

“A skirt between us and our thoughts”: reflections on Enrico Martines’s contribution

[“Uma saia entre nós e os nossos pensamentos”:
considerações sobre o contributo de Enrico Martines]

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, *The Duke of Parma*, Misogyny, Sexuality, Modernism.

Abstract

This article argues that *The Duke of Parma* should be read not merely as a repository of virulent misogyny but as part of Fernando Pessoa’s broader textual experimentation with dissident sexual identities. Building on Enrico Martines’s thematic analysis, it examines how the Duke’s discourse on male superiority, procreation, female sexuality, and abstinence contributes to dating the play and situating it within Pessoa’s early 1910s writings. While acknowledging the historical context of Pessoa’s misogynistic statements, the study proposes that the unfinished tragedy reworks neo-Shakespearean models of the tragic hero to dramatize the inner conflict of a “superior man” unable to reconcile intellectual detachment with erotic desire and social obligation. By mapping the Duke’s misogyny alongside other modes of sexual rebellion across Pessoa’s oeuvre, the article suggests that the play stages a complex negotiation of gender, sexuality, and genius rather than a stable ideological position.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, *The Duke of Parma*, Misoginia, Sexualidade, Modernismo.

Resumo

Este artigo propõe que *The Duke of Parma* deve ser lido não apenas como expressão de misoginia, mas como parte da experimentação de Fernando Pessoa com identidades sexuais dissidentes. A partir da análise temática de Enrico Martines, examina-se como o discurso do Duque sobre superioridade masculina, procriação, sexualidade feminina e abstinência contribui para a datação da peça e para a sua inserção no contexto dos escritos da década de 1910. Considerando o modelo neo-shakespeariano do herói trágico, argumenta-se que a obra dramatiza o conflito interior de um “homem superior” incapaz de conciliar desprendimento intelectual, desejo erótico e dever social. Ao articular a misoginia do Duque com outras formas de dissidência sexual na obra pessoana, sugere-se que a peça encena uma tensão complexa entre género, sexualidade e génio.

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The transcription and analysis of *The Duke of Parma* constitute a giant step forward in the dissemination and study of Fernando Pessoa's dramatic writings, of which the collected manuscript fragments of the tragedy account for almost one sixth part (16%). Further to playing a crucial role in conceiving, funding, and directing the international collaboration that is making *The Duke of Parma* accessible, Enrico Martines has made an especially valuable contribution to Pessoaan studies by examining the misogynist prejudices and revulsion against procreative sex voiced by the play's eponymous protagonist, and by considering how this aspect of the manuscript corpus might inform the perennially animated discussion of the themes of gender difference, sexuality, and erotic desire and agency across Pessoa's oeuvre.

Martines offers his reader a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of four themes that recur throughout the Duke's discourse: (1) the Duke's affirmations of male intellectual superiority, and of the value of men's intellectual companionship; (2) his belief that the essentially lowly and bestial endeavour of procreation is the fundamental role of "the female animal" (manuscript 11⁴D-100^r), and his revulsion at female sexuality; (3) his characterisation of women's imagination as perverse, in accordance with their purportedly natural disposition as seductresses of men, and (4) his abjuration of sex, and efforts to exorcise his own erotic desire, which he considers inimical to his pursuit of wisdom. The first of several ways in which Martines's attention to these four themes informs and enriches Pessoaan studies is the manner in which his identification of commonalities between the Duke's discourse on the erotic – and, particularly, aspects of his virulent misogyny – might assist a conjectural dating of Pessoa's work on his play. Certainly, the relationships that he identifies with both the English poem *Epithalamium* of 1913, and the embryonic fiction *Marcos Alves* – whose composition dates as "mostly between 1909 and 1913" (ZENITH, 2021: 303) – support Jerónimo Pizarro's theory that a first substantial phase of work on *The Duke* was "completed around 1913-1914" (PIZARRO, 2025: 137). Constructing a dialogue with José Barreto's comprehensive study of *Misoginia e Anti-Feminismo em Fernando Pessoa* (2011), Martines notes that Pessoa's most distasteful and vicious "misogynist and supremacist views" are articulated in writings from the 1910s. This was the time of the young Pessoa's enthusiastic reception of the pseudoscientific anti-feminist tracts of such authors as Paul Julius Möbius, Thomas W. H. Crosland, and Roberto Nóvoa Santos (BARRETO, 2011: 99), and of his formulation of misogynistic assertions similar to those uttered by the Duke in, for example, the 1913 English-language philosophical texts first published in PINA COELHO's *Os Fundamentos Filosóficos da Obra de Fernando Pessoa* (1971).¹ Here, Martines agrees with those specialists who, while noting the coruscating diatribes against both female morality and

¹ See manuscripts BNP/E3, 55-36 to 55-38 in Pessoa's archive. Barreto reproduces the full text of the dialogue in his study (2011: 123-129).

women's intellectual and professional ambition that Pessoa penned in his mid-twenties, have also observed that this streak of virulent misogyny did not persist throughout his literary career. As Richard ZENITH argues in his 2021 biography of Pessoa, *An Experimental Life*, "Pessoa's misogyny [...] would prove to have shallow roots. Within a few years' time, after his discomfort with women abated, so did his interest in arguing that they were less capable and less complex than men" (2021: 353).

The Duke's persistent reduction of all women to their bodies and reproductive capacity, and his expressions of disgust for their sexuality and the desire it arouses in men, thus support surmisals about Pessoa's conception and initial sketching of the play. At the same time, however, the aspect of the text that Martines has brought into focus poses two questions, given the fact of Pessoa's uncharacteristically sustained attention to his projected play, some version of which he continued drafting in the last year of his life.² First is the discomfiting question of how confidently—or not—we may conclude that Pessoa "moved on" from his youthful denigration of women. Martines draws attention to Pessoa's "Explanatory" in the undated manuscript 11⁵D-83^r, annotating a quip by the Duke noting the purposelessness of men's nipples, and asserting that the Duke's "constant sexual allusions and their purpose" are "not the author's". Concurring again with ZENITH (2021: 304-305), Martines suggests that we take this disclaimer—uncharacteristic though it is of Pessoa—at "face value" (MARTINES, 2026). Read as an earnest disclaimer, Pessoa's "Explanatory" offers evidence for his defence against the charge of lifelong misogyny, but it leaves us to ponder the second question, of Pessoa's motivations for persevering, over a quarter of a century, with a drama centred on a man obsessed by a horror of physical intimacy with women and convinced of their moral depravity.

This second question is ultimately intractable, given the play's incompleteness and the indications found across the manuscript corpus that Pessoa's conception of the Duke's story evolved over that timeframe. Martines's decision to structure his survey of sexuality and misogyny in the corpus not in relation to what can be discerned about the play's structure, but, instead, thematically, is therefore a pragmatic one, and one that serves Pessoa scholars well. This arrangement enables him first to characterise the key tenets of the Duke's invective, and thereupon deftly chart the connections between this aspect of the corpus and the misogynistic discourse, and disavowals of sexual agency, found elsewhere in Pessoa's writings. It also, I would suggest, offers us a stable platform from which to embark on cautious speculation regarding the "purpose" (11⁵D-83^r) of the Duke's disdain for women and his disgust at their bodies and at (hetero)sexual congress, mapping his comments in relation to what we can discern of the play's intended structure and dramatic logic, with particular attention to the sketched plot outlines in manuscripts 11⁴D-2, 11⁵D-43, and

² As MARTINES (2025: 3) notes, the latest dated manuscript in the *Duke of Parma* corpus (11⁵D-71) is dated 4th January 1935.

11⁵D-44. While the 183 identified documents comprising the manuscript corpus cannot be assembled even into the skeleton of a play—and might even be more accurately interpreted as the skeletal fragments of several differing versions of a play—all are fragments of a projected *tragedy*, which Pessoa conceived in response to—though not necessarily in conformity with—contemporary interpretations of Shakespearian dramaturgy, and, as Diego Saglia has explored, in the wake of the early-mid nineteenth-century vogue for “neo-Elizabethan” theatre.³ Both the Duke’s character and his fate are presumably modelled after the type of each pertaining to what Andrew Cecil Bradley, the towering presence in Victorian-era Shakespeare criticism, identifies as a specifically Shakespearian development of the tragic hero figure first defined in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. This tragic hero is a figure of high social status—prince, potentate, or military general—whose “fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire” (BRADLEY, 1949: 10), and one possessed of exceptional qualities or greatness, which may variously be “nobility of mind, or genius, or immense force” (1949: 20). Beyond that, however, this man whose exceptionality represents to the audience the “full power and reach of the soul” (1949: 20), nevertheless contributes to his own undoing by dint of a fatal flaw of temperament: “[i]n the circumstances where we see the hero placed, his tragic trait, which is also his greatness, is fatal to him” (1949: 21).⁴ If we take Pessoa’s Duke to be this type of great man whose very exceptionality makes him err catastrophically, and if, as another explanatory note of Pessoa’s, on manuscript 11⁵D-28^r, informs, the Duchess who he demeans, insults, and murders is “um carактер intensamente feminino – limpido, puro e amante” [an intensely feminine character – candid, pure, and loving], then, presumably, the Duke’s disgust for her and for all womankind is either a symptom of his fatal flaw, or a causative factor in, or tragic consequence of, his similarly fatal error.

It is on the basis of this observation that I would like to suggest that, rather than reading *The Duke of Parma* as showcase for a misogyny that makes women scapegoats for the carnal constitution and bestial instincts that the Duke laments are possessed by all humankind, we might read it as an unfinished—possibly unfinishable—chapter of Pessoa’s textual rebellion against the constricting sexual *diktats* of

³ As Diego SAGLIA argues, “Though repeatedly disparaged and dismissed by innumerable detractors during the nineteenth century and after, [...] neo-Renaissance plays continued to be written, produced, staged, and debated well into the early twentieth century [...] On these premises, it is most likely that Shakespeare was not Pessoa’s only model for *The Duke of Parma*, and that his neo-Renaissance play was not an isolated or anachronistic attempt, but rather a project consistent with a century-long phenomenon in British drama and theater” (2024: 24).

⁴ As BRADLEY says of Shakespeare’s heroes, “Some, like Hamlet and Cleopatra, have genius. Others, like Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Coriolanus, are built on the grand scale; and desire, passion, or will attains in them a terrible force. In almost all we observe a marked one-sidedness, a predisposition in some particular direction; a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind. This, it would seem, is, for Shakespeare, the fundamental tragic trait” (1949: 20).

his society. In other words, we might assess its protagonist as being one component—and a distinctively “tragic” one—of a diverse literary repertoire of sexual identities that Pessoa fashioned, all deviating from, and disturbing, contemporary notions of sexual “normality” and propriety. The first emanations of this repertoire can be traced back at least to Pessoa’s output of the early 1910s: as Richard ZENITH points out, just within the first six months of 1913, Pessoa “like a protean actor simultaneously playing different and even contradictory roles, [...] was radically celibate in *The Book of Disquiet*, nervously expectant in his paeon to marriage, which focuses at length on the about-to-be-deflowered bride, and enamoured of a young man in *The Book of the Other Love*” (2021: 349-350). As is well known, for many years—at least until the discovery and publication, from the early 2000s, of a number of homoerotic love poems—the dominant interpretations of Pessoa’s engagements with the erotic were those of an attempted purgation or sublimation of discomfiting desire.⁵ Nevertheless, it is equally possible to read texts such as the *Livro do Desassossego*, “Antinous”, and “Epithalamium”—just as much as the better-known and vociferously sado-masochistic, voyeuristic, and homoerotic outpourings of Álvaro de Campos in such works as “Ode Triunfal”, “Ode Marítima”, or “Passagem das Horas”—as gestures of defiance regarding the imperatives of heterosexual courtship, marriage, procreation, and the consistent performance of exemplary bourgeois masculinity that Pessoa’s family and wider society expected him to observe.

Pessoa’s treatment of his two lengthy narrative English poems, of course, exemplifies how this rebellion was by no means always confined either to the privacy of manuscripts stashed in his famous trunk or to the discretion of fellow members of his café-based literary coteries. Pessoa’s 1930 claim to João Gaspar Simões that the composition of “Epithalamium” and “Antinous” had a purely therapeutic, and not literary, objective—namely, to purge from his mind “um certo elemento de [obscenidade]” [a certain element of obscenity] that was “um certo estorvo para alguns processos mentais superiores” [a hindrance to some superior mental processes] (PESSOA, 1957: 67)—guided critical assessment of his treatment of the erotic (and, in particular, the homoerotic) right up to the 1990s. Yet the thesis of the “obscene” English poems serving an essentially pragmatic function of catharsis required a disregard for the facts of Pessoa’s decision to self-publish the poems and to stake upon them his bid for literary recognition in the English-speaking world, when he sent review copies to the leading British literary journals of the day.

⁵ It was arguably the discovery of the short English-language poem “Le mignon”, first analysed in ZENITH (2002), that initiated a reassessment of Pessoa’s treatment of homoerotic desire. Prior to this reassessment, the most substantial and influential critical exegeses, predicated largely on readings of the poems “Antinous” and “Epithalamium” and on Pessoa’s letter of 18th November 1930 to João Gaspar Simões accounting for their composition, included those of Jorge de SENA (2000, first published in 1974) and Eduardo LOURENÇO (1981).

"Antinous" is unique amongst Pessoa's works in having been published and promoted by its author not just once but twice⁶, and this after previously being slated for publication in the never-to-be realised third issue of *Orpheu*.⁷ Pessoa further proved his willingness to defy his society's revulsion at, and pathologisation of, erotic love between men in republishing and promoting the homoerotic *Canções* of the young António Botto in 1922, and then responding in print to the campaign of censorship and accusations against him of publishing "pornography" and "immoral books" that swiftly followed.⁸ One can only speculate as to how any contemporary Portuguese readers possessing a knowledge of English and a copy of Pessoa's 1921 *English Poems III* might have received "Epithalamium". Even discounting what ZENITH (2021: 348) diagnoses as the unintentional comic tone of many of its descriptions of foreplay and coitus, the poem's depiction of matrimony as a frenzied ritual culminating in the aggressive sexual possession and domination of a fearful bride reads as an affront to convention, and indeed PESSOA singled this work out as "directo e bestial" (1957: 67) [graphic and bestial]. "Epithalamium" presents a kind of inverted or mirrored image of *The Duke of Parma's* grotesque characterisation of heterosexual coupling, for example in its celebration of how an entire community is possessed by a compelling delirium of lust – "drunk and veined emotion [...] A great carouse of dreams", and of how the sexual act reduces the bride to the status of a servile animal, when "[t]he maiden mount now her first rider bears!" (PESSOA, 1993: 61).

The contrasting commendation made in numerous fragments of the *Livro do Desassossego* of absolute sexual abstinence as a form of mental hygiene might appear less obviously subversive in the present day. Such texts would, however, have been an affront to those contemporary public health campaigners and policy-makers from across the political spectrum who maintained that addressing Portugal's low birth rate through improved puericulture and other pronatalist measures was fundamental to the nation's recovery from its nineteenth-century "degeneration", and who hence extolled procreation (within marriage, and subject to eugenicist restraints on the sexual agency of morally or intellectually "degenerate" persons) as a patriotic

⁶ Pessoa's *Antinous: A Poem*, distributed to a selection of leading British newspapers and literary journals early in 1918, received brief review notices in *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Glasgow Herald*, *The Graphic*, *The Scotsman*, and *The Athenaeum* (ZENITH, 2021: 559-560). In 1921, Pessoa's short-lived Olisipo press published his 1918 revised version of the poem as the first part of *English Poems I-II*, which was distributed to British newspapers and journals together with *English Poems III*, comprised of 'Epithalamium' (ZENITH, 2021: 616).

⁷ As Pessoa informed Armando Cortes Rodrigues, in a letter of 4th September 1916, "[é] aí que, no fim do número, publico dois poemas ingleses meus, muito indecentes, e, portanto, impublicáveis em Inglaterra" (PESSOA, 1985: 69).

⁸ For a full account of the 'Literatura de Sodoma' scandal, see LUGARINHO (2003) ZENITH (2021: 621-627), and the contributions of CASCAIS (2023) and KLOBUCKA (2023) to the dossier "Cem Anos da Literatura de Sodoma" in *Via Atlântica*.

duty.⁹ Bernardo Soares's profession of celibacy as essential precondition for serene acquiescence to the unfathomable mystery of being seems remarkably consistent with Pessoa's claim to Simões of a need to purge "obscenity". At the same time, though, it fits into a consistent pattern, across Pessoa's oeuvre, of identifying manifestations of both sexual "abnormality" and psychological disturbance as the origins, or correlative of, his distinctive literary genius. As KLOBUCKA and SABINE summarise in their "Introduction" to *Embodying Pessoa: Corporeality, Gender, Sexuality*, "Pessoa frequently theorizes his specifically dramatic path of depersonalization as inherently linked to the psychosexual 'disorders' that stalked both the pseudoscientific and popular imaginations of his day: masturbation, transsexualism or sexual 'inversion', and hysteria" (2007: 16). Indeed, in the context of his claim to be mired "naquela distância de tudo que se chama a Decadência [...] a perda total da inconsciência" (PESSOA, 2009: 51) [at that distance from everything, which is called Decadence (...) the total loss of the unconscious], one might interpret Soares's insistence on sexual abstinence as a kind of mocking obedience to early twentieth-century eugenicists' calls for the enforced abstinence or sterilization of the mentally ill, to safeguard the future of the race.

The major benefit of Martines's survey of the Duke's misogyny and aversion to sex to Pessoa scholarship is the admirably clear picture it provides of how *The Duke of Parma* corpus participates, albeit to greatly differing extents, in all three of Pessoa's most frequent modes of textual rebellion against conventional sexual mores: that is, (i) evocations of love between men, (ii) the affirmation of celibacy as precondition for intellectual and moral health, and (iii) the abasement of heterosexual intercourse, sometimes entailing the abjection of the female body as unclean and bestial. Martines's attention to these aspects of the Duke's discourse, and his mapping of their intertextual relationships across Pessoa's oeuvre, do not only encourage our reassessment of more familiar texts we might have considered to have been exhaustively researched. Martines's study also equips us for informed conjecture regarding how Pessoa intended the play to function as neo-Shakespearean drama: in other words, for asking what might have been the actual *tragedy* to unfold within it, and where the roots of that tragedy might lie amid the Duke's sexual panic, his apparent descent into madness, and the conspiracies against his person and his rule.

Martines directs us clearly towards what I believe is the most convincing answer to the first question when he references, in his abandoned fiction *Marcos Alves* (1910) and elsewhere, Pessoa's invocation, in *The Book of Disquiet*, of the "homem superior" [superior man] or "homem de génio" [man of genius]. As outlined in the undated text entitled "O homem superior", first published in Teresa Rita Lopes's

⁹ On pronatalist discourses and policies in Portugal of the 1920s and 1930s, and especially following Salazar's entry into government in 1928, see CLEMINSON (2014: 162-172).

landmark anthology *Pessoa por Conhecer*, this is a figure who, thanks to his preternatural intellectual faculties—which, no doubt, equip him to overcome any erotic disturbance of “processos mentais superiores”, “[a]prende a sentir tudo sem o sentir directamente” [learns to feel everything without feeling anything directly]. Given that “sentir directamente é submeter-se – submeter-se á acção da coisa sentida” (LOPES, 1990: II, 27) [to feel directly is to surrender—to surrender to the action of the thing that is felt], his discipline of detachment, substituting experience with a kind of meta-affective imaginative engagement, equips the “superior man” to achieve self-sovereignty and self-reliance.¹⁰ In order to “gosar no perfeito silencio a sua superioridade” [enjoy his own superiority in perfect silence] and achieve a state of untrammelled freedom, he must learn to disregard “o ridículo, o trabalho e a dedicação” [ridicule, work, and dedication], and refuse commitment to, or reliance on, either his fellow humans or his material environment:

Como não se dedica a ninguém, também nada exige da dedicação alheia. Sobrio, casto, frugal, tocando o menos possível na vida, tanto para não se incomodar como para não aproximar as cousas de mais, a ponto de destruir nellas a capacidade de serem sonhadas, elle isola-se por conveniencia do orgulho e da desillusão.

(LOPES, 1990: II, 27)

[Since he is not committed to anyone, neither does he demand the commitment of others (to him). Sober, chaste, frugal, engaging as little as possible with life, as much to avoid inconveniencing himself as to avoid such proximity to things as would destroy their capacity to be imagined, he isolates himself for the benefit of his pride and his freedom from delusion)

Martines reminds us of Bernardo Soares’s claim, in the *Livro do Desassossego*, that this mental discipline also ensures that “o homem superior não tem necessidade de nenhuma mulher” (*apud* BARRETO, 2011: 45) [the superior man has no need of any woman]. Pessoa’s aforementioned dialogue of 1913 concurs with Soares, and indeed affirms that the “supreme” type of man has no need of any embodied erotic experience: as ZENITH (2021: 351) paraphrases, uninterested in “the pursuit of normal sexual pleasure”, the “superior man” evoked in this dialogue will “replace it with the sexual pleasure afforded by sublime friendship with other men”.

The consonance that Martines identifies between this Pessoaan superman’s repudiation of erotic agency and that of the Duke of Parma make it a reasonable (though obviously unverifiable) hypothesis that the latter’s tragedy is that of an aspiring—or perhaps erstwhile—“superior man” who is driven to homicidal and self-destructive madness by the impossibility of attaining—or perhaps of sustaining—such a liberatory state of detachment. The oft-reiterated connection that Pessoa’s writings assert between genius and mental disturbance—a key tenet, incidentally, of the comparisons he makes between his own nature and that of Shakespeare—should guide our

¹⁰ When quoting from Pessoa’s text in LOPES (1990), I have retained the original orthography.

speculation regarding how he sought, in *The Duke of Parma*, to redeploy or refashion the Shakespearian trope of the tragic hero's descent into madness. Even if one cannot conclude that the Duke's madness is not feigned, after the manner of Hamlet's, from his own assertion that "I am mad. | Mad, my boy, mad, as much as madness is" (11⁵ D-71^r), then surely the "insane delight" (11⁴ D-95^r) that Pessoa's stage directions attribute to him as he hurls the guiltless Duchess from a bedroom window confirms a pathological disturbance. As BRADLEY observes, the "abnormal states of mind" of, for example, King Lear, Macbeth and Othello are "never introduced as the origin of deeds of any dramatic moment" (1949: 13). Rather, they are provoked by the conflicts in which the hero is embroiled: both the conflict between opposed parties in the drama, and, more importantly, the "conflict in the soul of the hero" (1949: 19), an "inward struggle" that is "most emphasized" in Shakespeare's later "mature" works (1949: 18). In other words, the mentally disturbed Shakespearian hero is one who is overcome by this personal inner conflict and hence alienated from external circumstances that the conflict has rendered intolerable. His descent into madness is also often the moment of *anagnorisis*, or tragically belated insight into the forces impelling him to destruction. In the Duke's case, genuine mental disturbance and *anagnorisis* seem to coincide when he arrives at a "solemn occasion" of state dressed in a jester's motley, cap, and bells, and announces himself "fool | in general of this portion of the land | of fools" (11⁴ D-80^v), professing the conviction that the society on which he is losing his grip as ruler is as deranged as he himself.

Reading Pessoa's plot outlines and fragmentary dialogues in line with Bradley's analysis of Shakespearian tragedy encourages a surmisal that the Duke's insurmountable inner conflict, and the derangement it engenders, develop consequently to the earliest and clearest catalyst for the play's "external" conflict, namely the breakdown of the Duke's relationship with his minister Alberto, who, at the play's start, he has publicly humiliated by calling him "fool" (11⁴ D-2^v; 11⁴ D-6^v). Even if this is not the case, however, Pessoa's sketches for the play are haunted by the unquiet ghost of a chaste but intense affection between the two; as MARTINES ventures, "an intellectual communion between them—a form of elevated union that, in his view [the Duke's view], can exist only between men" (2026). The ardour of this bond on the Duke's side is suggested when he calls his minister "the truest philosopher I have met" (11⁵ D-34^r) and exclaims—in phrases both nuanced by the use of "as" as subordinating conjunction, instead of the conventional "if"—that "I | would kiss thee, as were it not indecency" (11⁵ D-34^r) and that "As thou wert a woman, I | would marry thee" (11⁴ D-9^r).¹¹ As regards Alberto's sentiments, Pessoa's plot sketch

¹¹ This use of "as" in place of "if" as a subordinate conjunction is not found in Shakespeare's works, where instead the phrase "as it were", in line with a rhetorical convention of sixteenth-century English, serves to introduce a metaphor, as in *Measure for Measure*, III: 1, "Thou hast nor youth nor age | But as it were an after-dinner's sleepe" (SHAKESPEARE, 1986: 907).

in manuscript 11⁵ D-43^v informs that he, "ambitious & □, is | far more unstable & affection liable/ to wavering through affection than he him-|self thinks". Much of the play's dramatic tension, and indeed its intended pathos, appears to derive from Alberto's inner conflict between affection and ambition, and hence his irresolution in carrying out his plot to bring down his lord: Martines highlights his response to his sister Hermione's enquiry "What is the Duke to you?" (11⁵ D-17^r), in which, notwithstanding his ambition and zeal for revenge, he confesses an abiding, cerebral love, which—like the love of Pessoa's 1913 "supreme type" of man—supplants any physical love:

There are loves of the mind as of the body,
 And ~~ia~~ kinship doth ~~lie~~ lie between some minds...
~~That have no common~~
 Where bodies have no common source + bodies ^{parentage}
 + + and bodies

(11⁵ D-17^r)

A fragmentary monologue headed "Alberto", meanwhile, lays out the conflicted minister's remorse for his Machiavellian "exploitation of my real friendship | To him" (11⁵ D-84^r) and both suggests self-recrimination and emotional pain when Alberto asks:

Why should I
 Make stepstone even of me to mine own greatness,
 Tread mine own heart [...]

(11⁵ D-84^r)

And concludes that "I was a fool to bet | My friendship" (11⁵ D-84^v).¹²

Refashioning or repurposing the genre of Elizabethan-Jacobean era tragedy as a story of the suffering and mortal calamity of his own type of "superior man" would be consistent with Pessoa's common practice of praising or emulating a literary forebear with the ultimate objective of trumping their recognised achievement with an "improvement" or innovation of his own, or of refuting or inverting the philosophical, aesthetic, or political arguments they propose. At the same time, however, one needs to take account of inconsistencies in the definitions of this "superior man" across Pessoa's writings. While the 1913 model "superior man" may profitably enjoy "sublime friendship" with another man, the *Livro do Desassossego* attributes to

¹² There is no clear indication in the *Duke of Parma* manuscript corpus of how Alberto resolves his tortured ambivalence regarding his plot against the Duke, but the listing in Pessoa's Act V plot sequence summary (11⁵ D-44^r) of 'A[lberto]'s monologue of despair' confirms an unhappy conclusion. A dialogue headed "Act V. In the Forest" (11⁵ D-69^r) has a seemingly defeated Alberto confessing to a similarly broken and despondent Duke that: "There was ambition in me | But this to-day ^{yesterday} has seen ^{saw} has quite burnt ^{it} out..."

him a more radical discipline of affective disengagement. Sundry passages of the *Livro* indicate the contribution thereunto of *abdication*—the avoidance, wherever possible, of actions whose consequences might drag the perpetrator back into a state of reliance on, or surrender to, other humans or circumstances. In this context, it would make sense for the root of *The Duke of Parma's* tragedy to be not a sundered bond of chaste love between men, but a conflict between the Duke's personal belief in this abdication, and the forms of agency that are his obligation as feudal potentate. In other words, the need of this "superior man" to "renounce love as physical contact with women and as carnal, plebeian pleasure" and, instead, "embrace abstinence and chastity in pursuit of higher ends" (MARTINES, 2026) is absolute, not simply because sexual intercourse is a low, bestial response to frivolous urges, but because procreation is—along with murder and suicide—the most drastically consequential form of agency, and the one for which the Duke condemns his father (11⁵ D-5^r). Might the Duke's madness, and more specifically his obsessive, ultimately murderous revulsion against women and procreative sex, arise from the irreconcilability of his desire for abdication with his duties of governing and of producing an heir? Certainly, there would be profound and tragic irony in the story of an individual whose horror at his allotted task of procreation, and at its enslaving consequences, drives him to commit an equally consequential and enslaving act.

This diagnosis of the Duke's tragedy might offer an explanation for his disgust at erotic desire and its consummation, while not, however, excusing the misogynist scapegoating of women for the siren calls of his own repudiated lust, a shifting of blame encapsulated in one of Pessoa's better poetic conceits: "when there is a woman near, there is a skirt between us and our thoughts" (11⁵ D-5^v).¹³ The same theory does, however, possess at least two weaknesses. First, it would presuppose that, in *The Duke of Parma*, Pessoa was rather perversely attempting to construct a (neo-)Shakespearian tragedy—a genre whose plot is propelled by a series of "acts or omissions thoroughly expressive of the doer, characteristic deeds" (BRADLEY, 1949: 12)—around a protagonist who cleaves to a philosophy of inaction.¹⁴ Such an innovation would not be inconsistent with the grandeur of Pessoa's literary ambitions, and might also help account for his failure to complete the play, the sketches for which are notably short on dramatic incident. The theory's more serious weakness derives from the absence in these same sketches of any clear reference to fatherhood as dynastic duty impeding either abstinence or any other forms of abdication: rather, the Duke only informs that "I married when I was young, had | no children, pbecause

¹³ This passage of the typewritten manuscript bears longhand corrections, as follows: "when there is a woman near, ~~there is | whole future is like to be~~ is a skirt between us and our thoughts".

¹⁴ Bradley observes that while Shakespeare permits "accidents" a minor contribution to causality (for example, the Friar's message going astray in *Romeo and Juliet*), deeds "are the predominant factor" driving his tragedies, and moreover "these deeds are, for the most part, actions in the full sense of the word", in that they speak to the doers' character and beliefs (BRADLEY, 1949: 12).

God knows that" (11⁵D-5^v). In the same speech, his resentment and disgust for his father's sexual activity is motivated not by the burdensome duties he has inherited, but rather by an agonised dismay at his very existence in a world he considers foul and inexplicable: "the | world is evel, [...] man is wretched, woman base" (11⁵D-5^r). That something—whether external and circumstantial, or inherent to his own constitution—is frustrating his development into a "superior man" is clearly suggested by his lament that "[t]here is something imperial in me, but I cannot find the door | (way) to it" (11⁵D-5^r).

The Duke's obsessive denunciations of heterosexual coupling, his disdain for women, disgust at their bodies and sexuality, and horror at the power of erotic desire over his own thoughts make clear what and who he most blames for this. How much of this blame is justified is not clear from the sketches for the play: Pessoa's description of the "pure", "loving" and "intensely feminine" Duchess discredits the Duke's contention that all women are inherently lascivious and treacherous—and indeed, as Martines points out, the Duke admits that he calls his wife "whore" purely to offend her (11⁴D-95^r)—but whether or not the Duke's own sexual appetite is what prevents him from detaching from the material world and "enjoying his own superiority in perfect silence" is harder to determine. Placed in the contexts of Pessoa's literary oeuvre as a whole, and of his documented concern regarding his own failure to meet society's expectations of his sexual role, it is eminently reasonable to interpret *The Duke of Parma* as the tragedy of a man aspiring in vain to intellectual "greatness"; to a cerebral mode of existence that might possibly admit of chaste love between men, yet is undisturbed by the libido. The significance or "purpose" of the Duke's histrionic expressions of misogyny, however, remains moot. Pessoa's long-running project of a Shakespearian drama may have begun as a vindication of his misogynist convictions of the early-mid 1910s, only to become, later, a vehicle for exploring obsessive denunciations of women that "are not the author's" but that are either a corrosive symptom of the pressure on an asexual or queerly sexual man to avoid stigma and suspicion by settling down with a nice girl, or a similarly malign displacement onto a female Other of a man's fear and revulsion regarding his own sexual appetites.

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