

Fernando Pessoa

## [Retrato de Frederick Wyatt]

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Of dreamers no one was a greater dreamer than he. He was eternally incompetent to take stock of reality. His attitude before things was always a false and uneasy one, always oscillating from one extreme point of view or manner of action to the other extreme. This concerned just as much and as deeply his fundamental views — if we can speak of the fundamental views of one who had none — as his most trifling actions. It is as possible to consider him an idealist (I use the word in its metaphysical sense) as a materialist: he would be the first to wonder which he was. His political opinions were in a perpetual fluctuation between an excessive anarchism and the arrogance of a through aristocrat. In his life — his *unreal* life as he would have called it sometimes — he was sure to be either of a childish and morbid shyness or of an impetuous and clumsy boldness. The worst was that he was not even consistent in the line of action he chose: sometimes he would shrink into a sudden and incongruous shyness in the midst of a recklessly insane act, at others he would suddenly break out from shyness in the strangest and insanest manner.

My great and sincere friendship for him cannot hinder me from being still rather amused on recalling the way several Portuguese poor people — the washerwoman, for instance — used, with a curious and evidently spontaneous community of expression, to refer to him when speaking to me: *O seu amigo, coitadinho!* (Your friend, poor gentleman!). They would very possibly have been perplexed to explain what the *coitadinho* (so untranslatably Portuguese!) meant there. But they all felt, in their characteristic warm-heartedness, that there was some inexplicable thing to be pitied about him. Now that I remember this, I cannot omit a still cuter expression that a neighbouring barber once used and which was reported to him and to me and stung him greatly: It is a pity he is not mad; it would have been better like that. It is perhaps the best casual wordportrait of him, as I easily perceived, because it hit his character off so justly and yet showed how terrible evident even to a [...] casual and (...) observers was suffering he thought he hid in himself from all eyes.

s. d.

**Pessoa por Conhecer — Textos para um Novo Mapa** . Teresa Rita Lopes. Lisboa: Estampa, 1990: 195.