practical communication. Description was also a semiotic device greatly appreciated by the realistic aesthetics that flowered in the nineteenth century, in, for instance, the works of Gustave Flaubert and C. E. Gadda. Later, literary Modernism established itself by the plethoric use of the descriptive register through which the reader is literally immersed in an endless stream of information.

The wealth of detail that constitutes the encyclopedic character of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and of *La Mécanique* suggests that through an apparent narrowing of the plot, European literature is reaching a turning point. Precision turns into a form of preciousness, and the escalation of details turns into a travesty of transparency. Under the pen of these innova-

tors — which Pessoa tracks in his own poetic way — the informative use of the language becomes a means of subverting the canonicity of the genres, novelistic as well as poetic. The precursors of this turn have a significant line of descent, from *La Modification* (Butor) through *La Route des Flandres* (Simon) to *Le Planetarium* (Sarraute), in addition to *L'inquisiteur* (Pinget) or *La Jalousie* (Robbe-Grillet).<sup>9</sup>

And what is a tourist guide if not an abstract narrative framework in which the reader can project himself in place of the main character who has disappeared from the plot? Is this not the most suitable poetic mold for literary subversion?

Pessoa's *Lisbon* anticipates in many ways the current taste for the sociology and aesthetics of everyday, which help the individual subject to transform his consumption of the world into a consumption of signs, all at the whim of his hedonistic fancy and despite the impingements of the world with its constraints and predetermined circuits, tourist circuits included. Closer to our time, this aestheticization of everyday life, of the *always already*, reaches its climate with the master-story of the everyday paradigmatically attested to by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

The second assumption pertains to the definition of identity. T. R. Lopes subscribes to the widespread idea that Pessoa had a true identity (corresponding to his legal identity) and assumed identities under which he was free to create his works as a poet. In other words, under his true identity Pessoa would have stopped asserting himself as an artist and turned into a prosaic tourist-guide writer.

I believe that this opposition between two regimes of identities (the "true" Pessoa and Pessoa's "masks" of assumed names) omits a key parameter. Indeed, the awareness that the voice "is that of the tour guide" should not block remembering that Pessoa was an exile, or underestimate the fact that the uprootedness had weighed heavily in the genesis of his enhanced poetic sensitivity.

Indeed, the identity explosion in Pessoa's polymorphic and polycephalic poetry can be seen as the aesthetic means through which he reinvented for himself a sort of continuity of identity, perceptible only to himself.

<sup>9</sup> The theoretical statements on this literary movement (Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* and Nathalie Sarraute's *L'Ère du soupçon*) praise description and informativeness and represent them as appropriate rhetoric.