

Episode 4. **Ibis, the Egyptian bird**

Location: **Route between Rua do Carmo and Rossio / Chiado - Baixa**

Street sounds

Sofia: We are in the very heart of Pessoa's Lisbon. We will walk down Chiado towards Rossio. In 1909 Fernando Pessoa received an inheritance. He left his aunts' house and lived alone for the first time. He rented an apartment in Rua da Glória.

[00:00:36.12]

Teresa Rita Lopes: He had to wait until the age of 21, at that time majority was only at 21, to receive an inheritance from his father's mother.

Seagulls

Teresa Rita Lopes: And he decided to set up a publishing house.

Sofia: He saw an advert in the newspaper *O Século* for a publishing house that was for sale in Portalegre.

Steam train whistle

Sofia: He went there and bought the machines. He called the publishing house *Ibis Company: Typography and Publisher - Steam Factory*.

Richard Zenith: Pessoa's attraction to Ibis was not at all innocent.

Ibis bird call

Richard Zenith: It was not just because of the beauty of the bird.

Flipping pages, Ibis bird call

Fernando Pessoa:

Ibis, the Egyptian bird,

Always standing on one foot

(which is fairly odd)

It's quite a quiet bird

*Because with only one foot it won't walk the earth. **

Richard Zenith: Ibis is a bird that likes to be in the water on one foot. And that symbol, that was a symbol, because Ibis was a sacred bird, an Egyptian God, Thoth. And Thoth was the scribe of the Gods, so he was the inventor of writing and it had also to do with magic.

Old printing machine, Ibis bird call

António Mega Ferreira: And then there's a mystery, Ibis Typography seems never to have worked. But it is not quite like that.

Teresa Rita Lopes: It did work indeed. Ibis printed a newspaper of the Algarve, *O Povo Algarvio*, a Loulé newspaper.

José Barreto: But his idea was to print his own texts, not to depend on anyone, he could publish his texts in Portugal and in England.

Teresa Rita Lopes: But it didn't work out.

[00:02:36.12]

Fernando Cabral Martins: After a few months it went bankrupt. He shuts up shop, sells the presses and that's it, he moves on to something else.

António Mega Ferreira: And then there is a letter from his mother in which she says: "Fernando, you have to be careful about putting yourself into these situations, look what happened with that Ibis thing". But clearly it didn't work out, because he had no ability for business, I mean he had talent we know, but it was for writing.

Old printing machine stopping, street sounds, door opening and closing

Sofia: Ibis was the first in a series of unsuccessful businesses. But Pessoa had other skills that few people had in Portugal a hundred years ago.

Footsteps on stairs

[00:03:52.03]

António Mega Ferreira: 100 years ago knowing languages in Portugal was a very important tool in the job market. And he knew languages very well. He knew English of course and French too. From 1908, so he was 20, 21 years old, he started working in several offices writing letters in foreign language. What for? For correspondence with the international market, with international companies, etc., and therefore he started working very early. In fact there is an extraordinary document in his 1908 diary, which is a plan for life.

Old typewriter

António Mega Ferreira: In that plan for life he calculates how many paylips he needs to have and how many offices he needs to work in, to get paid so many dollars a month, which would allow him to devote himself to writing. This means that at the age of 20, Fernando Pessoa knew very well what he wanted to be. He wanted to be a writer.

Street sounds

José Barreto: He was a freelancer, he was always a freelancer. His family in Lisbon got him jobs in English companies, but of course he had to be a permanent employee. He would have to say goodbye to his freedom and be a person ruled by timetables, so he turned down several jobs that might have solved his financial problems forever, but which would have ruled out his dreams as an artist, as a writer, his enormous ambition. It must be said that it was already a great ambition of the young Fernando Pessoa, to have a major work, that would make him the great writer of his generation and of his time.

[00:06:02.13]

Luís Miguel Nogueira Rosa Dias: So he earned very little, he was always short of money. If he had ten escudos in his pocket, and a friend said “Hey give me ten escudos”, he would give away the ten escudos and would then be penniless.

José Barreto: He lived in rented rooms, poorly fed. He borrowed money constantly. He had chestnuts in his pocket, he was always finding ways to stave off hunger. Now and then, he attended the famous literary gatherings in Café Montanha, where, where, while talking to his friends, he would suddenly reach into his pocket and pull out a chestnut.

And his friend Francisco Peixoto Bourbon, who reported this, said that he was sometimes starving.

Cafe

António Mega Ferreira: I think he never lived in complete poverty. For example, we have an invoice for clothing bought in Lourenço & Santos, which was a great tailor of Lisbon, downtown in Restauradores. There were two stores downtown, today there's only one. In the diaries of 1913 or 1915, for example, he writes about how one night he was walking downtown and went to Pitta. Pitta was a clothing shop, which still exists today, that was the most elegant clothing shop in Lisbon, that is to say the most exclusive. He was very particular, for example, in the way he dressed, his clothes and all these things.

Inside Camisaria Pitta

Sofia: I just want to ask you if you still sell tailor-made suit? Yes, shirts and suits

[00:07:56.15]

Manuela Nogueira: He was a person who took very good care of his appearance and well-being. He bathed in cold water. His white shirt was always very clean. Irene was the washerwoman. She entered the door of Rua Coelho da Rocha, rang the doorbell and came in with a basket, and in the basket there was a bag, a bag in raw cloth, which you probably don't even know what it is. And the cloth had an F and a P for Fernando Pessoa embroidered in red. And then she would come in with that bag and say, "Here you are, Mr. Pessoa, your laundry!" He always had Irene to handle his clothes. And he was always flawless, with a tie or more frequently with a bow tie, it was usually a black bow, sometimes dark grey, usually grey. And a hat. They always put him with a hat nowadays. But I remember him without the hat, because at home he was not wearing a hat, was he?

Street sounds

Luís Miguel Nogueira Rosa Dias: He had that trim look. I think it had a certain English influence as well.

António Mega Ferreira: Also, he was a person who spent a fortune on books, a fortune, but then he had to sell them to get some money back.

José Barreto: He rarely left Lisbon, not even the city centre.

Fado music, on the street; street sounds

José Barreto: Fernando Pessoa was a man of habits, and then the habit of drinking. He worked in those companies, in those offices, dozens and dozens of offices, we have the testimony of the letterheads he used. Sometimes at the office he would suddenly get up and say "I'll be right back" and then he would go to Abel, drink a glass or two and go back to work, so that was something that was part of his day-to-day life.

[00:10:11.27]

Pablo Javier Pérez López: And he had a great sense of humour, a great sense of humour. The fact that he goes to Abel, that bar, already known in the flagrante de litro story, caught in the act of drinking, to have some drinks and then, when he gets back to the office, the son of his boss Moutinho de Almeida asks him, "How can you drink so much, how can you keep it together? You seem like a sponge". And Pessoa said: "A sponge, no, not just a sponge, a sponge factory with an attached warehouse." That kind of humour can only exist in people who are tragic, I really think this.

José Barreto: Then at the end of his life he tries to get a permanent job, but he can't. And he becomes very unhappy, very unhappy, because he already longed for some stability, and then in his spare time, he could devote himself to his writing.

Fado music playing on the street; street sounds; seagulls

Sofia: But that was only in 1932, when he applied for a job at the Cascais library. Pessoa was already 44 years old, and most of his work was still unpublished. His preoccupation with organising the work was excessive. If you are already at Rossio you can start the next episode.

Credits:

Voices:

Teresa Rita Lopes, Richard Zenith, Jorge Loureiro, António Mega Ferreira, José Barreto, Fernando Cabral Martins, Luís Miguel Nogueira Rosa Dias, Manuela Nogueira, Pablo Javier Pérez López and Sofia Saldanha.

Bibliography:

O Íbis, ave do Egipto, Pessoa Inédito. Fernando Pessoa. (Orientação, coordenação e prefácio de Teresa Rita Lopes). Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1993.

