



# FLORBELA ESPANCA

(Portugal, 1894-1930)

**Florbela Espanca has always had her fans. But for many years her poetry – deemed too emotive, with too many exclamation marks, too feminine! – was not given due recognition by the literature departments of Portuguese universities. Nowadays, however, her work is the object of critical study in Portugal and in other countries. The contemporary of Fernando Pessoa, she is somewhat his opposite. Instead of dividing herself into multiple poetic personalities that cast doubt on the validity of a coherent, unified self, she wrote an exalted poetry that relentlessly proclaimed “I am!”**

Born in the provincial town of Vila Viçosa, not far from Portugal’s eastern border with Spain, Espanca was an unusually emancipated woman for her time and place. She studied at the University of Lisbon’s School of Law, where only a handful of the students were female, and though divorce was socially frowned upon, she divorced twice and married three times – all in the space of a rather brief life. The poet, who suffered from depression and mental disequilibrium, ended it by ingesting an overdose of barbiturates on her 36th birthday.

Espanca began writing poetry – mostly sonnets – at a young age and was a frequent contributor of poems and prose pieces to periodicals. Although her sonnets were not formally innovative or technically remarkable, they impressed contemporary readers – and still impress us today – because of the unusual intensity of feeling they express. Thematically they were somewhat daring, insofar as the poet was insistently self-affirmative. Though not explicitly feminist, Espanca demanded to be taken as seriously as any man. And in her poem ‘TO LOVE!’ she freely admitted that the Catholic ideal of a single lifelong love was inimical to her passionate nature.

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## POEMS

EXALTATION  
FROM MY WINDOW  
IT'S ME!  
MAKE WAY FOR DEATH  
MY SORROW  
RENUNCIATION  
TO LOVE!

### EXALTATION

To live!... To drink the wind and sun!...  
To lift up to the sky our throbbing  
Hearts! God made our arms for grasping!  
And gave us mouths of blood for kissing!

The always red-glowing flame on high!...  
The always straying wings that soar  
Still higher, ready to uproot the stars!...  
Glory!... Fame!... The pride of creating!...

Life's honey and life's bitterness  
Dwell in the lake of my eyes like violets  
And in my ecstatic, pagan kisses!...

The heart of carnations fills my mouth!  
O bohemians, tramps and poets,  
How truly, Brothers, I'm your Sister!

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### Exaltação

Viver!... Beber o vento e o sol!... Erguer  
Ao céu os corações a palpitar!  
Deus fez os nossos braços pra prender,  
E a boca fez-se sangue pra beijar!

A chama, sempre rubra, ao alto, a arder!...  
Asas sempre perdidas a pairar,  
Mais alto para as estrelas desprender!...  
A glória!... A fama!... O orgulho de criar!...

Da vida tenho o mel e tenho os travos  
No lago dos meus olhos de violetas,  
Nos meus beijos extáticos, pagãos!...

Trago na boca o coração dos cravos!  
Boêmios, vagabundos, e poetas:  
— Como eu sou vossa Irmã, ó meus Irmãos!...

© 1923, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Livro de Soror Saudade*  
Publisher: Tipografia A Americana, Lisbon

## FROM MY WINDOW

High sea! Vanquished waves  
Breaking with whispered, troubled sighs...  
Immaculate, weightless flight of gulls,  
Like snows appearing on the hilltops!

Sun! A bird falling, still flapping  
Its wounded wings while gasping for breath...  
To you, sweet tortured sunset, I lift  
My hands in inward prayer, weeping!

O my charming verse of Samain,  
Not yet daylight, already you're moonlight,  
Like a white lilac whose flowers wither!

Love! I carry your heart in my breast...  
It pounds within me like this sea  
In an endless, never withering kiss!...

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From: *28 Portuguese Poets: a Bilingual Anthology*  
Publisher: Dedalus Press, Dublin, 2015

## IT'S ME!

Over the fields, over the knolls,  
Over the hills that cradle the morning,  
I scatter my glowing pagan dreams  
While birds alight on my shoulders...

In vain they buried me amid the rubble  
Of vainly carved cathedrals! Dizzy  
With wonder, the golden sun beholds me,  
And the weeping clouds call me sister!

Far echoes of waves... of universes...  
Echoes of a World... of a distant Beyond,  
From where I brought my verses' magic!

It's me! It's me! The one who, like no one,  
Plucked from life with anxious hands  
The hurtful thorns and none of the roses!

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## Da minha janela

Mar alto! Ondas quebradas e vencidas  
Num soluçar aflito e murmurado...  
Vôo de gaivotas, leve, imaculado,  
Como neves nos píncaros nascidas!

Sol! Ave a tombar, asas já feridas,  
Batendo ainda num arfar pausado...  
Ó meu doce poente torturado  
Rezo-te em mim, chorando, mãos erguidas!

Meu verso de Samain cheio de graça,  
'Inda não és clarão já és luar  
Como branco lilás que se desfaça!

Amor! Teu coração trago-o no peito...  
Pulsa dentro de mim como este mar  
Num beijo eterno, assim, nunca desfeito!...

© 1923, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Livro de Soror Saudade*  
Publisher: Tipografia A Americana, Lisbon

## Sou Eu!

Pelos campos em fora, pelos combros,  
Pelos montes que embalam a manhã,  
Largo os meus rubros sonhos de pagã,  
Enquanto as aves poisam nos meus ombros...

Em vão me sepultaram entre escombros  
De catedrais duma escultura vã!  
Olha-me o loiro sol tonto de assombros,  
as nuvens, a chorar, chamam-me irmã!

Ecos longínquos de ondas... de universos..  
Ecos dum Mundo... dum distante Além,  
Donde eu trouxe a magia dos meus versos!

Sou eu! Sou eu! A que nas mãos ansiosas  
Prendeu da vida, assim como ninguém,  
Os maus espinhos sem tocar nas rosas!

© 1919, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Livro das Mágoas*  
Publisher: Tipografia Maurício, Lisbon

## MAKE WAY FOR DEATH

Make way for Death, the Illuminated,  
Who comes to take me from this world.  
Fling wide open all the doors  
Like flapping wings of birds in flight.

What am I here? The disinherited,  
Who with her hands seized the moonlight,  
The dream, the earth, the sea, all life,  
Then opened her hands, and found nothing!

O Mother, dear Mother, why were you born?  
Why, tell me, amidst such agonies  
And horrid pains did you carry me

Inside you?... Just so that I could be  
The bitter fruit that in evil hour  
Was given birth by a lily's womb!...

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## MY SORROW

My Sorrow is an ideal convent  
Full of cloisters, shadows, vaults,  
Whose darkly twisting stone reveals  
Meticulously sculpted lines.

With agony the bells toll,  
Telling their sorely felt affliction...  
All of them make funereal sounds  
On striking the hours day in, day out.

My Sorrow's a convent where there are lilies  
Whose violet hue is steeped in suffering,  
Their beauty such as no eyes have seen.

In that sad convent where I dwell,  
Night and day I pray and weep!  
And no one sees or hears me... no one...

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## Deixai Entrar a Morte

Deixai entrar a Morte, a Iluminada,  
A que vem para mim, pra me levar.  
Abri todas as portas par em par  
Como asas a bater em revoada.

Que sou eu neste mundo? A deserdada,  
A que prendeu nas mãos todo o luar,  
A vida inteira, o sonho, a terra, o mar,  
E que, ao abri-las, não encontrou nada!

Ó Mãe! Ó minha Mãe, pra que nasceste?  
Entre agonias e em dores tamanhas  
Pra que foi, dize lá, que me trouxeste

Dentro de ti?... Pra que eu tivesse sido  
Somente o fruto amargo das entranhas  
Dum lírio que em má hora foi nascido!...

© 1934, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Reliquiae*

## A minha Dor

A minha Dor é um convento ideal  
Cheio de claustros, sombras, arcarias,  
Aonde a pedra em convulsões sombrias  
Tem linhas dum requinte escultural.

Os sinos têm dobres d'agonias  
Ao gemer, comovidos, o seu mal...  
E todos têm sons de funeral  
Ao bater horas, no correr dos dias...

A minha Dor é um convento. Há lírios  
Dum roxo macerado de martírios,  
Tão belos como nunca os viu alguém!

Nesse triste convento aonde eu moro,  
Noites e dias rezo e grito e choro!  
E ninguém ouve... ninguém vê... ninguém...

© 1919, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Livro das Mágoas*  
Publisher: Tipografia Maurício, Lisbon

## RENUNCIATION

Long ago I placed my youth  
In the quiet convent of Sadness. Forever  
Cloistered, it spends its days and nights  
With eyes closed, frail hands in a cross...

The Moon outside, Satan, tempts me!  
It blossoms into shimmers of Beauty...  
Nature is like an ardent kiss...  
My cell is like a river of light...

Shut tight your eyes! See nothing at all!  
Turn yet paler! And, resigned,  
Throw your arms around a greater cross!

Make the shroud that wraps you colder!  
Fill your mouth with earth and ashes,  
O my youth in your full flower!

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## TO LOVE!

I want to love, to be lost in love!  
To love just to love: Here... there...  
This one, that one, another one,  
Everyone! To love and not love anyone!

Remember? Forget? It's all the same!...  
Hold on or let go? Wrong? Or right?  
Those who say they can love someone  
Their whole life long are telling a lie!

There is in every life a Spring.  
When it flowers, it must be sung.  
The voice God gave us is for singing!

If I must come to ashes, dust,  
Nothing, then let my night be a dawn  
And let me be lost... to find myself...

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## Renúncia

A minha mocidade outrora eu pus  
No tranqüilo convento da Tristeza;  
Lá passa dias, noites, sempre presa,  
Olhos fechados, magras mãos em cruz...

Lá fora, a Lua, Satanás, seduz!  
Desdobra-se em requintes de Beleza...  
É como um beijo ardente a Natureza...  
A minha cela é como um rio de luz...

Fecha os teus olhos bem! Não vejas nada!  
Empalidece mais! E, resignada,  
Prende os teus braços a uma cruz maior!

Gela ainda a mortalha que te encerra!  
Enche a boca de cinzas e de terra,  
Ó minha mocidade toda em flor!

© 1923, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Livro de Soror Saudade*  
Publisher: Tipografia A Americana, Lisbon

## AMAR!

Eu quero amar, amar perdidamente!  
Amar só por amar: Aqui... além...  
Mais Este e Aquele, o Outro e toda a gente  
Amar! Amar! E não amar ninguém!

Recordar? Esquecer? Indiferente!...  
Prender ou desprender? É mal? É bem?  
Quem disser que se pode amar alguém  
Durante a vida inteira é porque mente!

Há uma Primavera em cada vida:  
É preciso cantá-la assim florida,  
Pois se Deus nos deu voz, foi pra cantar!

E se um dia hei-de ser pó, cinza e nada  
Que seja a minha noite uma alvorada,  
Que me saiba perder... pra me encontrar...

© 1931, Florbela Espanca  
From: *Charneca em flor*  
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