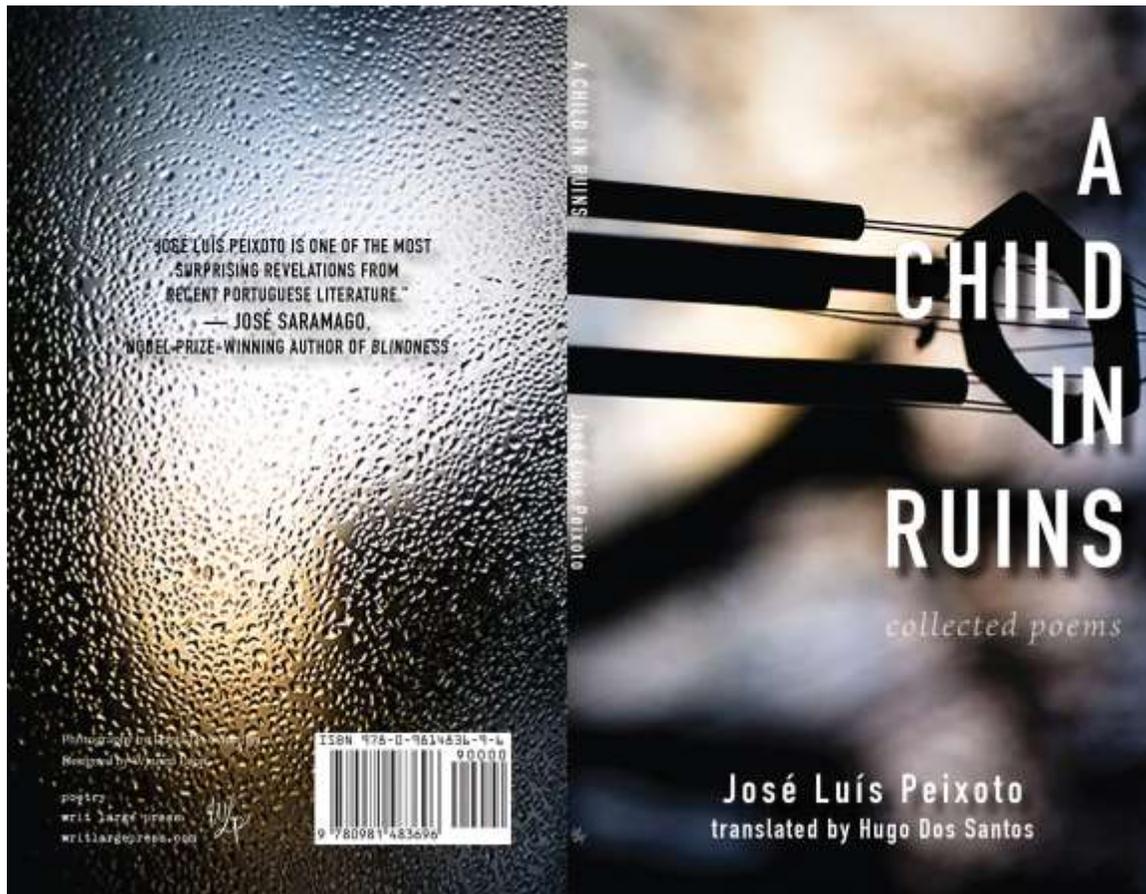


**Five Poems by José Luís Peixoto**  
**Translated from the Portuguese by Hugo Dos Santos**



The poems we're sharing with you today are part of a collection of translated poetry by the Portuguese author José Luís Peixoto, one of the most acclaimed and best-selling contemporary authors in Portugal. His prose has been translated in twenty languages, but his collected poems were not previously translated into English. We're very proud to present these beautiful new translations by Hugo Dos Santos selected from the book *A Child in Ruins* published by [Writ Large Press](#) in 2016. I hope you'll like them as much as we did.

—Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman

**Translator's Note:** This book is a selection from the three books of poetry that Peixoto has published so far. *A Crianca em Ruínas* (*A Child in Ruins*), first published in 2001, *A Casa, a Escuridão* (*The House, the Darkness*), first published in 2002, and *Gaveta de Papeis* (*Drawer of Papers*), first published in 2008. The selection of the poems in *A Child in Ruins* was made by me with some suggestions by Hugo. *A Crianca em Ruínas* was awarded the Award of the Portuguese Society of Authors for the best poetry book of that year. *Gaveta de Papeis* was awarded the Daniel Faria Award for poetry. This is the first time these books have been translated to English. —*Hugo Dos Santos, translator*

### **Selections from *A Child in Ruins***

#### **Five Poems by José Luís Peixoto *translated from the Portuguese by Hugo Dos Santos***

when it was time to set the table, we were five:  
my father, my mother, my sisters  
and me. then, my older sister  
married. then, my younger sister  
married. then, my father died. today,  
when it is time to set the table, we are five,  
except my older sister who is  
at her home, except my younger  
sister who is at her home, except my  
father, except my widowed mother. each one  
is an empty place at this table where  
i eat alone. but they will always be here.  
at the time to set the table, we will always be five.  
as long as one of us is alive, we will always  
be five.

i see in my handwriting the steps of my destiny.  
that big house with a yard and chickens  
dying cyclically. the sad mallows  
in hopeless flower beds. and in each stanza  
sitting before the landscape, the poem singular and final.  
the women drag the afternoons through the verses, like  
memories burning in all the nights of my life.  
who can forget the afternoons, if the branches on the orange trees  
were unforgettable? each word possesses a handful of that  
infinite yard.

the fruit bowl on the kitchen table is blood on the poem.  
my destiny was confined, and a destiny is forever.  
the light crosses my outstretched hands  
that shows the dust dancing in the air. i answer so many things to  
the silverware in the drawer.

voices arrive that never left. faces arrive  
that i dream when i wake up suddenly, crying. now,  
you're the man of the house, they said. and there was no house any more.

a year passes for mom, like the hours pass for children who  
still play on an imaginary street . innocent mom  
and humiliated by the sky and the stars, by the dogs barking  
in the distance, by the women whitewashing the walls, by the bells  
that call us and by the road to the cemetery. mom,  
life multiplied, as if your body ripped and the flesh  
was the soil and the words, and the bones were the branches of the  
orange trees and the words.

## **WORDS FOR MY MOTHER**

mom, i'm sorry, i always hoped you would understand  
the words i never said and the gestures i never made.  
today i know that i only waited, mom, and waiting isn't enough.

for the words i never said, for the gestures you so often asked  
of me and which i was never able to make, i want to ask your  
forgiveness, mom, and i know that asking forgiveness isn't enough.

sometimes, i want to tell you so many things that i can't.  
the photograph where i am on your lap is the most  
beautiful photograph i have. i like it when you're happy.

read this: mom, i love you.

i know and you know that i can always pretend that i didn't  
write these words. yes, mom, i will pretend that  
i didn't write these words, and you will pretend that you didn't  
read them. we are like that, mom, but i know and you know.

## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD

you look so beautiful today. when i say that new flowers  
bloomed in the soil in the garden, i mean that  
you look beautiful.

i enter the house, enter the room, open the wardrobe, open  
a drawer, open a box that contains your gold  
necklace.

between my fingers, i hold your fine gold necklace, as if  
i touched the skin on your neck.

there is the sky, the house, the room, and you are within me.

you look so beautiful today.

your hair, forehead, eyes, nose, lips.

you are within something that is within all the  
things, my voice nominates you to describe  
beauty.

your hair, forehead, eyes, nose, lips.

up against the silence, within the world,  
you look so beautiful is what i want to say.

when i was born. i hoped that life.  
would bring me. the soil. when i was born.  
i hoped that life. would bring me.  
the trees. and the birds. and the children.  
when i was born. i had the world. entire.  
after the eyes. after the fingers.  
and i didn't understand. i didn't understand. anything.  
i never imagined. when i was born. that life.  
when i was born. was already the darkness. the darkness.  
where i was. when i was born.

### About the author:



**José Luís Peixoto** is one of Portugal's most acclaimed and bestselling contemporary novelists. He was born in 1974 in Galveias, in the region of Alentejo (Portugal). Has studied Modern languages and literatures in Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Since 2000, Peixoto has published twelve titles (5 novels, 4 fiction books and 3 poetry collections). He is three-times a winner of the Jovens Criadores Prize. His first novel *Nenhum Olhar* (published as *Blank Gaze* in the UK by Bloomsbury and as *The Implacable Order of Things* in the USA by Doubleday/Anchor/Random House) was shortlisted in all major literary awards in Portugal and won the Jose Saramago Literary Award, delivered every two years for the best novel written in all Portuguese-speaking countries. *Blank Gaze* was selected by *Financial Times* as one of their best books of 2007. In the USA, it was part of 'Discover Great New Writer's selection at Barnes & Noble. In Portugal, it was selected by *Expresso* as one of their 10 best books of the decade. Peixoto's first fiction, *Morreste-me* (published in the UK as *You Died On Me*, Warwick Review, 2010) was selected by *Visão* as one of their 10 best books of the first decade of the twenty-first century. His poetry collection *A Criança em Ruínas* was awarded by the Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores (Portuguese Authors Society) as the best poetry book published in Portugal in the previous year. In 2003, JLP wrote the short-story collection *Antidote* in a joint project with the heavy metal band Moonspell, which reached new readers all around the world. In 2007, his novel *Cemitério de Pianos* (published as *The Piano Cemetery* in the UK) won the Calamo Award for the best translated novel published in Spain. In 2008, he received the Daniel Faria Poetry Award. In 2010, Peixoto published

the novel *Livro*, which won the literary award Libro d'Europa in Italy and was short-listed in the Femina Award (France). In 2012, Peixoto published *Dentro do Segredo, Uma Viagem na Coreia do Norte* (*Inside the Secret, A journey in North Korea*) his first work of non-fiction. Peixoto's poetry and short-stories have appeared in a great number of anthologies on dozens of languages. All his novels have been internationally acclaimed and so, far, have been translated in 20 languages. His web site is [www.joseluispeixoto.net](http://www.joseluispeixoto.net).

**About the translator:**



**Hugo dos Santos** is the translator of *A Child in Ruins* (Writ Large Press, 2016), the collected poems of José Luís Peixoto, and a recipient of a Disquiet International scholarship. His fiction and poetry have appeared in various publications in the U.S. and Europe, including *upstreet*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *DMQ Review*, *Public Pool*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *ironbound - a blog*. More at [www.hugodossantos.com](http://www.hugodossantos.com).