

Dryden, Keats, Tennyson, and Browning Unpublished Translations by Fernando Pessoa

ABSTRACT: Reading, writing, and translating were three interconnected activities for Pessoa. Although some of his translations were brought to light in Portugal during his own lifetime, a great number of them remained unpublished. This chapter provides a transcription of lines from Dryden, Keats, Tennyson, and Robert Browning, along with brief comments on each of the translations.

KEYWORDS: unpublished translation, Dryden, Keats, Tennyson, Robert Browning

As numerous fragments in the archive demonstrate, for Pessoa readings and rereadings of his favorite English poets were a continual inspiration for his own poetry and for critical reflection, as well as an impetus for his translations.

In a monograph from 1996 on poetry translated by Fernando Pessoa,¹ Arnaldo Saraiva revealed some poems, generally in English, that the young Pessoa had translated for the *Biblioteca internacional de obras célebres*, an anthology of world literature in twenty-four volumes that came out in the first decade of the twentieth century and was made available chiefly in Brazil.²

As for editorial projects undertaken throughout Pessoa's life (for example, *Olisipo* in 1921), a significant number were devoted to translations of works in different languages, with Pessoa as the main translator of the English. In June 1923, disheartened over the *Olisipo* project, Pessoa suggested to João Castro Osório, a manager of and partner in a publishing house, a Herculean plan for translations. The plan included ten plays by Shakespeare, as well as major works by Poe, Robert Browning, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, Shelley, Keats. In addition, Pessoa planned to include in volumes of the same set some minor English Restoration poets (for example, Sir Charles Sedley, Suckling, and Lovelace), as well as late Victorian poets (O'Shaughnessy, Dowson, and Lionel Johnson, among others).³ The sense of urgency and some megalomania in the letter to

Osório, in which Pessoa asks for an advance of 2,000 escudos, indicate that there was also a financial motivation. The idea failed to lead to any published results; however, it contributed to translations extant in Pessoa's archive, "prontas, e sujeitas apenas à necessária revisão final" (ready and subject only to the need of a final revision),⁴ as he optimistically announced in the letter.

Saraiva, in the appendix to his book, presents facsimiles of five fragments of translations, together with the passages in the original, but not the transcription of Pessoa's manuscripts. These are verses by Dryden (taken from "The Hind and the Panther," *Aureng-Zebe*, *The Conquest of Granada*, and *Don Sebastian*);⁵ Keats (from "Ode on a Grecian Urn"); Poe (from "Annie" and "The Haunted Palace"); Tennyson (from "Break, Break, Break"); and Robert Browning (from "The Pied Piper of Hamelin: A Child's Story"). Apart from Poe's verses, transcribed by Margarida Vale de Gato and subsequently published in 2011,⁶ all these translations have remained unpublished. This material, transcribed here, provides the reader with one more insight into the translation methods used by Pessoa, a poet who defined poetry as "obra litteraria em que o sentido se determina atravez do rhythm" (a literary work in which sense is determined through rhythm)⁷ and asserted that this was "[o] primeiro elemento a fixar" (the first element to consider)⁸ when translating a poem. In the paragraphs that follow, I briefly comment on some of the translations presented here for the first time.

The title of the manuscript that contains his translations of John Dryden's lines—"Dryden (LOWELL)"—suggests that Pessoa used a selection of poems from *Literary Essays* by James Russell Lowell,⁹ especially those in his essay on Dryden on pages 95 to 180 of the third volume.¹⁰ In his translation of "The Hind and the Panther," for instance, written in heroic couplets by the only Restoration poet included in this set, Pessoa opted for the decasyllable (mixing sapphic and heroic rhythmical patterns) and respected the rhyme scheme.¹¹

A copy of *The Complete Works of John Keats* extant in Pessoa's private library¹² dates back to his South African days. It was one of the books Pessoa selected on winning the Queen Victoria Memorial Prize for best English essay when he took the entrance examination for the University of the Cape of Good Hope.¹³ Pessoa considered Keats a master for his "line perfection"¹⁴ and even coined the Portuguese adjective *sensuoso*¹⁵ (sensuous) to describe the quality distinguishing Keats from his contemporary Shelley. Keats, one of the English lyrical poets Pessoa wrote most about, appears repeatedly in several of his editorial projects. Although Pessoa considered "Ode to a Nightingale" to be "the best of all odes of

Keats,"¹⁶ it was "Ode on a Grecian Urn," expressing "so human an idea as the heart-rending *untimeliness* of beauty,"¹⁷ that he selected for a poetry anthology project¹⁸ datable to 1917–1923. Keats's ode is in rhymed iambic pentameter, meter that Pessoa rendered by using the decasyllable (mixing for the most part Sapphic and heroic rhythmical patterns).

A copy of *The Complete Works of Alfred Tennyson*¹⁹ also figured on the list of books Pessoa chose on winning the prize mentioned earlier. "Break, Break, Break," a poem by Tennyson, "the greatest artist of modern times," according to Pessoa,²⁰ was also to be included in the anthology he envisioned. Tennyson's lines are in iambic pentameter. In his translation, Pessoa managed to reproduce the number of beats of the original (three beats per line become three stresses in the Portuguese text) and respect the rhyme scheme.²¹

Pessoa owned at least two books by Browning: *Poems of Robert Browning* (1907) and *The Works of Robert Browning* (1912).²² Pessoa, in keeping with his obsession with comparing poets, defines the greatness of Browning and Tennyson by placing them in opposition: "There's a disassociation among the moderns: they are either like Browning, great poets without being great artists, or like Tennyson, great artists without being great poets."²³ This "dramatically lyrical poet,"²⁴ as he calls Browning in another critical reflection, is presented here in a partial translation of the first stanzas of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." In this poem, Browning mostly combines the four-beat *dolnik*, a ballad meter known as *long measure*, with the three-beat *dolnik*.²⁵ In Pessoa's translation, we observe many decasyllabic and octosyllabic lines.