

Episode 2: **In capacious Africa where the moon outside shines**

Location: **Praça de Camões / Chiado**

Street sounds

Sofia: We are now in Praça Luís de Camões. Camões was a Portuguese Renaissance poet. He was the author of an epic poem about Portuguese maritime expansion called *Os Lusíadas*.

Ocean

Sofia: The plot of the poem is centered around Vasco da Gama's trip to India, which opened up a sea route to the East. Like Pessoa, Camões sets out on a voyage of discovery. They follow very similar paths, Camões in the middle of the 16th century and Pessoa in the late 19th century. The meeting between the two will last the time of Portugal's history and the time of poetry.

Children playing

Richard Zenith: In Durban Pessoa studied a lot, he had mostly a book-centered or bookish life. Pessoa studied in St. Joseph's School, a school of French nuns, although there were some Irish as well. And then he went on to Durban High School, which was a remarkable school. Most of the teachers in this school came from England and the school was very strict. It turns out that Durban as a British colony had the mentality of wanting to be very English, so in a way it was more English than England itself.

Music; children playing

[00:02:01.02]

Richard Zenith: The Africa Pessoa lived in was not Africa, because half of the population of the city of Durban were white European, 25% were Indians, who worked hard in commerce, and 25% were Zulu. There was segregation in fact, so the relations with the Africans were labor relationships, which as in the Pessoa household were essentially with the servants.

Crowd protesting

Richard Zenith: One particular Indian who was in South Africa when Pessoa arrived was Gandhi, and it was actually in South Africa that the protest movement against the British for the rights of the Indians began.

Mahatma Gandhi voice recording: *I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying...*

Richard Zenith: Later Pessoa would write a few very complimentary pages on Gandhi, saying that he was the only truly great man in the world.

Music

Mahatma Gandhi voice recording: *...that creates, dissolves and recreates.*

Street sounds

Sofia: Pessoa finished high school earlier than the other boys. So he spent a whole year in Portugal, from 1901 to 1902. On his return to Durban he studied at night at the

Commercial School. At the same time, he prepared for the university admission exam and dreamed of going to England.

Teresa Rita Lopes: This young man who had been the best in his class, had earned the right to go on to study in England, but they refused him. The excuse they gave was the year he spent without studying. So this boy who was preparing to be a poet, an English-speaking English writer, suddenly saw all his plans changed.

Children playing

[00:04:06.06]

Fernando Cabral Martins: He had been writing from a very young age and by 1903 he had already written a considerable amount. And all of these early writings were written in English. The first text he published, in Durban, was a poem written in English called "The Miner's Song," it was published in a Natal newspaper The Natal Mercury. The poem is signed by a fictional poet called Karl P. Effield and it is presented by a certain W.W. Austin, a traveler who knew that poet. Now, this is exactly the mechanism of heteronymy, a poem that corresponds to a figure of a completely autonomous poet with an associated biography. That is to say that the heteronyms strategy was already set and we are talking about 1903.

Music

Sofia: But Pessoa spoke the language of books, the English of a colony. It was not his natural language.

Richard Zenith: He was a shy boy. He had his friends at school, but he did not have an big social life outside the house. Now, it was lively at home, wasn't it? Because Pessoa's mother and her second husband had several children.

Music

Richard Zenith: It is worth noting that Pessoa, who lived in Africa for 9 years, mentions Africa very little in his work.

Thunder

[00:06:08.19]

Richard Zenith: A few months before his death, Pessoa heard on the radio some music, *Un Soir à Lima*, which his mother used to play on the piano in Durban.

Music

Richard Zenith: And then all his memories from Africa came back and he wrote a long poem remembering his African household. His mother already with grey hair playing the piano, and his stepfather, his sister and his little brothers.

Pedro Teixeira da Mota: Fernando Pessoa says "How I wish I had it in a drawer and could make it all bloom again."

Fernando Pessoa:

There by the window

Of never again ceasing to feel,

In that living room, our warm

Living room

In capacious Africa where the moon

Outside shines vast and indifferent,

Neither good nor bad,

And where, mother,

In my heart, mother,

You visibly play,

You eternally play

Un Soir à Lima.

Music

Richard Zenith: Therefore his childhood memories were very present to him, even if he did not speak about it very much.

Street sounds

[00:07:58.21]

Sofia: In 1905 Pessoa traveled by boat to Portugal along the western side of Africa. He arrived in Lisbon in September and lived with his aunt Anica, in Rua de São Bento. Now make your way to Café A Brasileira at Largo do Chiado.

Credits:

Voices:

Richard Zenith, Mahatma Gandhi, Teresa Rita Lopes, Fernando Cabral Martins, Pedro Teixeira da Mota, Jorge Loureiro and Sofia Saldanha.

Original music inspired by *Un soir à Lima*, Op.99 de Félix Godefrid: Carolina Machado e Lia Magalhães.

Bibliography:

A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems, Edited and Translated by Richard Zenith. London: Penguin Books, 2006; *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa*, Edited and translated by Richard Zenith. New York: Grove Press, 2001.