

Episode 8. **All love letters are ridiculous**

Location: **Rua da Assunção / Baixa**

Footsteps on wooden stairs

Sofia: You should now be at Rua da Assunção. On the second floor of number 42 were the headquarters of Felix, Valladas & Freitas Ltd. One of the company's partners was Mário Freitas, Fernando Pessoa's cousin and Aunt Anica's son.

Work office; voices

[00:00:37.08]

Richard Zenith: He worked and helped his cousin a bit at the office and Ofélia Queiroz went there to apply for a job.

Knocking on door

Manuela Parreira da Silva: Ofélia Queiroz was a young girl from a bourgeois family who worked as a typist, I suppose.

Manuela Nogueira: Because she was ahead of her time. It was not very common to find a woman working for a company where the employees were only men. She was different. She was funny, she was smart and it was the timing, timing is everything. She went to apply for a job there, he saw her.

Sofia: One day they were at the office and the power went down. That was when it all began.

Piano music

Manuela Parreira da Silva: According to what she said, one day, she was about to go home and he asked her to stay a bit longer, to let the others go, and then he knelt down beside her and began to recite a part of Shakespeare's Hamlet, the scene in which Hamlet declares his love to Ophelia. They had the same name, which was a coincidence.

Footsteps walking fast down wood stairs; piano music

[00:02:16.21]

Ofélia Queiroz: *I was very disturbed, of course, and, not knowing what to say, I just put my coat on and hurried off. Fernando got up, with the lamp in his hand to see me out. But suddenly he laid it on the wall partition; unexpectedly, he grabbed me by the waist, hugged me and, without saying a word, kissed me and kissed me, passionately, like crazy. (...) I went home embarrassed and confused and days went by, and as Fernando seemed to ignore what had happened between us, I decided to write him a letter, asking him for an explanation.*

Richard Zenith: And a great correspondence began. And it's interesting for several reasons. One of these being that it is a complete correspondence between two sweethearts of that time. Then she left the office a few months later, found another job, and Pessoa used to take the tram with her.

Inside tram

Manuela Parreira da Silva: They used to take the longer route so they could talk more. I suppose they went for walks together, because she refers to the fact that he occasionally

pulled her into the entrance of a building to kiss her. The letters show there was some physical contact, some intimacy. When he says "I wish I could lay my head on your little pigeons", it is obviously understood that the pigeons were her breasts.

Sofia: In 1920 Ofélia was 19 and Pessoa was 31. The relationship had two phases.

Inside tram

[00:04:09.26]

Manuela Parreira da Silva: In the first phase, perhaps she thought that in a short time the relationship would grow into an engagement and then a marriage. Because that was the most expected thing to do at the time.

Sofia: That first phase lasted until November 1920. Then they broke up. Farewell letters were written.

Piano music; inside tram

Ofélia Queiroz: *Lisbon, November, 27, 1920, Fernando, It's been four days since you last made an appearance or even wrote to me. You behave the way you do, because you don't have a reason to break up. Well given the circumstances, I don't think I want go on with this. (...) I am not your ideal, that much I understand, because if you really liked me you wouldn't behave the way you do, because you wouldn't have the courage.*

Tram bell; piano music

Ofélia Queiroz: *The temperaments counteract. To love is essential. Well if it's your will, I wish you happiness. Ofélia Queiróz. **

Fernando Pessoa: *Dear Ofélia: Thank you for your letter. It made me feel both sad and relieved. (...) These things cause suffering, but the suffering passes. (...) My destiny belongs to another law, whose existence you're not even aware of and it is ever more the slave of Masters who do not relent and do not forgive. You don't need to understand this. It's enough that you hold me in your memory with affection, as I will steadfastly hold you in mine. Fernando.*

Sofia: At that time when a relationship ended, couples would return letters and gifts to each other.

Inside tram

[00:06:05.06]

Manuela Parreira da Silva: Yet Fernando Pessoa in one of the letters, when the relationship ended in 1920, says: “Let’s not behave like ordinary people, let’s keep each other’s things”.

Pedro Teixeira da Mota: Then in 1929, they got together again. Fernando Pessoa gave Carlos Queiroz, a respected poet who was Ofélia's nephew, a photograph in which Fernando Pessoa is in Abel calmly drinking and Carlos Queiroz shows it to our friend Ofélia. Ofélia is again infatuated by him or simply remembers him and asks him to send her a copy too. He sends her a copy and that’s when Fernando Pessoa writes the wonderful phrase "caught in the act of drinking", *em flagrante de litro*, which restores the courtship between them. But the relationship wouldn’t last. They then continue to talk on the phone etc, but well, then the answer Fernando Pessoa gives is: “I have literary work to do.”

Manuela Nogueira: He had all that work on his mind. And he thought he didn't have time to organise his work. And if he had to pay rent, school for the children and on top of that give his wife some attention, he wouldn't find the time to do his literary work. He truly thought so.

Manuela Parreira da Silva: But anyway I think that until the end, maybe she always had some hope, especially when the relationship restarted in 1929 and so she also began to make concessions, saying, "I promise I wouldn't bother you, I'd let you do your work".

[00:08:11.04]

Piano music

Sofia: But this is a three-way relationship. Álvaro de Campos is part of it.

Manuela Parreira da Silva: So Álvaro de Campos writes to Ofélia, and Ofélia, replies to Álvaro de Campos, she plays along. Although she wasn't particularly keen on Álvaro de Campos.

Steffen Dix: And Pessoa was fascinated, because Ofélia joined the game, she played the game of the heteronyms with him. This also explains his emotional attachment to Ofélia.

Piano music; inside tram

Manuela Parreira da Silva: Because Ofélia understood perfectly everything he said to her, and her replies show that she understood deeply what he thought, what he wanted to do, etc.

Pablo Javier Pérez López: I think Ofélia recognises in Pessoa almost a twin spirit. There is a complicity between them that has to do with the fact that they are very sensitive people. It was not an easy time to live through. Portuguese society was very conservative. So with Ofélia, Pessoa finds a way of avoiding loneliness.

Inside tram

[00:10:04.04]

Manuela Parreira da Silva: Fernando Pessoa died in 1935. Ofelia, if I'm not mistaken, got married in 1938. When she got married she was about to destroy Fernando Pessoa's letters, which was also a common thing at the time. But Ofélia's husband didn't allow it. He said she shouldn't do it, because the letters of a poet like Fernando Pessoa were not to be destroyed.

Sofia: Fernando Pessoa's letters to Ofélia, were published in 1978, but it was only in 1996, five years after Ofélia's death, that the complete correspondence was published. It was with a letter, one sent from Lisbon to England that a new and unlikely relationship began. We shall speak about that in the next episode. Rua Augusta is our next stop.

Tram stopping

Credits:

Voices: Richard Zenith, Manuela Parreira da Silva, Manuela Nogueira, Marta Campos, Jorge Louraço, Pedro Teixeira da Mota, Steffen Dix, Pablo Javier Pérez López and Sofia Saldanha.

Music:

“Nocturne Op 9 No 3” by Podington Bear

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Bibliography:

Fernando Pessoa & CO.: “All love letters are ridiculous”, Selected Poems: Edited and translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith. New York: Grove Press, 1998;

“Fernando and I”, Testimony of Ofélia Queiroz recorded and organized by her grandniece Maria da Graça Queiroz.

Portuguese version:

http://www.umfernandopessoa.com/uploads/1/6/1/3/16136746/fernando_e_eu.pdf

* Free translation by Eugénia Brito

Cartas de Amor de Fernando Pessoa e Ofélia Queiroz, edição de Manuela Parreira da Silva, Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim (2012) * Free translation by Eugénia Brito

The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa, Edited and translated by Richard Zenith. New York: Grove Press, 2001, pp. 137-138

