

Fernando Pessoa

«Myth Supply Company, Ltd.»

Introduction and Translation
by Anna-Lisa Halling

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa (1888-1935) was a gifted and prolific Portuguese writer who wrote in Portuguese, French, and English and whose well-deserved fame arrived posthumously. Today, Pessoa is one of the most important and well-known authors in Portuguese literary history. Although born in Lisbon, the author spent several years of his childhood in Durban, South Africa where he attended an English school. He returned to Portugal for a short visit at the age of thirteen only to stay indefinitely. He briefly attended the University of Lisbon, but eventually dropped out and began to write. During his lifetime, Pessoa published three books of poetry in English (*Antinous* and *Sonnets* in 1918 and *English Poems* in 1921) and one book of poetry in Portuguese (*Mensagem* in 1933). Besides writing and publishing under his own name, Pessoa also created over 70 heteronyms. Distinct from the alter egos created by his contemporaries, creations such as Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos each possessed their own life history, political leanings, religious beliefs, and even physical characteristics. Posthumously edited volumes include *Poesias de Fernando Pessoa* (1942), *Poesias de Álvaro de Campos* (1944), *Poemas de Alberto Caeiro* (1946), *Odes de Ricardo Reis* (1946), *Poesia, Alexander Search*

(1999), *Quadras* (2002), *Poesia, 1918-1930* (2005), and *Poesia, 1930-1935* (2006). Sadly, Pessoa died relatively young (he was just 47 years old) of cirrhosis of the liver.

Although much of Pessoa's work was published in the twentieth century, unpublished manuscripts have been found in the twenty-first century. Such was the case with Pessoa's "Myth Supply Company, Ltd." ("Empresa Fornecedora de Mitos, Lda."), published for the first time in 2012 by Ana Maria Freitas in a collection of short stories titled *O mendigo e outros contos*. In my translation, I have endeavored to keep as close to the 2012 edition while attempting to utilize language and syntax that does not alienate the reader. Additionally, although I have attempted to maintain the original punctuation, in some cases I have omitted or altered it for the sake of comprehension. This fragmentary text feels and reads as incomplete, as if waiting for the author to fill in the literal blank spaces on the pages. It is rough and unpolished and leaves much work for the reader. In her introduction to the anthology, Freitas even provides the reader with a key indicating symbols representative of words that are either missing or illegible in the original. While the gaping blank in the following story clearly indicates an accidental lacuna in the text, other portions are



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even more ambiguous; it is almost impossible to tell the difference between an ellipsis and a series of missing words, both indicated by the editor using the same punctuation. All in all, this short story, as well as my translation of it, reads like a work in progress, because it is. Notwithstanding this text's unfinished feel and temporal removal from today's readers, it rings true in a world of post-truth politics and fake news. Now, as then, the myth and its suppliers shape our beliefs, our society, and our selves. ●



Traducción de Anna-Lisa Halling

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Myth Supply Company, Ltd.

“There he is,” said the maid, “the person who wants to talk to you.”

“He didn’t say who he was?” I asked.

“He gave me this card,” she said without a gesture.

I took the card, and what I read made me sit right down in my chair, against all the customs that I accumulated in my aimless life.

The card said this in bold letters:

MYTH SUPPLY COMPANY, LTD.

And, underneath, it read, in the usual place:

“Represented by . . .”

“This person asked for me?” I inquired of her.

“He asked for the ‘gentleman’ . . .”

“Okay,” I said, “tell him to enter . . .”

The card didn’t indicate an address, nor, beyond that, did it contain any other information.

The sales rep, or traveling salesman, entered my study with the physical confidence that is particular to his kind. He stood apart from known colleagues in that he carried neither a briefcase nor a smile. He greeted me ceremoniously, with a subtle nod of the head. I indicated that he should sit down. He sat down, and stared at me for a moment.

“You wanted? . . .” I half asked.

He leaned slightly towards me, and began to explain his mission in a voice that, while a little monotone, was not altogether unpleasing.

“Before explaining to you, with the proper details, the nature and quality of the products that I have to offer, a brief exposition of the reasons that led the business that I represent to — first, be founded, and second, produce, with the science and compunction that I will demonstrate, the qualities and kinds of products in which it specialized industrially.”

I nodded yes, vaguely, only perceiving for the time being, that so far I was not perceiving anything.

My visitor, who stared at the ground for a moment, soon lifted his head.

“Society is composed of three distinct tiers. The first is that of the creators of myths and is the true aristocracy. Befittingly, there are creators and transformers of myths—men of genius and men of talent, interpreting each word with a greater sense of value than that which is generally bestowed upon it. The second tier is that of the []. A soldier who fights for Napoleon feels in himself a vaster and grander life than the man who passes through life void and anonymous to himself.”

“But, in that case, why protest against the modern revolutionary and radical myths?”

“Because they claim to not be myths . . .”

“But every myth, in order to have power, must imbue itself with truth. There are no Christians where Christianity is thought to be a myth.”

“It’s not the same . . . the revolutionary myths tend to destroy the only reality, which is the distinction of classes. That’s where their social uselessness and falseness lies. It’s understandable that an aristocracy different from the current one would defend itself; but that no aristocracy at all is defended . . .”

“But an aristocracy of work can be defended, according to the radical myths themselves . . .”

“It doesn’t actually defend itself, but it’s possible that it may do so . . . Now work cannot be a myth, because it is a reality. Yes: to produce is to create reality, that is, entirely useless things. A myth is the creation of unrealities, that is, useful, living things that last and endure. Of all of the modern industries,” he said, “the only one that is now being carried out on a large scale, with everything still done in an empirical fashion, is the political industry. Now the natural path of invention — and our era is a markedly inventive era — is that of finding scientific formulas, and processes derived from those formulas, in order to eliminate empiricism, that brutish



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method, which is the first inevitable phase of any art or any industry. For what reason would someone have not yet remembered to introduce science and rational technique into political empiricism, destroying it and perfecting politics? For the simple reason that no one had yet remembered this. Until somebody remembers, no one will have remembered, not in the least. Now my company was the first to observe that the inventive field in the political industry was still open. My company invented the technical processes of this industry.”

And he disappeared, without a briefcase and still without a smile, from my very limited horizon.