

Sam Pereira. *The Marriage of the Portuguese* (Expanded Edition). Forward by Frank X. Gaspar. Dartmouth, Mass.: Tagus Press (UMass Dartmouth), 2012.

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The collection, a re-publication of the original four-part 1978 book *The Marriage of the Portuguese* along with a new, fifth and final section, has helped Pereira to concretize his place in the annals of Portuguese-American, as well as more general American, Poetry in our time. He approaches his poetic world with brilliance, audacity, and a love for the world despite the losses he has faced.

In the forward to the work, Frank Gaspar states that the theme of identity overpowers the reader, a statement with which I agree wholeheartedly. Alongside this are notions of death and the inroads the poetic voice unsuccessfully makes in attempting a compromise between his American side (“As white as the sheet I was born on”) and his Azorean roots and family/community traditions.

The language the poet uses is English. Yet, in several moments the grammar reminds us of his multi-cultural roots, such as in the poem “California Flush” – the use of verbs without a subject (it is usually present in the sentence/verse before, just not repeated again) and other structural considerations give the poems an air of foreign-ness, of the Portuguese which he had heard from his Grandmother as a child and which marks his native English

in its most profound and essential state.

Such a collection also deals with death as it deals with life and the soul's perpetual search for peace: it meanders between the classical, stable symbolism of Western poetry and turns it as it were a child's top capped with the seemingly mundane sources of our daily grind. Pereira's greatest strength is the constant rebirth of verse which his poetry breathes so very naturally as the poetic voice suffers such harsh and devastating events.

The poetic voice's light touch also reigns in a world in which the monstrous congeals with the nostalgia of an unknown happiness, in which the term *saudade* makes perfect, horrible sense. Such a complex yet seamless concoction can come only from a place of intelligence and self-awareness.

Yet, as the poet states, "This is not another decree about the sleepy ones;" his nostalgia bears none of the Surrealist revolutions we see in the work of other writers. These verses take on the stereotype of the unthinking sadness and turn it into a hopeful cry for peace from and within the world. The shattered redress of images onto whose perfection we cling becomes a moment of solace and brave effacement in poems such as "The Finest Cities."

As the reader enters into the final part of the book, written in more recent times, one sees that the book ends as it begins, but not in the sort of unfinished circle we would expect. These final poems open a discussion on aging and death in much more intimate terms, those of a more seasoned, yet still pained, poetic soul. A poem like "Horoscope" gives the reader an expected classical, Portuguese imagery (the discourse on the moon and milk as symbols for death and nourishing life) yet contemporary in its approach to some last breath of hope in an impending yet unreachable (and certainly self-inflicted) doom. The last several pages of the book begin to wax nostalgic, taking measure of the world the poetic voice has lived and lost as time has gone by. The poem "Nothing," in its desire to relive a world that never belonged to the poetic voice, the reader may rejoice again in the reappearance of the very Portuguese notion of *saudade*. In "The Sugars of Terceira," the poem which closes the collection, the return to a "Portuguese-ness" is complete; the poetic voice has decided to live in the world in which he could/would like to have understood his grandmother, the root of his ultimate and untimely identity.

Through a combination of uniquely Portuguese and American symbolisms, *The Marriage of the Portuguese* brings to life a world which the poet had almost lost, one which answers only to the past but that continues into the poet's present. A delightful and dense, yet easily understandable reading, the book shows us that nothing of our true selves can be forgotten in the seemingly inescapable entrapment of our daily lives.

