

Alexander Search

## THE WOMAN IN BLACK

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I

My tale is simple, sad and brief —  
As simple as all tales of grief,  
As brief as all that is ours, though  
It seem eternal to its woe;  
No tale of glorious deeds or fair,  
But one short poem of despair;  
Dark as all things where man is caught  
In the fine-poisoned nets of thought.  
Here is no flame of love's old fire,  
Nor song of pent or free desire,  
No thousand hurses [?] fill its plan,  
But it is centred round one man.  
A man? A boy, if boyhood be  
That where is sober misery.  
About a boy all moves, an elf  
Careless of happiness or pelf,  
But fated to sing but himself.

I was not born to joy nor love.  
The earth below, the sky above  
Compel a sense within my soul  
That deeply, heavily doth roll,  
Like a tremendous, mystic sea  
In lands where dreams alone can be;  
A feeling that a sadness is,  
Weeping in broken-hearted bliss;  
A sense that is a deep despair —

I know not why I should feel this  
Before the things that are most fair.

Beauty is more than pleasure's joy:  
That which must please is made to cloy,  
And Nature cloyes not with distaste  
But gives a sorrow [?], as of past  
Things whence the Present does inherit  
Something where [...] is and deep  
Beauty delicious in a sleep  
That is half-sadness to the spirit.

For Pleasure is not Joy — we know  
Joy lives as sorrow in the heart;  
One or the other lives; the dart  
That Sorrow kills comes from Joy's bow.  
Pleasure and distaste are not so.  
Sorrow and Joy are as the strange  
And unknown forms of life and change  
That are ignored in depths of ocean:  
Pure is the depth of their emotion.  
Pleasure and Pain are not like these,  
But as on surfaces of seas  
The alternation of their motion  
And shows of shifting without end.  
Joy may like the sun's light transcend  
The clouds of Pain; Pleasure may be  
The face and look of Misery.

### III

Ay, Nature chills me with deep fear,  
For Nature, to my seeing, spent  
With looking on my woes too near,  
It is but Mystery eloquent.  
The plainest stone, the simplest flower —  
All have a meaning deep and vast,

Mocking their living of an hour.  
But this significance, that hath past  
So oft to poet's song and word,  
Makes them but madmen, even as I,  
Speaking in outline [?] sense absurd  
Strange thoughts for beings that must die.  
But Man to me is dreder still,  
The thing of thought, feeling and will,  
Which is so dark unto mine eyes  
That of the sense he calls his soul  
— Let not of seeing speak the mole [?] —  
I cannot dream to theorize.

For men, who have wrought creeds and codes  
And guided nations by the roads  
Of feeling and of speculation,  
Have seen as much — nothing — as I  
Into the world. All could perceive  
That Nature aught doth signify:  
Beyond this they could stop or rave.  
Most raved and therefore could believe.

Yet I, naturally wrapt about,  
Normally, as in feathers the bird,  
With hesitation and with doubt,  
Find all the world a thing absurd.  
Because myself, a part of it,  
Am an absurdity unfit.

Too young I learnt to reason coldly  
And draw conclusions firmly, boldly,  
From thoughts and facts to shatter creeds,  
Careless of man's mendacious needs.  
Preciseness cast in me the seeds  
Of madness, and the soil was good  
For that abnormal growth of pain  
Whose flowers are red, colour of blood.

Too soon I learned to see too clear,  
And therefore nothing now can capture  
My heart, to which reasoning is rapture,  
That sees night where most poets say  
«'Tis day — I see it all — 'tis day.<sup>a</sup>  
They sing of joy, T sing of fear.

Alas! Why should I stop thus long  
Over the illness of my life,  
That has Insanity for wife?  
Turn I back with an impulse strong.  
Leave I this shallowness and sing.  
The deeper sorrow of my song.

s. d.

**Poesia Inglesa.** Fernando Pessoa. (Organização e tradução de Luísa Freire. Prefácio de Teresa Rita Lopes.) Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1995: 208.