



TEIXEIRA DE PASCOAES

(Portugal, 1877-1952)

[Monday 2 January 2006]

A mystic poet who felt profoundly connected to the humblest things and to the brightest stars, Teixeira de Pascoaes was born and died in the small town of Amarante, in northern Portugal, and led a relatively uneventful life. In 1896 he went to Coimbra to study law, though poetry and contemplation were his favorite endeavors. University life was, at the time, a rather boisterous affair, but Pascoaes kept out of student brawls and political rows, devoting himself to study and writing. He published his first three books of poems while at university (not counting the book, later repudiated, that he had published a year before arriving at Coimbra), and these already show his attraction to an idealized nature, to the darkly mysterious, to the vague and ethereal. He worked for a few years as a lawyer and a judge, but then retreated, as it were, into his inner life. He was by no means a recluse, however. His religiosity had a missionary side: Pascoaes became the chief apostle and theoretician of *saudosismo*.

Saudosismo was a movement that promulgated *saudade* as a national spiritual value that could have transformative power. *Saudade* means “longing, nostalgia, yearning” for something absent, but it is a feeling fraught with more emotional weight and affective intensity than corresponding words from English and other languages convey. Pascoaes gave this unique Portuguese word a philosophical and spiritual twist. In an article published in 1913, he wrote that “*saudade* is creation, a perpetual and fruitful marriage of Remembrance with Desire, of Evil with God, of Life with Death . . .”. And in a conference delivered that same year, he spoke of “the action of *desire* on remembrance and of *remembrance* on desire, the two intimate elements of *saudade*”, described elsewhere in the conference as “the perfect and *living fusion* of Nature and the Spirit”. *Saudade* was, in Pascoaes’ conception, a species of *élan vital*.

From 1910 to 1916, Pascoaes was editor of *A Águia*, an Oporto-based magazine that became the mouthpiece for the *Renascença Portuguesa* (Portuguese Renaissance), a movement of which *saudosismo* was part and parcel. It was by cultivating *saudade*, considered to be the defining characteristic of the ‘Portuguese soul’, that a national renaissance was supposed to take place. This signified not “a simple return to the Past” (wrote

Pascoaes in *A Águia* in 1912) but a “return to the original wellsprings of life in order to create a new life”. To achieve this Renaissance he advocated, among other things, the establishment of a Portuguese Church, which could better accommodate the original spirit of the nation, part Christian but also part pagan.

The nationalist program of *saudosismo* is only latently felt in most of Pascoaes’ poetry, for his bent was predominantly spiritual, and in a lecture delivered in the last year of his life, he remarked: “Man does not belong only to society; he belongs, first and foremost, to the Cosmos. Society is not an *end* but a *means* for facilitating man’s mission on earth, which is to be the *consciousness of the Universe*.” This point of view informs virtually all of his poetry, which is, in large measure, a pantheistic celebration of life – not just life on earth, but also the life of the imagination and the universe. In the early poem ‘Poet’, he states that “I am, in the future, time past” – the embodiment, in effect, of *saudade*. He claims to be “a mountain cliff”, “an astral mist”, “a living mystery”, “God’s delirium”, and so on, which is why he also says, “I’m man fleeing from himself”. Not limited to his own body, he connects with the rest of reality, to the point of interpenetrating and *becoming* its other manifestations.

Pascoaes’ universe is one of correspondences between seeming opposites: the past with the future, nostalgia with hope, sorrow with joy, the material with the spiritual. The dynamic nature of this unity of opposites is well expressed by two verses greatly admired by Fernando Pessoa: “The leaf that fell / Was a soul that ascended” (from a poem titled ‘Elegy of Love’). Far from being a fixed machine of integrated moving parts, Pascoaes’ universe is in continual expansion, through the creative energy of hope, sorrow, desire, *saudade*. Just as poetic inspiration leaves “the splendor of a verse” on the printed page, “so too hope, endlessly burning, (...) / Leaves in space the forms of the Universe, (...) / Mortal recollections of its divine being” (in ‘Indefinite Song XXII’). And man, through his “living encounter” with the things of Nature “gives birth to souls, / Divine apparitions” (in ‘Encounter’).

Profoundly religious in spirit, Pascoaes did not seem to have or to need any clear notion of God. His poetry is an ongoing hymn to a Nature made divine, in which man’s role is to see and sing it.

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POEMS

APOLLO

ENCOUNTER

FINAL ELEGY

IDYLL

INDEFINITE SONG XXII

POET

THE MASK

WIND OF THE SPIRIT

APOLLO

From distant smoke and haze
Ethereal and vaporous blue,
Dizzying, the splendor
Of a flame arises.
There are bonfires burning
Shadowed distances:
They will say all turns to flame touched by our
gaze.

A fire of mad ecstasy
Burns all of space.
Extinguished, it is stone,
Man, a grove of trees.
I see a brilliance grace
The Blue, looming like a lily on a lonely hill.
I see a beam of light take on the contours of a
rock.

I see the burning up of everything;
And feel the great sun
Crackling as it sears,
Burning there within my blood;
And gleaming in a blossoming trunk,
In the voice of the nightingale,
Pouring over the earth in endless tears.

I focus on the light:
I rise in the radiant sweep
The image of this world
Gives other worlds;
And it is clear to me how deep
It is I drop
When my being floods the mighty flood of
night.

Your lyre, grown mute,
Apollo, is the night.
And day's the pure and holy
Sound it breathes.
Hearing it, on the open plains,
The wheat grows ripe;
The lily laughs at daybreak, at evening the
water speaks.

I have an astral sense
Able to discern
Your joyous song

Apolo

Dos fumos da distância,
Etéreos e azulados,
Surge, vertiginoso,
Um resplendor de chama.
Há fogueiras queimando
Os longes ensombrados;
Dir-se-á que o nosso olhar tudo o que toca
inflama.

Abrasa todo o espaço
Um fogo de delírio;
Ao apagar-se, é pedra,
É homem e arvoredo.
Vejo um clarão, no Azul,
Que, em ermo outeiro, é lírio.
Vejo um raio tomar as formas dum penedo.

Vejo o incêndio de tudo;
E sinto o grande sol
Crepitar no meu sangue,
Arder dentro de mim;
Fulgir num tronco em flor,
Na voz do rouxinol,
Derramar-se, na terra, em lágrimas sem fim.

Concentro-me na luz;
Subo na claridade
Que a imagem deste mundo
Aos outros mundos leva;
E vejo bem que desço
A uma profundidade,
Quando meu ser alaga a inundação da treva.

A noite é a tua lira,
Apolo, que emudece.
O dia é o som divino
E puro que ela exala.
Ouvindo-o, na planície,
O trigo amadurece;
O lírio ri, na aurora; à tarde, a água fala.

Tenho um sentido astral,
Que sabe distinguir
Tua alegre canção
De mística harmonia.
Meu sonho era poder,
Em versos, traduzir

Of mystic harmony.
My dream would be
To translate into verse
Your song of light that turns all worlds to
ecstasy.

© Translation: 1998, Alexis Levitin

ENCOUNTER

My living encounter with the humble
Things of Nature gives birth to souls,
Divine apparitions,
Which abstractly behold me from I don't know
where,
From I don't know what unfamiliar place
Outside this space
In which trees and rocks appear.

I see specters, images of Mystery,
Fantastical figures,
Glowing outlines imprinted on the dusk,
Like so many omens. . .

Outlines of pallor emerging in the distance,
And sorrows that are fading portraits
Of unknown Divinities. . .
Statues of silence and melancholy
In the solitude of the hills. . .
Sphinxian postures in the desert,
The shadows of the Pyramids in the sun,
And Plato dragging his tunic of light
Among Egypt's sad and solemn priests
Wearing vestments of dust and dead penumbras,
In temples of moonlight and petrified clouds. . .

I see before me fantastical presences,
Dreamed horizons that gird me
In a painful embrace! Dark birds that alight
On my brow, where night has fallen,
And winds that carry me through
Mists and lightning. . .
Already lost and dead, I'm no more
Than a human appearance,
Floating over the waves of emotion
That surge inside me like blood
From an open wound. . .
And I ride the waves, which spread

Teu cântico de luz que os mundos extasia.

© 1906, Teixeira de Pascoaes
From: *Vida Etérea*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Encontro

Do meu encontro vivo com as cousas
Humildes da Natura, nascem almas,
Aparições divinas,
Que, abstractas, me contemplam, não sei donde,
Não sei de que lugar desconhecido
E fora deste espaço em que aparecem
As árvores e os penedos.

Vejo espectros, imagens do Mistério,
Quiméricas figuras,
Perfis de lume impressos no crepúsculo,
Como sinais de agoiro. . .

Perfis de palidez alvorecendo ao longe,
E tristezas que são retratos esvaídos,
De ignotas Divindades. . .
Estátuas do silêncio e da melancolia,
Na solidão dos montes. . .
Atitudes da Esfinge no deserto,
A sombra das Pirâmides ao sol,
E Platão arrastando a túnica de luz,
Entre os padres do Egipto, hieráticos e tristes,
Vestidos de poeira e de penumbras mortas,
Nos templos de luar e empedernidas nuvens. . .

Vejo, diante de mim, quiméricas presenças,
Horizontes de sonho que me cingem
Num doloroso abraço! Escuras aves
Que me pousam na fronte anoitecida,
E ventos que me levam através
De névoas e relâmpagos. . .
E, já perdido e morto, não sou mais
Que uma aparência humana,
Boiando sobre as ondas da emoção
Que brotam, cá de dentro, como sangue
Duma ferida aberta. . .
E vou à flor das ondas que se espriam
Em litorais de neve e branca espuma,

Over shores of snow and white foam,
In blue distances of endless clarity,
And in the nocturnal vagueness where stars
Emerge, like smiles of the devil. . .

I float on a lofty dream,
In heights of mystic splendor,
Where the white lily of moonlight opens.

I float on a lofty dream, in which I see
Myself as an indefinite being. . . The vast night,
Spreading over me its black wings,
Cannot hide me. My face,
Risen above the darkness,
Contemplates the divine Moon.

© Translation: 2005, Richard Zenith

Em distâncias azuis de claridade infinda,
E no vago nocturno em que as estrelas
Afloram, como risos do demónio. . .

Flutuo num sonho aéreo,
Em alturas de místico esplendor,
Onde abre o lírio branco do luar.

Flutuo num sonho aéreo, em que me vejo
Um ser indefinido. . . A noite imensa,
Que estende sobre mim as negras asas,
Não me pode esconder. A minha face,
Erguida para além da escuridão,
Contempla a Luz divina.

© 1925, Teixeira de Pascoaes
From: *Cânticos*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

FINAL ELEGY

I sculpted as best I could my sorrow:
A black marble block that weighs on me
And bathes me in an icy sweat.

I imposed beauty on that rough stone.
The bitter water of my tears
Softened its tragic rigidity.

And when I saw my anguish raised
Into a perfect statue in the blessed sun,
I touched it! It was frozen and inert!

I inwardly weep! I sob and shout!
In this book I'm pallor and grief.
The sorrow that lives in my troubled self
Is so much dead ash in my song.

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Elegia Final

Trabalhei quanto pude a minha dor
– Negro bloco marmóreo que me pesa
E me inunda de gélido suor.

Impus ao bruto mármore a beleza.
Minhas lágrimas de água amargurada
Suavizaram-lhe a trágica dureza.

E, ao ver a minha angústia alevantada
Numa estátua perfeita, ao sol bendito,
Toquei-lhe! Estava inerte e congelada!

Choro dentro de mim! Solução e grito!
Sou neste livro palidez, quebranto.
A dor tão viva no meu ser aflito
É como cinza morta neste canto.

© 1912, Teixeira de Pascoaes
From: *Elegias*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

IDYLL

As the night above me
Keeps on growing,
Closer and more real
Is your apparition. . .
Your shadowy eyes
On an ivory face,
Your voice like a prayerful murmur. . .

O Virgin of Sadness,
I hear your steps. . . I see,
Imprinted on my soul,
The outline of your feet. . .
You come from afar. . . Here
You come, smiling, to kiss me
With lips that have turned to dust.

That ghostly touch
Of your amorous Shadow
Plunges me into silence
And an ashen pallor. . .
And my life sinks,
Ecstatic and overwhelmed,
Into a gloomy abyss of love.

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INDEFINITE SONG XXII

Fraternal things, cosmic memory
Of the divine hope
Which expands in an infinite thrust
And cools into forms of granite,
Earth and fire – beautiful brute forms!
And it kindles in the imperfect creature
(Humanized, embodied night)
Souls, which are intimate stars.

Of all its vast creation

Idílio

Conforme vai crescendo
A noite sobre mim,
Mais próxima e real
É a tua aparição. . .
Os teus olhos de sombra
Em rosto de marfim,
Tua voz, num murmúrio de oração.

Ó virgem da Tristeza,
Ouço-te os passos. . . Vejo
Impresso, na minh'alma,
O talhe dos teus pés. . .
Vens, de longe. . . Lá vens,
Sorrindo, dar-me um beijo,
Com uns lábios que a terra já desfez.

Teu contacto espectral
De Sombra enamorada
Afoga-me em silêncio
E lívido palor. . .
E a minha vida fica,
Extática e abismada,
Numa fundura lúgubre de amor.

© 1899, Teixeira de Pascoaes
From: *Terra Proibida*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

Canto Indeciso XXII

Cousas fraternas, cósmica lembrança
Divina esperança,
Que se expande num ímpeto infinito
E se condensa em formas de granito,
De terra e fogo, – as brutas formas belas!
E acende na imperfeita criatura
(Humanizada noite, com figura)
As almas, que são íntimas estrelas.

A mais profunda e viva inspiração

The deepest and most vital inspiration
Leaves, in words of ink, the splendor of a verse.
So too hope, endlessly burning,
Following its ethereal course,
Leaves in space the forms of the Universe,
Smoky vestiges,
Mortal recollections of its divine being.

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Deixa, da sua enorme criação,
Em palavras de tinta, o resplendor dum verso.
Assim a esperança, eternamente a arder,
Seguindo etéreo rumo,
Vai deixando, no espaço, as formas do
Universo,
Vagos sinais de fumo,
Recordações mortais do seu divino ser.

© 1921, Teixeira de Pascoaes
From: *Cantos Indecisos*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

POET

When the first tear welled up
In my eyes, divine clarity
Lit up my village homeland
With the sad light of longing.

How I glow, poor humble things,
As sorrow in your darkness. . .
I am, in the future, time past.
In me, old times are new ages.

I'm a mountain cliff, an astral
Mist, a figment in the morning,
The earthen image of a soul.

I'm man fleeing from himself,
A raving phantom, a living mystery,
God's delirium, dreams, nothingness.

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Poeta

Quando a primeira lágrima aflorou
Nos meus olhos, divina claridade
A minha pátria aldeia alumiu
Duma luz triste, que era já saudade.

Humildes, pobres cousas, como eu sou
Dor acesa na vossa escuridade. . .
Sou, em futuro, o tempo que passou;
Em mim, o antigo tempo é nova idade.

Sou fraga da montanha, névoa astral,
Quimérica figura matinal,
Imagem de alma em terra modelada.

Sou o homem de si mesmo fugitivo;
Fantasma a delirar, mistério vivo,
A loucura de Deus, o sonho e o nada.

© 1898, Teixeira de Pascoaes
From: *Sempre*
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THE MASK

That living and unfettered light
Arriving from a distant, mysterious star
And reflecting off our face,
Making it shine with a strange glow. . .
That hidden lamp which turns our mask
Transparent and radiant
With joy, sorrow or despair
And still other feelings arisen
From an angel's or a demon's heart. . .
That true and ideal portrait composed
Of soul and body and whose frame
We are, aimlessly wandering. . .
That's it, yes, our apparition, us,
Made of stars, shadows, raging winds
And countless centuries, finally emerging
Out here, on earth, in the light of the sun.

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WIND OF THE SPIRIT

I felt a mysterious wind pass by
In a profound and cosmic whirl.
It took me in its arms; I avidly
Went; and I saw the Spirit of the World.

Earth's solitary things, glowing
Like an unconscious gaze of night,
Like a tear's dead light, felt none
Of that tragic gust, which ruffled

Only my soul! O lofty wind!
Wind of Prophecy and Exaltation!
Wind that blows in waves of mystery,
Stirring me up, making me ecstatic!

Strange wind, raging without touching
The tenderest flower! But it inflames
My entire being, causing it to give off
God's light, love's light, infinite light!

A Máscara

Esta luz animada e despreendida
Duma longínqua estrela misteriosa
Que, vindo reflectir-se em nosso rosto,
Acende nele estranha claridade;
Esta lâmpada oculta em nossa máscara
Tornada transparente e radiante
De alegria, de dor ou desespero
E de outros sentimentos emanados
Do coração dum anjo ou dum demónio;
Este retrato ideal e verdadeiro,
Composto de alma e corpo e de que somos
A trágica moldura, errando à sorte,
É ela, é ela, a nossa aparição,
Feita de estrelas, sombras, ventanias
E séculos sem fim surgindo, enfim,
Cá fora, sobre a terra, à luz do sol.

© 1925, Teixeira de Pascoaes

From: *Cânticos*

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Vento do Espírito

Senti passar um vento misterioso,
Num torvelinho cósmico e profundo.
E me levou nos braços; e ansioso
Eu fui; e vi o Espírito do Mundo.

Todas as cousas ermas, que irradiam
Como um nocturno olhar inconsciente,
Luz de lágrima extinta, não sentiam
A trágica rajada, que somente

Meu coração crispava! Ó vento aéreo!
Vento de Exaltação e Profecia!
Vento que sopra, em ondas de mistério,
E tanto me perturba e me extasia!

Estranho vento, em fúria, sem tocar
Nas mais tenrinha flor! E assim agita
Todo o meu ser, em chamas, a exalar
Luz de Deus, luz de amor, luz infinita!

O wind that nothing resists except
An invisible shadow. . . A forest
Or rough stone is, for you, a wispy
Essence, and I am a rugged cliff.

At night, O crazy wind, you pound
My troubled soul, and a loud whoosh wraps it
And swoops it away; and so it passes
From life to life, and from death to death.

Wind that took me to I don't know where. . .
But I know I went, and I saw close up,
Before my eyes, the burning mist that hides
God's ghost, hovering over the desert!

And I also saw the hazy light
That loomed out of the darkness, enlightening
My heart, which soars beyond life,
Shedding its burden of tears.

That great wind overturned
My calm existence; and ancient sorrow
Drenched my mean and feeble body,
Like rain the tatters of a beggar woman.

In a great wind I went; I went and saw:
I saw God's Shadow. And in that shadow
I lay down, ravished, and felt within me
The earth in bloom and the sky aglitter.

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Vento que só encontras resistência
Numa invisível sombra. . . Um arvoredo,
Ou bruta pedra, é como vaga essência;
E, para ti, eu sou como um penedo.

E na minha alma aflita, ó doido vento,
Bates, de noite; e um burburinho forte
A envolve, arrasta e leva, num momento;
E vai de vida em vida e morte em morte.

Vento que me levou, nem sei por onde;
Mas sei que fui; e, ao pé de mim, bem perto,
Vi, face a face, a névoa a arder que esconde
O fantasma de Deus, sobre o deserto!

E vi também a luz indefinida
Que, nas trevas, se fez, esclarecendo
Meu coração, que voa, além da vida,
O seu peso de lágrimas perdendo.

E aquele grande vento transtornou
Minha existência calma; e dor antiga
Meu rude e frágil corpo trespassou,
Como a chuva uns andrajos de mendiga.

E fui num grande vento; e fui; e vi:
Vi a Sombra de Deus. E, alvoroçado,
Deitei-me àquela sombra, e, em mim, senti
A terra em flor e o céu todo estrelado.

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