

Fernando Pessoa

Twenty Poems



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‘Everything that a human being expounds or expresses is a note in the margin, of a text that has been totally erased. From the meaning of the note, we, more or less, discern the meaning the text may have contained; but there is always a doubt, and the possible meanings are many.’

from: O livro de desassossego

Autopsychography

(Autopsicographia)

The poet is a pretender,
who pretends so completely
he even pretends to pain
the pain he really feels.

And those who read what he writes,
reading of pain, feel truly
neither of those pains he has,
but what they themselves have not.

So round its track goes
wheeling, to entertain our reason,
this string of carriages
they call the heart.

The Innumerable

(Vivem em nós inúmeros)

The innumerable live in us;
when I think or feel, I do not know
who it is thinks or feels.
I am merely a place
of feeling or thought.

I have more souls than one.
There are more I's than myself.
I exist nonetheless
indifferent to them all.
I silence them: I speak.

The conflicting impulses
of what I feel or do not feel
dispute inside who I am.
I ignore them. They dictate nothing
to the one I know. I write.

Like A Mist

(Tenho em mim como uma bruma)

I have in me like a mist
that is and contains nothing
nostalgia for nothing at all,
the desire for something fine.

I am enveloped by it
as if by a fog
and I see the last star glowing
above the stub in my ashtray

I smoked life away. How uncertain
all I saw or read!
And the whole world, a vast open book,
smiles at me in an unknown language.

This

(Dizem que finjo ou minto)

They say I pretend, I lie
In all I write. No.
I simply feel with
the imagination.
Not using the heart.

All that I dream, that passes,
that I lack or that ends,
is like level ground
overlooking some other thing.
It is that which is beautiful.

That is why I write amidst
that which is not nearby,
free of personal ties,
serious about what is not.
Feel? Let the reader feel!

There Was A Rhythm

(Houve um ritmo no meu sono)

There was a rhythm to my sleep.
When I woke it was lost.
Why did I leave that abandonment
of myself, in which I lived?

I don't know what it was that was not.
I know it rocked me gently,
as though the rocking sought
to turn me, once more, into who I am.

There was a music that ended
when I awoke from dreaming.
But it did not die: it endures
in that which stops me thinking.

That Which Pains Me

(O que me dói não é)

That which pains me is not
what is in the heart,
but those beautiful things
that will never exist...

They are the forms without form,
that pass without pain
having power to know them,
or love to dream them.

They exist as though sadness
were a tree and, one by one,
its leaves fell
between its vestige and the mist.

Rather The Flight Of The Bird

(Antes o vôo da ave)

Rather the flight of the bird, that passes and leaves no trace,
than the passage of the animal recorded in the earth.
The bird goes by and forgets, and so it should be.
Where it no longer exists, and so serves no purpose,
the animal shows it has been, which serves no purpose.

The record left behind is a betrayal of nature.
Because the Nature that was is not Nature.
What has been is nothing, and to record is not to see.

Pass by, bird, pass by, and teach me to pass by!

Beyond The Bend In The Road

(Para além da curva da estrada)

Beyond the bend in the road
there may be a well, a castle.
There may be simply more road.
I neither know nor ask.
As long as I'm on the road before the bend
I simply look at the road before the bend,
since I can see only the road before the bend.
It would do no good to look elsewhere
or at what I can't see.
Let's just concentrate on where we are.
There's beauty enough in being here, not elsewhere.
If anyone's there beyond the bend in the road,
let them worry about what's beyond the bend in the road.
That is the road, to them.
If we arrive there when we arrive we'll know.
Now we only know that we're not there.
Here there's only the road before the bend, and before the bend
there's the road with no bend at all.

Note

(A minha alma partiu-se como um vaso vazio)

My soul broke like an empty vase.
It fell, irretrievably, down the stairs.
It fell from the hands of the careless girl.
It fell, into more pieces than there was china in the vase.

Nonsense? Impossible! I don't know!
I've more sensations than when I felt like myself.
I'm a scatter of pieces on a mat that needs shaking.

I made a sound in falling like a breaking vase.
All the gods there are lean over the stair-rail
and gaze at the pieces the girl made of me.

They are not angry at her.
They are forgiving.
What was I but an empty vase?

They look at the absurdly conscious pieces,
conscious of themselves, not of them.

They gaze and smile.
They smile, indulgently, at the unwitting girl.

The grand staircase rises, carpeted with stars.
One piece shines, its glossy exterior outwards, between the stars.
My work? My ultimate soul? My life?
A piece.
And the gods gaze, at it especially, not knowing why it hangs there.

Between Sleep and Dream

(Entre o sono e o sonho)

Between sleep and dream,
Between me and what in me
is the I that I suppose
runs a river without end.

It passed by other banks,
diverse but distant,
on the wandering course
the whole river takes.

It arrived where I live
at the place I am today.
It passes, if I meditate on myself;
waking, it has passed by.

And the one I feel I am, and dies
in what binds me to myself,
sleeps where the river runs,
the river without end.

I Am A Shepherd

(Sou um guardador de rebanhos)

I am a shepherd.
The sheep are my thoughts
and all my thoughts sensations.
I think with my eyes and ears,
my feet and hands
my nose and mouth.

To think a flower is to see it, and smell it,
and to eat a fruit is to know its meaning.

And so, on a very hot day,
sad at enjoying it so much,
I lie flat in the grass,
I close my hot eyelids,
I feel all my body, lying down in reality,
I recognise the truth, and I'm happy.

In This World Where We Forget

(Neste mundo em que esquecemos)

In this world where we forget
we are shadows of who we are,
and the true expressions we form
in that other where, souls, we live,
are here grimaces and signs.

All is night and confusion
that exists among us here:
projections, smoke scattered
from the fire whose glow is hidden
when we look at what life gives.

But one or another, gazing
closely for a moment,
can see in the shifting shadows
the intent in the other world
of the expression that makes them live.

And then they find the meaning
of what here is merely a grimace,
and their intuitive gaze
returns to their body, lost,
imagined, understood.

Shadow of the yearning body,
it pretends it feels the tie
that binds it to the marvellous
truth that hurled it, anxious,
to the floor of space and time.

It Flows

(Flui, indeciso na bruma)

It flows, indecisive in the mist,
more than the indecisive mist,
a being that is something to discover,
and for which nothing is needed.

It only wishes to consist
of being the nothing that surrounds it,
a beginning of existence
completed before it is grasped.

It is the meaning that exists
in the breeze that is scarcely felt,
the essence of which consists
in passing by, uncertainly.

The Reaper

(Mas não, é abstracta, é uma ave)

But no, she's abstract, she's a bird
of sound turning in the air, of air,
and her soul sings without hindrance,
for singing is what makes it sing.

Bodies

(O meu corpo é o abismo entre eu e eu)

My body's the abyss between I and I.

If all's a dream beneath the unreal dream
of open sky, to dream yourself is to possess yourself,
and to possess yourself is to dream more closely

forever separate souls,
bodies are the dream of a bridge
over an abyss without shores

I, because I know myself, separate myself
from me, and think, and thinking is slight.

The hour goes by. But my dream is mine.

There Is For Everything We Do

(Há em tudo que fazemos)

There is for everything we do
a singular Reason (?):
It is not what we want.
It is done because we live,
and living is not thinking.

If anyone thought about life
they would die of thinking.
That is why the life that is lived
is a thing forgotten
between moment and moment.

But it's no matter that it is,
or even that it's been allowed to be:
it's bad that our mood controls us;
it's good that no one sees us;
between them, stay alive.

I Took Off The Mask

(Depus a mascara e vi-me ao espelho)

I took off the mask and saw myself in the mirror –
there was the child, of so many years ago.
Nothing had changed.
That's the advantage of knowing how to take off the mask.
One is always the child,
the past that was
the child.
I took off the mask and put it on again.
That's better.
Thus, I am the mask.
And I return to personality as to
a station at the end of the line.

Say Nothing

(Não digas nada a quem te disse tudo)

Say nothing to the one who told you all –
that all, the all that's never told...
those words made of velvet
whose shade of colour no one knows.

Say nothing to one who bares their soul...
the soul that cannot be bared. Confession
is indulged in simply to win calm
from listening to ourselves talking.

All useless, and false.
It's a spinning top a boy in the street
sets going to see how it spins.
It spins. Say nothing.

No One Loves Another

(Ninguém a outro ama, senão que ama)

No one loves another, rather they love
whatever of themselves is, or is imagined,
in the other. Don't grieve if no one loves you.
They feel who you are and you're a stranger.
Be who you are, loved or not.
Secure in yourself, you'll know less sorrow.

Abdication

(Abdicação)

Take me into your arms, O eternal night,
and call me your son. I am a king
who willingly abandoned
my throne of weariness and dreams.

My sword, weighing my tired arms down,
I surrendered to calm and powerful arms,
and I left my crown and sceptre – shattered
to pieces, in the anteroom.

My coat of mail, utterly useless,
my spurs with their futile jingle,
I left behind on the chill staircase.

I shed royalty, body and soul,
and returned to Night, ancient, calm
as a landscape in the dying light.

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