

BHSPM-1984

## MAR PORTUGUÊS

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This year of 1985 commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the death of one of Portugal's greatest poets, Fernando Pessoa.

He went to primary school in South Africa and knew English well and indeed he wrote several poems in English.

One of his most famous works is an epic poem called "Mensagem" dedicated to the History of Portugal.

When the then Prime Minister of Portugal Dr. Marcello Caetano visited London in 1973 as part of the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the Treaty of London of 1373 which marks the formal beginning of the ancient Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, he was much fêted and a banquet was given in his honour in the Painted Hall at Greenwich.

In the programme of this Banquet a poem from "Mensagem", was transcribed:

### MAR PORTUGUÊS

*O mar salgado, quanto do teu sal  
são lágrimas de Portugal!  
Por te cruzarmos, quantas mães choraram,  
quantos filhos em vão rezaram!  
Quantas noivas ficaram por casar  
para que fosses nosso, ó mar!*

*Valeu a pena? Tudo vale a pena  
se a alma não é pequena.  
Quem quer passar além do Bojador  
tem que passar além da dor.  
Deus ao mar o perigo e o abismo deu,  
mas nele é que espelhou o céu.*

What is curious is that it was then translated by the Poet Laureate the late Sir John Betjeman:

### PORTUGUESE SEA

*O sea, how much of your salt  
Is sharp with the tears of Portugal  
How many mothers have wept  
and sons prayed vainly to cross you  
And maidens remained unmarried  
That we might claim you our own  
O salty seas of Portugal.*

*And was the price too high?  
Not if the soul can pay it  
Not if the soul is big enough  
To round the cape and discover  
Further perils beyond  
For God who created the waters  
Made them also mirror his heaven.*

And also by Mr. Alan Goodison, a British Diplomat then appointed to the Lisbon Embassy:

*O sea, how much of thy sharp salt  
Is tears from Portugal!  
That we might cross you, many mothers wept,  
The prayers of many sons were vain!  
How many maidens ever lonely slept  
That thou mightest be ours, o main!*

*Was the pain worth it? All is worth the pain  
If only the soul scorns the mean.  
Who longs beyond the Cape to pass  
Must beyond anguish also pass.  
God gave the sea both danger and abyss  
But it is there that heaven mirrored lies.  
The sea!*