

## POETIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN "SEGUE O TEU DESTINO", BY FERNANDO PESSOA



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### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to outline certain compositional transformations provided in the poem "Segue o teu destino", by Fernando Pessoa, pointing out the proficiency of the poetic changes materialized in the literary modality of the ode. To make these contours, the study adopts interlocutions between elements of the theories of the poetic genre and reflective segments of comparative literature, and seeks to highlight similarities and differences between literary texts and the developments arising from intertextual transformation. The following are the returns of the investigation: the fruitful transformation of a textual modality for the Portuguese language scenario; the sound arrangement in different confluences; the dissemination of poetic vectors in a new literary configuration; and the reordering of the philosophical interfaces of the ode.

**Keywords:** Fernando Pessoa, Comparative Literature, Ode, Poem, Thematology.

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## INTRODUCTION

The poem "Segue o teu destino", by Fernando Pessoa (2008), is associated with variants of the ode modality, a fixed form of composition that was consolidated in Greek and Roman literature. This modality is characterized by its elevated tone, and its purposes are the homage to notable figures, the consecration of certain acts, the celebration of abundance, the reflection on political-pedagogical issues, the penchant for philosophical inflections, etc. As Trajano Vieira (2017) points out, in the initial moments of its production in Greek literature, the ode had as precursors the names of Sappho, Alcaeus, Anacreon, and Pindar, achieved great formal, thematic, and sound variability. In the literary creation of the ode in the Roman scenario, new perspectives emerged, in which the works Horácio provided in the Latin language, according to the assertions of Zelia de Almeida Cardoso (2011).

The poetic text "Follow your destiny" is expressed through the intermediation of Ricardo Reis, a heteronomic creation among others by Fernando Pessoa (1983; 2003; 2006; 2008), which is interconnected with classic lines of composition (such as the link to the universe of the so-called literary treatises, the adequacy of the tone to the textual modality, the adoption of fixed forms in the poetic construction, the use of the sources of arguments provided by *the topos* of tradition, etc.), to the constitutive parameters of the Horatian ode, to the philosophies of containment peculiar to the spheres of Stoicism and Epicureanism, as evaluated by Benedito Nunes (2009). In composition, the poetic self seeks to carry out a dialogue with the reader, encouraging him to adopt certain so-called proactive measures. For this, different elements such as good living, detachment, assertiveness, mythological aspects, among others, are intertwined.

In view of this scenario, this study seeks to appreciate the poem "Follow your destiny" in its compositional disposition, and also to highlight the benefit arising from the intertextual transformations, established between this Pessoan ode and the ode "I, XI", by Horace. In order to carry out this path, the research is carried out on different fronts. To analyze the constitutive elements, rudiments of the theories of the poetic genre are articulated, such as those proposed by Salvatore D'onofrio (2007), Octavio Paz (2012), Edgar Roberto Kirchof (2013) and Clarice Cortez and Milton Rodrigues (2009). On the other hand, in order to make interfaces between literary texts and between branches of knowledge, reflective segments of comparative literature are correlated, such as the

considerations of Sandra Nitrini (2010), Tânia Franco Carvalhal (2003) and María José Rodríguez Sánchez de León (2012).

## POETIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Tell you. The answer  
 It's beyond the gods  
 (Pessoa, 2008, p. 76)

The poem "Follow your destiny", by Fernando Pessoa (2008), is configured mainly through a projected dialogue between the instance of the poetic subject and spheres of the reader's figure, and also through the launch of experiential, existential and mythological considerations. To establish these interlocutions on the textual level, the poem makes use of verbs in the imperative moods ("**Water** your plants, / **Love** your roses") and indicative ("Soft **is** to live alone. / Great and noble **is** always / To live simply") and adopts the alternation of the people of the discourse, in second ("**Leave** the pain in the aras"), in third ([...] The answer / **Is** beyond the gods.) and first ("Only **we are** always / Equal to ourselves") (Pessoa, 2008, p. 76; emphasis added). The use of these resources enables the production of an effect of sense of variability and proximity in the conduction of this projected dialogue with the figure of the reader.

Poetic composition can be divided into two moments or parts, according to the progress of the events or subjects that unfold in the text. The first moment (in the first thirteen verses) is established with the poetic subject indicating recommendations and definitions linked to the plane of daily and daily existence. The second moment (in the last twelve verses) is instituted by the suggestion of acts that are added to divine spheres, as we can glimpse below:

Follow your destiny, 1  
 Water your plants,  
 Love your roses.  
 The rest is the shadow  
 Of other people's trees.

The reality  
 It's always so-so  
 Of what we want.  
 Only we are always  
 Just like ourselves. 10

It is smooth to live alone.  
 Great and noble is always  
 Live simply.  
 Leave the pain in the hoops

As an ex-voto to the gods.

He sees life from afar.  
 Never to interrogate.  
 She can do nothing  
 Tell you. The answer  
 It is beyond the gods. 20

But serenely  
 Imitate or Olympus  
 In your heart.  
 The gods are gods  
 Because they don't think about each other.  
 (Pessoa, 2008, p. 76)

Therefore, the poem brings in its basis of movement the oscillation of the vectors of the inherence of restlessness and the prominence of the search for serenity in the conduct of daily and timeless experience, in a Pessoaan view of the production of Horace's odes. To this end, the text interacts acts and dispositions such as detachment and perseverance in poetic proposals for valuing human existence. This compositional peculiarity is located in the context of the constitution of Ricardo Reis' heteronymy, but it is also located in the sphere of the rereading of contexts and forms of thematic dissemination, as Tânia Franco Carvalhal points out: "To read a text is to launch it in an interdiscursive space and in the relationship of various codes". (Carvalhal, 2003, p. 76). Horace's ode "I, XI" points to similar horizons, attributing to the invalidation of actual anticipations, to small pleasures and to divine designs the possibility of the absence of great disturbances:

Do not question, it is not lawful to know me or you  
 what end will the gods give, Leuconoe. Don't even try  
 Babylonian calculations. Before accepting whatever,  
 either many winters grant us Jupiter, or the latter  
 only, which now shatters the Tyrrhenian Sea against the rocks  
 Volcanic. Wise, decants the wines, and for a brief  
 [time span  
 prune the long hope. While we are talking, there will be  
 [Escaped disrespectfully  
 The hour: harvests the day, minimally credulous in the future<sup>2</sup>.  
 (Horácio *apud* Cícero, 2012, p. 25-26)

Fernando Pessoa and Horácio unfold in these compositions the *topos* of the ephemerality of life, unveiling in the impermanent character of the elements and in the

<sup>2</sup> *Tu ne quaesieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi / finem di dederint, Leuconoe, nec Babylonios / temptaris numeros. ut melius, quidquid erit, pati. / seu pluris hiemes seu tribuit Iuppiter ultimam, / quae nunc oppositis debilitat pumicibus mare / Tyrrhenum: sapias, vina liques, et spatio brevi / spem longam reseces. dum loquimur, fugerit invida / aetas: carpe diem quam minimum credula postero.* (Horácio *apud* Cícero, 2012, p. 26)

fragility of the future the constitution of beacons that direct to the need to search for a state of ataraxia. Such a search is constituted by the interconnection of the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism, as Benedito Nunes discusses about the philosophical universe that makes up the heteronym Ricardo Reis:

Philosophies of restraint, anti-passion, both Epicureanism and Stoicism sought tranquility; the first neutralizing pain, and this they called pleasure, and the second safeguarding the rational intelligence from the demands of desire and the madness of the will, and this they called virtue. The virtue of the one and the negative pleasure of the other harmonized in the same ideal of equanimity: to keep the soul exempt, immobile ataraxic, immune to the tragic experience that these doctrines recognized and tried to overcome. (Nunes, 2009, p. 217)

The intersection between the manifestation of ideas and the concretion of elocution plays a peculiar role in the execution of this poetic project. To enter this area, we highlight the study of the levels or strata of the poem, according to the premises set by Salvatore D'onofrio (2007), Edgar Roberto Kirchof (2013) and Clarice Cortez and Milton Rodrigues (2009). Initially, at the lexical level, it is pointed out that the selection of words chosen in the poem points to the alternation of the origin of words of erudite, everyday, botanical, existential, sacred and mythological extraction. The mixture of these origins simultaneously provides the poem with an identification with daily problems, an aesthetic enrichment and an inquiry into the destinies of the human being.

Subsequently, the fundamental performance provided by the semantic level within the poem is signaled. In this stratum, the production of the effect of meaning occurs through the highlighting and opposition between elements of "Follow your destiny". Such a path is concretized through resources such as metaphor ("**Water** your **plants**, / **Love** your **roses**."), comparison ("**Leave the pain in the aras** / **As an ex-voto to the gods**"), personification ("See life from afar. / **Never question it**.") and antithesis ("**Soft is to live alone**. / Great and **noble is** always / **To live simply**.") (Pessoa, 2008, p. 76; emphasis added). The adoption of metaphor, comparison and personification can provide the development of a climate of realization of a design. The use of the antithesis, on the other hand, makes it possible to maintain the tension between two possibilities: to remove and unite opposing spheres.

On the other hand, the sound level in the literary form of the poem leads to another path of realization, in which the effects of absorption and simultaneity are more present. In this scenario, Octavio Paz assures us that "[...] the poem is a snail where the music of the world resonates [...]" (Paz, 2012, p. 15). This more reverberating character of the sound

level occurs both explicitly and tacitly. Much of the sonority of the poem "Follow your destiny" is due to the adoption of a predetermined artistic constitution. In this sense, the composition is formed by five stanzas of five verses with five poetic syllables in each verse, which provides a certain symmetry of sound extension and evokes the consonance sought by the Horatian poetic project and Ricardo Reis:

Se/ gue o /teu /des/ tino,  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Re/ga/ as/ tuas/ plants,  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 A/ ma / as/ tuas / rosas.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 O/res/to/ is the/ shadow  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 From ar/vo/res/ to/llias.  
 1 2 3 4 5

A / re/ a/ li/ dade  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Sem/pre is /mais /ou /menos  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Of what /we/ who/oars.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Only /we /so/ mos /always  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 I/ guais/ a /we-/ourselves.  
 1 2 3 4 5

Sua/ve é/ vi/ver /só.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Gran / de e /no/bre is /sempre  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Vi/ver/ sim/ples/thin.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 I've already given /pain/in the /aras  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Co/mo ex-/vo/to aos /deuses.  
 1 2 3 4 5

See /de/ lon/ge a/ life.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Nun/ ca a /in/te/rrogues.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 E/la/na/da/can  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Say/zer/-te. A/res/post  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Es/tá a/lém /dos /deuses.  
 1 2 3 4 5

But/if/re/in/mind  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 I/O/O/O  
 1 2 3 4 5

In your/co/ra/tion.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 The/ gave/ifs/ are/ gods  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 Why/ that/ not/ if/ they think.  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 (Pessoa, 2008, p. 76)

The formal preponderance of the goal for a symmetry and constitutive homogeneity brings the sound level closer to the graphic level in the poem, reverberating the syllabic construction of the verses in the visual coordination of the text. On the other hand, the adoption of the minor round in the poem already signals an intertextual transformation carried out by Fernando Pessoa. By incorporating the poetic resource of the "old measure" (with its also medievalizing flavor) in the dialogue with the Roman Horatian aesthetics, an inflection of amalgamating nature of disparate formal horizons is provided and a character of plasticity is expressed in this exchange. In this sense, the transformation operated by Pessoa leads us to another threshold of reading previous texts, as Sandra Nitrini points out: "Reading, therefore, denotes an aggressive participation, an active expropriation of the other." Writing' would be 'reading' converted into production [...]" (Nitrini, 2010, p. 162). In "follow your destiny" the production of musicality effects also takes place through the adoption of sibilant alliterations ("**It's always more or less** / Of what we want. / **Only we are** always so"), **assonant appeals** ("**Water**your plants, / **Love** your roses") and the frequency of the rhymes toantes:

[...]  
 He sees life from afar.  
 Never to interrogate.  
 She can do nothing  
 Tell you. The answer  
 It's beyond the gods  
 [...]  
 (Pessoa, 2008, p. 76; emphasis added)

These sound resources, in turn, can highlight a concomitance between the permanence of a more parsimonious rhyme and the manifestation of more expressive sonorities. Such simultaneity of a more contrastive sound configuration can evoke and be associated with the purposes of perennality (as is the case of the toante rhyme) and persuasion (as in the opening and intensity of the assonance).

At the syntactic level, the order and distribution of the words in the poem have the contribution of the resource of chaining, a way of providing the overflow of one verse into



the next verse: "Great and noble is always / To live simply". The spread of the verses is also associated with the visual level of the poem, and, on the other hand, can promote the indication of an effect of maintaining the course of daily battles. Another syntactic resource adopted in the text is the adoption of the hyperbate (inversion of the normal order of the sentence): "Leave the pain in the aras / As an ex-voto to the gods". The transposition promoted by the hyperbate can provide an emphasis on the conflicts inherent to the subject matter, since the modification of the order also allows the oscillation of the degree of importance in the perspective adopted.

The reference to the divine sphere is more accentuated in the last three stanzas, and it is at this point that the character of detachment conveyed in the poem is sharpened. This interface between literature and mythology provides several elements for reflection, both in the compositional sphere, in the conceptual developments and recurrence of the theme. The treatment given to the appreciation of the themes finds in the comparative aspect of the theme a fruitful territory for reflections, such as those proposed by Álvaro Manuel Machado and Daniel-Henri Pageaux (2001), Cristina Naupert (2003) and María José Rodríguez Sánchez de León (2012). In this horizon of recurrence of themes, Sánchez de León highlights the breadth and depth that the interlocutions developed by the theme can provide:

*In a sense, thematology prevents the artificial isolation of literary works, but this does not imply a renunciation of the study of originality or of their functioning within the work. Consequently, the themes are linked equally to the history of literary ideas as to aesthetics to the analysis of textual structures. In fact, he assures that there is an interdependence between the chosen theme and the form and of both with the ideological and historical context. The very idea that he proposes of myth finds its justification here. Literature not only takes over mythology but also allows it to know how the literary tradition codifies it and the reasons for its reinterpretation<sup>3</sup>. (Sánchez de León, 2012, p. 373)*

In interlocution with the appreciation of the poem "Follow your destiny", the thematic view provides a triple face of conjugation, in which the reflection on the divinities inherent to the Horatian context are unfolded in a different way. As a result of the poetic transformation carried out by Fernando Pessoa, we have the broadening of the horizons of experiential

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<sup>3</sup> In a certain sense, thematology prevents the artificial isolation of literary works, but without this implying a renunciation of the study of originality or of functioning within their work. Consequently, the themes are equally linked to the history of literary ideas than to aesthetics and the analysis of textual structures. In fact, it ensures that there is an interdependence between the chosen theme and the form and of both with the ideological and historical context. The same idea that he proposes of myth finds its justification here. Literature not only appropriates mythology, but also allows it to know how the literary tradition codifies it and the reasons for its reinterpretation. (Sánchez de León, 2012, p. 373)



interaction. In the poem, in addition to the disassociation of the commitment imposed by suffering ("Leave the pain in the aras / As an ex-vote to the gods"), another panorama of visualization is inserted: the possibility of a super-divine actional sphere: "[...] The answer / Is beyond the gods." Therefore, in the transformative path of this Pessoaan ode, a more acute and more productive rereading is made.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This work sought to make a projection on possible poetic transformations provided in the ode "Follow your destiny", by Fernando Pessoa, in interlocution with the ode "I, XI", by Horácio. Preliminarily, the following are highlighted as driving aspects in the poem: the survey of the formal constitution of the poem, in which the following stand out: the artistic unfolding of the "poetic self" into a heteronym; the possibility of achieving a certain equivalence between the classical proposals of the ode modality and their corresponding philosophies, which support this worldview; the division of the composition into two moments (plane of daily existence and divine sphere of existence); and the mixture of the lexical origin of words. And as deepening and transforming developments of perspectives, the productivity provided by Pessoa's text is highlighted, which presented compositional differences in terms of sound solutions (versification design and rhythmic scheme) and in the experiential correlation with the divine spheres of the Horatian context.

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