

Born in Translation and Iteration

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João Delgado's poetry first appeared as an anthology of translated poetry in *He'arat Shulaym* Issue 1, published in November 2001 in Jerusalem by the artist collective Sala-Manca. The entire issue was devoted to João Delgado. Delgado was a Portuguese-Argentinean poet, born in Lisbon circa 1920 (or not), who left Portugal as a political refugee for Buenos Aires. He disappeared in 1976 during the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983). Since 1976, there has been no trace of his fate, although new fragments of his work are constantly being discovered, translated, and published by the Sala-Manca group.

Keywords: João Delgado ; Sala-Manca ; Israeli art ; Israeli poetry

1. Introduction

João Delgado, a Portuguese poet, was born or died in Lisbon. He stayed in Alcântara for three days. On the fourth day, he joined the navy and set out for Buenos Aires. There he read the great poets of the 1920s in the 1970s, participated in art evening classes at the city's night schools, and these impelled him to drop both poetry and art.

([Delgado 2001](#), p. 8)

João Delgado's poetry originally appeared as a translated anthology in the first issue of the journal *He'arat Shulaym* (Notes in the Margins) published in November 2001 in Jerusalem by the artist group Sala-Manca. The entire issue was devoted to Delgado, a Portuguese-Argentinean poet. Born in Lisbon circa 1920, Delgado left Portugal as a political refugee, settling in Buenos Aires. He subsequently disappeared in 1976 during the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983). Since then, no trace of him has been found, although new fragments of his work are constantly being discovered, translated, and published by Sala-Manca.

The surprising publication of Delgado's poetry for the first time in Hebrew, translated by members of the Sala-Manca group, elicited a positive response. Literary critics praised Delgado's poetry and art, finding and sharing with the readers previously unknown relationships between Delgado and poets and artists from the European avantgarde. Albert Swissa, a renowned writer and art critic, wrote in his review:

In Paris, I met experts from the Oulipo group who told me that Delgado's life and work are summarized in a crossword puzzle by George Perec, a crossword puzzle based on hidden codes inside words that were removed over the years from the Larousse dictionary and found their new home in footnotes dispersed throughout Perec's oeuvre. I have the crossword puzzle with me, but I didn't dare start dealing with it. No matter what, all the researchers agree that one or two verses from J.L. Borges' 'The Golem' (quoted in the article "76"), prove that Delgado came across Borges in Buenos Aires at some point during the late 50s and that this event had a decisive influence on Delgado's internal world and destiny. Borges posed for Delgado a simple riddle: "João Delgado surpasses João Delgado. Who is who? And who surpasses who?" Following this, Delgado discovered his ascendance and relationship to the 16th century (?) João Pinto Delgado, a crypto-Jewish poet, who is named together with Luis de Leon and other poets.

([Swissa 2001](#))

Swissa, thus, enriches Delgado's virtually unknown biography and lineage and, in a way, collaborates with the Sala-Manca group in their project of writing, publishing, and performing Delgado's biography. Yoram Melzer, an influential literary critic and translator, wrote a review of the first issue of *He'arat Shulaym* in which he discussed João Delgado's poetry as presented by Sala-Manca in translation:

I admit. I'd never heard about the man [João Delgado] beforehand. After reading the [first] issue, I had my concerns regarding his existence, concerns that were heightened specifically by some of the texts (i.e., "he used to say that that is the thing," Rodriguez¹ would argue "nothing." That word game is possible in Hebrew, not in Spanish or Portuguese).² An interesting case, especially in light of the prose, poetry and conceptual art linked to Delgado's name. A thorough reading of *He'arat Shulaym* Issue 1 reveals that indeed it is a double heteronymic game. The confident issue reveals (does it?) a group of creators who have decided to cling to art, and they do whatever they want to in the framework of an intensive dialogue with the artistic field.

(Melzer 2002)

While Swissa enriches Delgado's biography by linking him to Oulipo and stressing the poet's lineage as a descendent of João Pinto Delgado, the crypto-Jewish poet, Melzer attempts to decode the poetry by referring to the contemporary artists behind Delgado's persona. Translating and publishing poetry without the original; the idea of iteration; the construction of a collective identity comprising João Delgado and his heteronyms; the blurring of the fictional with the "real"; all these characterize not only Delgado's oeuvre but the construction of an artistic identity for a two-member artistic group who are at once a couple, team, and collective embracing of multiplicity and dispersion.

2. The Beginnings of the Relationship between Sala-Manca and Delgado

He'arat Shulaym is a print art journal published in Hebrew in Jerusalem by the Sala-Manca artistic group.³ Sala-Manca (which means "without space" or literally "without room") is based in Jerusalem and has been active since 2000. Its members and the authors of this article are a pair of artists and scholars who were born in Buenos Aires, and both immigrated to Israel in their early twenties. The journal was published independently. In the editorial note of the first issue, the editors write that its main objective is "...to distract the individual's gaze for a moment from the dominant cultural reality" (*Sala-Manca 2000, p. 1*).

The first issue, as mentioned, was devoted to the publication of João Delgado's poetry and art. The editors defined Delgado as a pseudocharacter on the fringes of Argentinian culture and literature. In the absence of any original texts, Delgado's poetry was published for the first time in Hebrew translation. The cover was a facsimile of an empty page with a footnote in Hebrew: a quote from Delgado (see below). To devote the first issue of *He'arat Shulaym* to Delgado was a statement. For the editors of the journal, it was a way to establish an artistic lineage that would contextualize their work not only in the Israeli artistic and literary scenes but in a hybrid cultural territory in which translation could become original. The members of the Sala-Manca group were two young artists, not raised in and not yet connected to the local Israeli art scene, nor connected anymore to the Argentinean art scene. The journal was a way to inscribe the artists in a tradition related to a radical South American avantgarde artist whom they admired.

The specific tradition in which they inscribed themselves was that of a fictive wandering avantgarde poet, a political refugee, in the margins, and in the idea of being only in translation. The original disappeared. The poet disappeared. Delgado disappeared during the last Argentinean dictatorship. The only way to survive was in translation. What remained? The construction and reconstruction of a translated I. Sala-Manca brought (and/or created) a group as their lineage—João Delgado and his heteronyms—to share themselves with the Israeli art scene, relate to it, and contest it. They were not an I but a We or a multiple "I".

This article examines João Delgado's poetic work in relation to Sala-Manca's artistic practice and the way both Sala-Manca and Delgado create, much like the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, a "system of life" (*Zenith 2012, p. 140*) by existing as heteronyms of one another, allowing for a multiplicity of identities and stressing the relation to Others. A *pseudonym* might be described as signing with another name, although the writer uses the same style and writes from their "own" personality and positionality. By contrast, a *heteronym* is the utterance of the sentiments, positionality, and personality of an Other beyond the writer. A heteronym is a splitting of the creative self, allowing different personas to write in different ways and even sometimes having different kinds of relationships between them.⁴ In discussing heteronyms, researchers will try to problematize the relationships between authorship and identity in relation to the dynamics of the Sala-Manca group as immigrants in terms of language and culture and yet belonging to the Jewish majority in Israel. Taking academic writing as a dialogical and artistic process, this article examines those with whom researchers have conversed as immigrants, as artists, as new citizens of a country, and as citizens who hold critical political viewpoints vis-à-vis the country they joined.

In the film “Edouard Glissant: One World in Relation” ([Diawara 2010](#), 00:09:21), Glissant says that every diaspora is a passage from unity to multiplicity. To be diasporic is to leave behind unity and become multiple, to belong and not belong at the same time, and to be able to exist as a hybrid self. One must know how to cultivate “a son’s viewpoint, the vision of a foreigner” ([Plenel 2011](#)). João Delgado’s life story and work try to be a work of multiplicity and diaspora(s), continuing to exist through his heteronyms.)

3. The Beginnings

The story of João Delgado’s life cannot be told in a linear manner. The information available is sporadic and fragmentary. According to Sala-Manca, he was born in Lisbon in 1921⁵ (this is not actually possible; apparently he was born some years earlier), worked for the newspaper *La Opinion* from the age of fifteen, and left Portugal after performing an intervention at the newspaper in 1926. A day after the military coup d’état, Delgado, who was responsible for writing the newspaper’s obituaries, changed the color of the ink in the printing press from black to white. In this way, the words were “silenced”, nothing was written, or so it appeared. With subtle poetics, the blank issue anticipated the dark times that would descend upon the Portuguese people. All copies of that issue were confiscated and burnt by the army with only one copy surviving. That single copy, signed by the poet and given to his friend and heteronym Arturo Maure, was published for the first time as a facsimile in the eleventh issue of *He’arat Shulaym* in 2006.⁶ On that ostensibly blank page, Delgado wrote, in white letters, his own obituary as a Portuguese citizen. Indeed, that very same day he was born as a wandering poet, a refugee.

According to his autobiography (which is written in the third person and appears as an epigraph at the beginning of this article), he arrived in Buenos Aires, where he lived until he disappeared during the “Process of National Reorganization.” This was the official name used by the Military Junta for the military dictatorship that ruled between 1976 and 1983 which led to the disappearance and killing of thousands of opponents of the regime or those the Junta perceived as such, Delgado among them.

Close to nothing is known about Delgado’s family history and childhood. He may be (as pointed out by his heteronym Arturo Maure in the article “76” ([Maure 2001](#)) and followed by Albert Swissa in the press article) a descendent of the *marrano* poet João Pinto Delgado (~1582–1653).

4. Delgado’s Family History

João Pinto Delgado, born in Portugal around 1582, is considered one of the prominent exponents of crypto-Jewish poetry. João Pinto Delgado escaped the Inquisition in Portugal, leaving for France and then Antwerp, where he died in 1653 ([Roth 1935](#)). As both Cecil Roth and Timothy Oelman note ([Roth 1935](#); [Oelman 1982](#)), people often confused him with his grandfather who bore the same name. This note complicates Maure’s quote from Jorge Luis Borges in the article “76”: “João Delgado’s literary talent surpasses João Delgado’s talent.” Borges may have been also playing a double game here, connecting the contemporary Portuguese poet João Delgado with either of the two sixteenth-century poets of the same name.

The latter two João Delgado were forced to leave the city where they were born and raised. João Delgado the 2nd was forced to leave due to religious prosecution. Delgado the 3rd escaped Salazar’s dictatorship for political reasons, fleeing to Buenos Aires. The decision to travel to Buenos Aires is another enigma; perhaps “he got lost using Lewis Carroll’s map of the ocean” ([Sala-Manca 2000](#), p. 20; [Swissa 2001](#)).

Indeed, as his heteronym Arturo Maure wrote:

João Delgado the 3rd was a multi-faceted artist. Among other things, he was a poet, dramaturg, journalist, researcher, compositor and collector of objects of no value [...] Delgado wrote to be forgotten. To melt into the otherness. He hunted the essential, the succinct. Multi-faced anonymity.

([Maure 2001](#), p. 4)

João Delgado the 3rd (1920?–1976?) disappeared during the last military dictatorship in Argentina in 1976; his heteronym Arturo Maure is the one who survived to tell the story:

Delgado disappeared; it is said he had gone elephant hunting. Those who got to know him can testify that this is impossible. We could recognize the literary reference immediately. Perhaps it was a rumor initiated by Delgado himself, a way to let us know that he succeeded in escaping, ran away from the police and from Hemingway—to cross the border.

(Maure 2001, p. 4)

According to Sala-Manca's introductory note (see **Figure 1**), the article was published for the first time in 1996 in the magazine *La Arroba*, edited by Pablo Suarez in Montevideo (Sala-Manca 2000, p. 4). This original, as Delgado's poetry, is inaccessible, perhaps nonexistent, and its translation is the only document upon which researchers can rely.

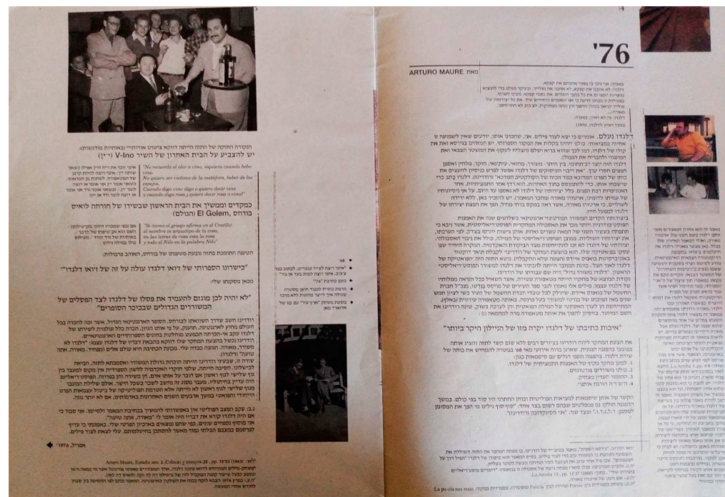


Figure 1. '76' by Arturo Maure. He'arat Shulaym, Issue 1.

In Argentina, as a poet and an activist, Delgado knew that his name was on the Argentinian dictatorship's blacklist. To protect himself, he began to multiply his literary self and split it into different heteronyms: Arturo Maure (literary critic), Rodriguez (architect), Juan Mestre (anarchist and compass maker), Regina Handke (Hungarian-Jewish poet), Marian Loop (Romanian sound artist and inventor), Prof. G. Vakulinchuk (writer and theoretician), and Irena Fantlova (cubist actress). "He was looking to become invisible through the many faces of his own anonymity," Maure writes in "76".

5. Delgado and Pessoa

Delgado cannot be read without connecting him to one of the most original and prolific poets of the last century: Fernando Pessoa. Daniel Blaustein, a scholar of Latin-American Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, sent an attachment in a private email to Sala-Manca containing the writings of Nanando F. Pietrazzurra, an Italian Hebraist who also translated Pessoa into Hebrew. In the attachment, Pietrazzurra recounted how Delgado got to know Pessoa:

There are so many coincidences that Jung, Carl Jung, might have coined his notorious notion of "synchronicity" taking as a starting point this constellation of events: the picture of João Delgado as a young boy was taken in Lisbon in 1929; in the same city, between 1913 and 1935, Fernando Pessoa—under the heteronym Bernardo Soares—writes the 479 fragments that will compose "The Book of Disquiet".

(Blaustein 2006)

Pietrazzurra, according to Blaustein,⁷ set sail from Reggio de Calabria for Buenos Aires on 18 November 1931, aboard the *Malcolm*. Due to a technical problem, the ship was delayed in Lisbon for seven weeks; there, in the harsh winter of 1932, Pietrazzurra might have become acquainted with Soares. His translation of fragment 148 into Hebrew was found in the Leprosarium "Ariel O. Cozzoni" in the city of Rosario, Santa Fe province, Argentina in 1965. Fragment 148 reads:

Everything stated or expressed by man is a note in the margin of a completely erased text. From what is in the note we can extract the gist of what must have been in the text, but there is always a doubt, and the possible meanings are many.

(Pessoa 2002, n. 148)

A year later, Pietrazurra committed suicide. His body was recognized by the only person who came to visit him at the leprosarium: João Delgado.

The art magazine edited and published by Sala-Manca for seven consecutive years between 2000 and 2007 was called *He'arat Shulaym* which means "Notes in the margins", and the art events that were organized for the launch of each issue were entitled *He'ara*—"Comment". Both for Sala-Manca and for Delgado and his heteronyms, fragment 148 by Fernando Pessoa reflects the spatial way in which they perceive their marginal practice.

Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) and his heteronyms were among the greatest exponents of heteronymic philosophy; he also inspired Delgado. Fragment 148, selected from the "Livro do desassossego" (1982) by Fernando Pessoa, engages with Delgado's passion for the margins, that which is not considered central by the hegemonic system as a gateway to the importance of life.

During the 1920s, Delgado was a young adult living in Lisbon, and Fernando Pessoa and his heteronyms were already active in Portugal's literary scene. It is highly possible that Delgado knew, as Daniel Blaustein suggests, the "system of life" ([Zenith 2012, p. 140](#)) called Fernando Pessoa. For Delgado, the heteronymic poetic was a way to search for anonymity, to dissolve himself, or what Maure calls "multifaceted anonymity." This was anonymity characterized by a plurality of selves, not by non-showing, but by a multiplicity of manifestations.

In his article "Fernando Pessoa's Heteronymic Machine" ([Morris 2014](#)), Adam Morris alleges that Pessoa's heteronymic system of life is a precursor to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari describe the interaction of concepts which themselves are "centers of vibrations, each in itself and everyone in relation to all the others" ([Deleuze and Guattari 2011, p. 23](#)). Furthermore, researchers can understand "schizoanalysis" and "heteronymity" as concepts resonating with one another in one of these vibrational relationships. João Delgado expanded the "heteronymic machine" to different media and genres: theatre, poetry, performance, and academic works. An example of the latter is the case of the proposal for a doctoral thesis about Delgado presented by one of his heteronyms, the architect Rodriguez at the University of Buenos Aires ([Maure 2001](#)). The playfulness of Delgado's heteronymic writing, along with a subtle or open critique of the cultural and political establishment, is present in all their works, including most pointedly a critique vis-à-vis their own selves.

Delgado's search for anonymity and multiplicity is a construction that results from this dissensus. João Delgado's work was developed by trying to create an antonymic relationship to individuality, unity, and marketable artistic production perhaps also against the idea of the mere existence of a subject/star/figure. He is a non-capitalist poet, a non-product, a fiction, a remembrance, and an oblivion. If the "individual" becomes a question of space, but a non-physical space of "in-betweenness" situated at the fluctuations between one thing and another, as Deleuze and Guattari formulate it, Delgado is a footnote, and this is why the name of Sala-Manca's journal is in a sense an homage to Delgado.

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