

Episode 1: **My backyard takes up the whole theater, my childhood**

Location: **Largo de S. Carlos/Chiado**

*Street sounds; seagulls; footsteps; music*

[00:00:19.17]

**Sofia:** We are in Largo de São Carlos, previously Largo do Directório. On one side of the square is the National Opera House. But look at the building opposite. At number 4, on the fourth floor on the left, a boy was born. It was the afternoon of Saint Anthony's Day, June 13, 1888.

*Horse-drawn carriage*

**Jerónimo Pizarro:** He used astrology to make calculations to assess the time he was conceived, to understand at what time he as mere sperm reached the maternal womb, the date of his conception.

*Church bells; seagulls*

**Jerónimo Pizarro:** He wasn't sure at exactly what minute he was born, but the truth is that he made horoscopes to try to calculate when he was going to die and those horoscopes seem to be correct.

**Sofia:** This boy who would become interested in the enigmas of the world, was born into a bourgeois and catholic family. He was baptised in Basílica dos Mártires, right next door.

**Jerónimo Pizarro:** That's why he listens to the chiming of the bells, the bells, the bells of my village.

**Fernando Pessoa:** *The church bell of my village is the bell from the Church of the Martyrs, in Chiado. The village of my birth was the São Carlos Square.*

*Footsteps; music*

**Luís Miguel Rosa Dias:** He had a very close relationship with his mother, my grandmother.

**Manuela Nogueira:** My grandmother was very cultured. My mother's mother, his mother, was a highly educated woman for the times. Because she could speak both English and French fluently, she played the piano beautifully and used to write verses.

**Richard Zenith:** Pessoa's father worked at the Ministry of Justice, but he also wrote music reviews for the *Diário de Notícias*. He was passionate about music, and they lived, perhaps not by chance, in a building overlooking the Teatro de São Carlos, where opera was performed, which was Fernando Pessoa's father favourite form of music.

*Door opening and closing; outside sounds; seagulls; horse-drawn carriage; cars*

[00:02:56.26]

**Luís Miguel Rosa Dias:** The people who lived in that flat opposite the Opera House, along with an elderly maid, were his mother and father, and his grandmother Dionísia who had serious attacks of madness.

*Seagulls*

**Richard Zenith:** She was the mother of Fernando Pessoa's father. And it was rather complicated to deal with her, because she suffered from dementia. According to the first biographer, the disease was called rotating dementia, meaning she was sometimes more or less well, but then there would be phases in which she was not well at all.

**Luís Miguel Rosa Dias:** So every once in a while she was sent to the asylum at Rilhafoles, directly to the emergency room where people went when they had madness attacks.

*Seagulls*

**Richard Zenith:** Because she would break everything in the house - dishes, glasses, other objects And then there was another sad thing, his father had tuberculosis.

[00:04:07.05]

**Manuela Nogueira:** His father fell ill, he was very ill, there in Largo de São Carlos, then he went to a farm, now it is Caneças, Telheiras, around that area, and he went there to heal himself, as it was thought that fresh air would do it. There was nothing to cure tuberculosis then.

*Horse-drawn carriage*

**Manuela Nogueira:** I wonder what he felt having to see his father so ill and far away. He used to go to visit his father with his mother in a horse-drawn carriage. It was such a long distance, back then. And from time to time he stayed there, because at that time the real danger of tuberculosis wasn't known.

*Music; bells; owls; crickets*

**Sofia:** From the marriage of Maria Madalena and Joaquim another boy was born, Jorge. Fernando was four years old at the time.

**Richard Zenith:** Then Fernando's father died, 6 months later, and this small family, Fernando, his mother, and Fernando's little brother, Jorge, moved to a smaller house. But then Jorge also died, less than one year old.

*Music; street sound*

**Richard Zenith:** It was around that time that Fernando Pessoa's mother met a man who would become her second husband, João Miguel Rosa. They were very fond of each other and it became a very strong relationship.

**Sofia:** João Miguel Rosa was appointed consul in South Africa, and so the marriage had to be by proxy, meaning that his brother attended in his place. It was a long journey to South Africa and his mother thought of travelling alone and leaving little Fernando with the family. But the boy did not want to remain behind, he wanted to go with her. He wrote a poem about it at the time.

[00:06:14.15]

**Fernando Pessoa:**

*Here I am in Portugal*

*Land where I was born*

*Although I really like it*

*I love you so much more \**

**Manuela Parreira da Silva:** This story was told, I don't know if it's true, but it is said that after hearing the poem, his mother was so moved that she wasn't able to leave him behind. But perhaps this is just a story, because she probably realised that she wasn't able to leave him, she felt sorry about leaving him, and he eventually went along with them.

**Richard Zenith:** Soon after the wedding, on Maria Madalena's birthday, 30th December 1895, Pessoa's mother, Fernando and a great-uncle, Uncle Cunha, went to South Africa.

*Ship horn*

**Sofia:** Fernando Pessoa would live in South Africa until he was 17. We shall hear all about that in the next episode. We are going to go now to Praça Luís de Camões.

**Credits:**

Voices: Jerónimo Pizarro, Jorge Loureiro, Luís Miguel Nogueira Rosa Dias, Manuela Nogueira, Richard Zenith, Leonor Forjaz, Manuela Parreira da Silva and Sofia Saldanha.

Music:

“All Will See” by Hyson

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“Nocturne Op 9 No 2” by Podington Bear

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Bibliography:

Fernando Pessoa & CO.: Selected Poems: Edited and translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith. New York: Grove Press, 1998

The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa, Edited and translated by Richard Zenith. New York: Grove Press, 2001, p. 245.

\* Free translation by Eugenia Brito