From Florbela to Pessoa (in English):
Eight poems by Maria Lúcia Dal Farra with commentary

[De Florbela para Pessoa (em inglês):
Oito poemas de Maria Lúcia Dal Farra comentados]

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Keywords

Translation, Florbela Espanca, Fernando Pessoa, Imaginary encounters, Poetic dialogues.

Abstract

In 2015, *Pessoa Plural* published a set of poems by Maria Lúcia Dal Farra entitled *De Florbela para Pessoa, com amor* [From Florbela to Pessoa, with love] in which Florbela Espanca, the Portuguese poet, short story writer, and translator, addresses Fernando Pessoa from beyond the grave, suspecting him to be the elusive soul-mate she has been seeking throughout her life. Maria Lúcia structures her work around quotes from both authors, revisiting the themes that nurture most poetry—love, life, pain, and death—and provides a poignant portrayal of two of the most prominent voices of early 20th Portuguese literature. This translation (of her revised 2017 version) and the accompanying commentaries aim to invite reflection on the seemingly unlikely hypothesis that, despite their contrasting literary styles and lifestyles, their thematic preoccupations and personal philosophies often converge. Soul-mates? Perhaps not, but they are much closer kin than we might have imagined.

Palavras-chave

Tradução, Florbela Espanca, Fernando Pessoa, Encontros imaginários, Diálogos poéticos.

Resumo

Em 2015, *Pessoa Plural* publicou uma série de poemas de Maria Lúcia Dal Farra intitulados *De Florbela para Pessoa, com amor*, através dos quais a poeta, contista e tradutora Florbela Espanca, suspeitando que Fernando Pessoa poderia ser a elusiva alma gêmea que sempre procurava, escreve-lhe do Além. Maria Lúcia estrutura os poemas na base de citações pessoanas e florbelianas, revisitando alguns dos temas que mais nutrem a literatura – amor, vida, sofrimento e morte – oferecendo-nos um retrato pungente de duas das vozes mais sonantes da literatura portuguesa vintecentista. A intenção da tradução (da versão revista de 2017) e dos comentários é de suscitar uma reflexão sobre a hipótese aparentemente improvável de que, não obstante os seus estilos literários e de vida divergentes, as suas respectivas preocupações temáticas e filosofias pessoais não raras vezes convergem. Almas gêmeas? Quiçá não, embora parentes muito mais próximos do que poderíamos ter imaginado.

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Introduction

The literary reputations of Fernando Pessoa and Florbela Espanca depend more on their poetry than on their prose, and even today both remain far less known to readers outside the lusophone world than they deserve. Though more of Pessoa's work has now been translated into English and other major languages, that of Florbela lags far behind (GERRY, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c). Moreover, Maria Lúcia's own work—be it poetry, academic research, or literary criticism—is available primarily in Portuguese, notwithstanding its intercultural scope and relevance.

Unusually, in these poems, we find a writer (Maria Lúcia) writing about a writer (Florbela Espanca) who is writing to a writer (Fernando Pessoa) about what writers write about (such as life, love, pain, and death). Rather as an artist might use brush and paint, Maria Lúcia uses her own poetic skills and sensibilities, along with extensive quotations from Pessoa and Florbela—both direct and adapted—to create what Gilda SANTOS (2021) has called "a poetic love triangle of intertwined Florbelian and Pessoan verses."

Generally speaking, translators appreciate the opportunity to have access to the authors on whose texts they are working and usually (albeit not unanimously) regard the outcomes as positive. Inevitably, the commentaries accompanying the present translation revisit some of the material Maria Lúcia Dal Farra included in her prefatory essay to the poems when they were first published (DAL FARRA, 2015); these reflections were 'patched together' using fragments of conversations between us in 2018 and again in 2021, regarding not only the source of the quotations from Pessoa and Florbela that abound in these poems, but also what they reveal about the lives, philosophies, and thematic priorities of the two writers.

There seems little doubt that Florbela and Pessoa were aware of each other's existence (DAL FARRA, 2015: 118), not least because, for those who took an interest in literature at the time—whether writers, publishers, or readers—the appearance of the *Orpheu* journal in 1915 could hardly have gone unnoticed. Furthermore, young writers and intellectuals such as Alfredo Guisado, Américo Durão, and Mário Beirão, who already knew Pessoa and had gained admittance to his circle, were fellow students of Florbela's at Lisbon University.

Maria Lúcia intended these poems to read as if they were drafts of letters written *postmortem* by Florbela to initiate a dialogue with Pessoa. The Florbela she imagined is "already aware of the speculations and suspicions" regarding the possibility that their paths might have crossed and, being "an assiduous reader of Pessoa's work" (DAL FARRA, 2015: 125), she draws more often on his words, which she greatly admires, than on her own, which in real life Florbela often deprecated. Using phrases from his and her own works that evoke events in their own lives, the lives of those around them, and in the turbulent times in which they lived, Florbela's avatar provides the reader with an incisive and poignantly critical portrayal of

Pessoa, while Maria Lúcia looks over her shoulder, so to speak, challenging us to disentangle their braided biographical, literary, and philosophical orbits.

The patchwork structure of the poems is reminiscent of the *cento*, described by the poet, literary critic, and anthologist David LEHMAN (2006: 27) as a poem assembled using only quotations drawn from other poets. It is:

> […] a collage-poem composed of lines lifted from other sources—often, though not always, from great poets of the past […] [resembling] a quilt of discrete lines stitched together to make a whole […] The ancient Greeks assembled centos in homage to Homer, the Romans […] to Virgil. Ever since T. S. Eliot raided Elizabethan drama and 17th-century poetry for "The Waste Land", the collage has held a strong attraction for modern poets.

In at least three senses of the word, the poems presented here in English translation could be thought of as an extended *semi-cento*. I use the prefix "semi" advisedly because, first of all, these poems contain as much of Maria Lúcia's own voice and poetics as those of Pessoa and Florbela. Extending Lehman's textile analogy, it is as if a seamstress has constructed a patchwork by interspersing scraps of cloth from her own garments with the fabric she has recovered from other sources. Second, in addition to containing numerous quotes and near-quotes, the poems repeatedly allude to the minutiae that serendipitously link the hypothetically interwoven biographies of the poet-protagonists, rather like the filling and the lining that lie beneath the patterned surface of a patchwork quilt. Finally, in these epistolary fragments, neither the poetry nor the sewing is completely finished. At some point in the future, more patches may be added, introducing unfamiliar fabrics, and any remaining loose threads hidden from view. Indeed, these eight poems could be thought of as a work in progress: much research still remains to be done on the lives and works of Pessoa and Florbela, the findings of which will be a source of new materials (excuse the pun) to be incorporated into future missives.

The two poets may not, after all, have met in life and, in these poems, seem yet to meet in the afterlife. Despite being a prolific correspondent, Pessoa may decide to ignore Florbela's epistolary provocations. The two poets may continue to circle each other, as if each were riding their own Lisbon tramcar, running on separate routes that suddenly diverge, then run parallel and occasionally intersect, obliged to obey tracks and timetables deliberately designed to avoid collisions, with each poet yearning to defy the forces that conspire to keep them apart.

ANNEX

A poem-by-poem commentary

The commentaries that follow were not written with the intention of deconstructing Maria Lúcia Dal Farra's eight poems so as to explicate every contextual, intertextual or interpersonal reference. Neither was the aim to interrogate the creative process through which she wrote these poems, nor even to justify choices made by the translator. The main purpose of the commentaries is to clarify for readers less familiar with the language, lives, and literary works of the poems' main protagonists, some of the key references they might otherwise have found obscure or incomprehensible and, in doing so, allow them to explore with Maria Lúcia a very particular and influential slice of the early 20th century Portuguese literary scene.

To distinguish the historical figure from the Florbela whom Maria Lúcia has imagined, the latter's name appears in italics. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

Preliminaries – Presenting Florbela

For those unfamiliar with the details of Florbela Espanca's short and turbulent life, it reads rather like the plot of one of the romantic novels she would later come to translate. She was born in 1894 in rural Portugal, the illegitimate daughter of a commercial photographer and antiquarian who was also among the country's first itinerant exhibitors of silent films. Notwithstanding her inauspicious beginnings and somewhat bohemian upbringing, she was one of the first generation of Portuguese girls to attend secondary school and, at that time, one of the very few to attend university. In defiance of the prevailing mores, she married three times in a little over 10 years, published several collections of poetry that generated not a little notoriety due to their confessional and erotic tone, wrote two volumes of short-stories and translated ten foreign novels into Portuguese.[1]

Florbela's emotional relationships with men never seem to have been simple. From her father she expected greater family stability: both she and Apeles, his son from the same extramarital relationship, were raised by João Espanca's wife who, being unable to conceive, tolerated her husband's infidelities. While Florbela's father spared no expense in providing for his children's care and education, he made no move to have his paternity legally recognised. It was in this somewhat unstable environment that sister and younger brother grew up together in great emotional complicity and, as Florbela got older, it was Apeles who increasingly became the benchmark by which she would assess her suitors.

[1] For details of this neglected dimension of Florbela's creative work, see GERRY (2012; 2018).

Florbela yearned for her Prince Charming to appear so that her future life could become more settled and the material and emotional constraints on her literary ambitions removed. She had high expectations of her lovers, and was quick to desist when they proved unable (or, in rare cases, unwilling) to match them. When her first serious attachment—a holiday romance—ended, she wed the childhood friend whom everyone had expected her to marry. By the time she entered university in 1917, the relationship was effectively over and, in 1920, she began an affair with António Guimarães, whom she married in 1921. In 1924 Florbela left him to live with Mário Lage, soon to become her third husband.

In Poem I, Florbela describes herself as also being "no longer a sister to anyone."[2] In 1927, her brother Apeles, following the unexpected death of his fiancée, was killed when his Navy seaplane crashed into the River Tagus with such force that neither his body nor the aircraft were ever recovered. Devastated, Florbela mourned in the only way she found possible: by writing. Eschewing poetry, and suspending work on *O Dominó Preto* [*The Black Domino*], chronologically her first collection of short stories, she composed in just a few short months the eight *contos* of her collection *As Máscaras do Destino* [*The Masks of Destiny*], a complex enfabulation of the rise and demise of her brother in which she, Apeles, and Milady Death—a figure to be cherished rather than feared—repeatedly appear.

The last few years of Florbela's life were spent translating foreign novels into Portuguese and readying what would be her last collection of poems for publication. Having suffered from poor physical and mental health throughout her adult life, she died from an overdose of barbiturates on her 36th birthday. With the publication of her remaining poetry and prose, Florbela's work gradually gained acceptance as a key element in the canon of 20th century Portuguese literature and has provided extremely fertile ground for academic research, both in Portugal and Brazil.

[2] Florbela's sonnet "In memoriam", dedicated to Apeles, ends with the couplet "Eu fui na vida a irmã de um só Irmão | E já não sou a irmã de ninguém mais!" [*I was in life the sister of one Brother only | and now I am the sister of nobody else!*"] (ESPANCA, 2013: 128).

De Florbela para Pessoa. Com amor	***From Florbela to Pessoa. With love***
Poem I	
No tempo em que festejavam o dia dos meus anos eu era infeliz e já estava morta. Filha ilegítima de pai incógnita, irmã de ninguém mais, nunca (ao volante do Chevrolet pela estrada de Cascais) tive direito a truques ou a psicografias.	[*At the time when they were celebrating the day on* *which I was born* *I was far from happy* *and I was already dead.* *Illegitimate daughter, enigmatic father, sister to* *no-one else* *never* *(driving the Chevrolet home on the road from Cascais)* *did I have the right to use tricks* *or automatic writing.*
Nesta negra cisterna em que me afundo prendi espinhos sem tocar nas rosas. Caro me cobraram a audácia mas nem Crowley conheci. Perdi-me para me encontrar e por fim achei-me	*In this black pit into which I find myself sinking,* *I've grasped every thorn* *yet never touched a rose. My daring cost me* *dear without needing to* *make Crowley's acquaintance. I went missing* *to seek out the real me* *ultimately finding*
ao pé de uma parede sem portas.	*myself before a wall with no way out.*
Quis amar, amar – e amei perdidamente mas por dois maridos seguidos (e desigualmente) fui dobrada	*I wanted to love, to love* *—and did so—with abandon* *but two of my husbands in tandem* *in quite diverse ways* *double-crossed me*
à moda do Porto.	à la mode d'*Oporto.*]

Poem I. Just a little trickery and deceit

In these poems, Florbela Espanca, as imagined by Maria Lúcia Dal Farra, is addressing Fernando Pessoa from beyond the grave. However, it is not clear *a priori* if she is doing so at some point during the 5-year hiatus between their deaths (December 1930 and November 1935, respectively), or is writing to an already-deceased Pessoa whose celestial whereabouts she has yet to ascertain.

In Poem I, Maria Lúcia first signals that it is *Florbela*'s birthday, which also happens to be the day on which she died. We will hear these words again, for Álvaro de Campos—one of Pessoa's main literary heteronyms—begins several verses in his poem "Aniversário" [*Birthday*] with the same phrase: "No tempo em que festejavam o dia dos meus anos…" [*At the time when they were celebrating the day on which I was*

born …]. Here, however, it is followed not by Pessoa's macabrely cheerful words "Eu era feliz, e ninguém estava morto" (PESSOA, 2013: 131) [*I was full of happiness and nobody was dead*], but by *Florbela*'s grim self-portrait: she is unhappy (as usual), illegitimate (as ever), grieving (latterly)… and (finally) dead.

Suddenly, we find ourselves heading out of Lisbon in a borrowed Chevrolet. The setting is also borrowed: it comes from "Ao volante do Chevrolet pela estrada de Cintra" [*At the wheel of a Chevrolet on the road to Sintra*], the opening line of another Álvaro de Campos poem (PESSOA, 2014: 214-216), which in turn echoes *O Mysterio da Estrada de Cintra* [*The Mystery of the Road to Sintra*], the novel co-written by Eça de QUEIROZ and Ramalho ORTIGÃO that caused a sensation when serialised in the Lisbon press in 1870. To set the scene, however, rather than climbing into the hills northeast of the capital, the car must head westwards along the coast to a beauty spot near the resort of Cascais where the suicide of a visiting foreign celebrity is to be faked.

Florbela is bemoaning the fact that success seems to have come more easily to poets like Pessoa, either because they used sleight of hand or because she lacked their courage and impetuosity.[3] Though outwardly reserved and self-absorbed, Pessoa was not averse to using trickery to attain his objectives, be they aesthetic or sentimental. For example, with the sole intention of stirring up public interest, he confirmed to the press that the English occultist Aleister Crowley, whom he was eager to cultivate, had indeed disappeared while visiting Cascais. He also used deception (and not a little emotional manipulation) in his more intimate affairs, infiltrating Álvaro de Campos and another of his literary heteronyms, A. A. Crosse, into his letters to Ophélia Queiroz, identifying them as friends whose written testimonials might persuade her parents to consent to the marriage. Pessoa may even have believed that all poetry was essentially an exercise in trickery. In "Autopsicografia" (PESSOA, 2013: 48), he characterises poetry as a form of "sincere pretence" that provides its audience with pleasurable relief akin to *Schadenfreude*: poets suffer a double dose of distress, for while readers are spared the anguish of directly feeling the pain that writers experience, the latter—as they compose—are obliged to relive the event that first stimulated their poetic imagination.

Comparing herself again to Pessoa—and notwithstanding the daring her real-life counterpart had so often shown in the face of the established bourgeois views on women, morality, marriage, and suicide—*Florbela* ruefully concludes that she had not needed to meet anyone quite as eccentric as Crowley for her life to be dogged by ill-luck, and that every time she summoned up the courage to affirm herself, she paid a heavy price. To express metaphorically how fate seemed to target Florbela for unjust treatment, Maria Lúcia repurposes lines from "Sou eu!" [*It's me!*] from the *Charneca em Flor* [*The Heath in Bloom*] collection (ESPANCA, 2013: 132):

[3] The phrase "truques e psicografias" [*tricks and automatic writing*] refers not only to Pessoa's use of heteronyms but also his belief that spirits were responsible for some of his works.

Sou eu! Sou eu! A que nas mãos ansiosas	[*It's me! It's me! She whose hands so eagerly closed,*
Prendeu da vida, assim como ninguém	*More often than anybody else's did,*
Os maus espinhos sem tocar nas rosas!	*Round life's sharpest thorns, yet never touched a rose!*]

Poem I then employs the opening lines of the iconic sonnet "Amar!" [*To love!*][4] (ESPANCA, 2013: 115) to suggest that by losing herself in love—by loving *perdidamente* [*with abandon*], Florbela aimed to fill the emotional void that had been preventing her from discovering her true identity.[5]

Yet *Florbela* refuses to wait for her fate to be sealed. She plans to escape to somewhere beyond the dark pits and blank walls with which she has had to contend in life. By echoing the transcendent and more hopeful last line of the same sonnet, Maria Lúcia draws attention to Florbela's pantheistic belief that we can take death, both literally and metaphorically, into our own hands: it provides the opportunity for the ultimate self-affirmation, a voyage of self-discovery, in short, a transfiguration (ESPANCA, 2013: 115).

E se um dia hei de ser pó, cinza e nada	[*And if one day I'm to be dust, ashes, nothing at all*
Que seja a minha noite uma alvorada,	*Let a dawning be created out of that nightfall*
Que me saiba perder... p'ra me encontrar.	*Let me learn to be lost … so myself I may find.*]

In these lines, Florbela's impassioned advocacy of suicide resonates strongly; as early as 1916, in a letter to her friend Júlia Alves, she had written of her admiration for those who had the strength to "simply, dispassionately, bid farewell to life" (ESPANCA, 1986: 152), a theme revisited in "The passion of Manuel Garcia", her *conto* about the impossible, obsessive love of a stonemason for a nobleman's daughter:

> Oh, a medonha coragem dos que vão arrancando de si, dia a dia, a doçura da saudade do que passou, o encanto novo da esperança do que há-de vir, e que serenamente, desdenhosamente, sem saudades nem esperanças, partem um dia sem saber para onde, aventureiros da morte, emigrantes sem eira nem beira, audaciosos esquadrinhadores de abismos mais negros e mais misteriosos que todos os abismos escancarados deste mundo!
>
> (ESPANCA, 2015: 166)

> [*Oh, the awesome courage of those who* (…) *renounce the tender memories of what has gone before and the new delights of what may come to pass, and serenely, contemptuously, with neither regret nor hope, one day take their leave without knowing where they may be going, venturers in the land of the dead, wanderers with neither hearth nor home, travellers with the temerity to cross chasms darker and more mysterious than the most yawning abyss the world can offer*.]

[4] The first lines of the sonnet "Amar!" have become well-known throughout the lusophone world:

"Eu quero amar, amar perdidamente! | Amar só por amar: Aqui... além... | Mais Este e Aquele, o Outro e toda a gente… | Amar! Amar! E não amar ninguém!" [*I want to love, love with total abandon!* | *Love just for love's sake, love hither and yon…* | *First this one, then that one, then the other ones, all at random…* | *To love! To love! And yet to love no-one!*].

[5] Maria Lúcia also chose *Perdidamente* as the title for her edition of Florbela's love letters to António Guimarães (ESPANCA, 2008).

Poem I ends with an extended metaphor in which disappointments, both amorous and gastronomic, intersect. Throughout the poem "Dobrada à moda de Porto" [*Tripe in the style of Porto*], Pessoa's heteronym Álvaro de Campos repeats the name of this key item in the cuisine of Portugal's second city. Looking at life as one might peruse a restaurant menu, he orders a helping of love, but the "waiter", whom we must assume is Destiny, serves him tripe instead. "Não comi, não pedi outra coisa, paguei a conta, | E vim passear para toda a rua", says de Campos [*I didn't eat it, I ordered nothing else | I just paid, left, and went strolling round the streets*]. Incredulous that Destiny could be so doubly cruel as to dash his hopes and then laugh in his face, he asks himself: "Mas, se eu pedi amor, porque é que me trouxeram | Dobrada à moda do Porto fria?" (PESSOA, 2014: 346-347) [*But since I had ordered love, why was it then that I was brought | tripe* à la mode d'Oporto*, and cold at that?*]. *Florbela* then adds a further layer to this metaphor by turning it into a pun. She is able to associate tripe with treachery—the latter being a dish that, at least according to tradition, is best served cold—because the word "dobrada" is also the past participle of the verb "to double cross". *Florbela* can thus claim that her second and third husbands (who both hailed from the North) deceived her in the Oporto style, both proving unpalatable, as neither could meet her exacting standards.

Poem II

Mas tu, Fernando, mesmo
te afundando na garganta do diabo
(de Miss Jaeger?)
– sabiamente te ocultaste por baixo da
gabardine e do teu oblíquo guarda-chuva,
e atento seguiste p'ra além doutro oceano,
ocultismos adentro.
Sempre te restou intacto e seco
(ó Pacheco!)
o digno fato negro de mago
das palavras
e de cavalheiro das moças.

Mesmo dos teus flagrantes delitros
fizeste humor. Mas foi
num desses copos que afogaste Ophélia.
E as outras –
Mary (com quem lias Burns)
Daisy, Cecily, Chloé
a noiva em cio do epitalâmio
Lídia, Neera, Maria
a *Monster Escarlate*
e mesmo *as invertidas* (como tu dizias)

[*But you, Fernando, even*
when you found yourself landing in the devil's maw
(Or Miss Jaeger's?)
—very wise it was of you to hide yourself away
beneath a gabardine and your uptilted umbrella,
steadily proceeding beyond that other ocean,
occult knowledge at the ready.
It was always kept dry, so spick and span, Pacheco,
old man
that sober black suit you wore as wizard
of the written word
and gentleman to all the girls.

You even turned your most flagrante *of* litres
into jokes. But it was
in your cups that you drowned your Ophelia.
And the others—
Mary (with whom you read Burns)
Daisy, Cecily, Chloé
the bride-to-be, rehearsing her part so wantonly
Lydia, Neera, Maria
the Scarlet Monster
and even the inverts *(as I think you used to call them)*

– todas têm-te em alto apreço.
Mas o que foi feito de Freddie, o Baby?!

Ignoramos, Campos. Somos estrangeiros
onde quer que
estejamos.

—all those girls hold you in such high esteem.
But whatever became of Freddie the Baby?!

Nobody really knows, Campos. We're all foreigners
wherever
we happen to be.]

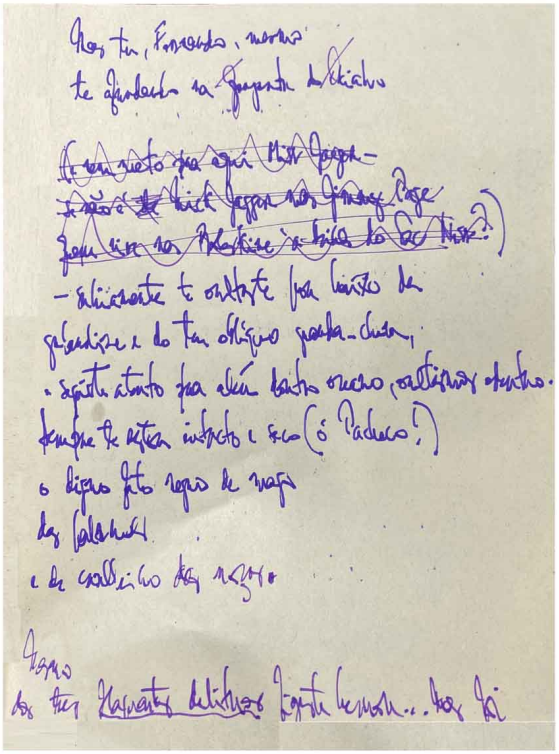

Fig. 1. The opening of Poem II. The deleted lines, with references to Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page, and Loch Ness (where Aleister Crowley had his castle), appeared in Maria Lúcia Dal Farra's original version of these poems, published in *Pessoa Plural*, n.º 7 (2015).

Poem II. Passions, penchants, and prohibitions

Here, we meet a series of women who, despite holding Pessoa "in high esteem", may have become as much his victims as Ophélia did. The list begins with "Miss Jaeger", a German *femme fatale* the poet briefly met, moves on to Ophélia Queiroz, the love of his life, and finishes with some of the female characters who are scattered across his poems, and who may represent women whose lives had intersected his.

Hanni Larissa Jaeger came to Lisbon in 1930 in the company of the English occultist Aleister Crowley. In the cosmology of Thalema, the religion he founded, Hanni served as "The Scarlet Woman", the earthly avatar of Babalon, symbolising the universal feminine principle, participating in the cult's key rites with such enthusiasm that Crowley nicknamed her "The Scarlet Monster". Pessoa was immediately attracted to Hanni (DAL FARRA, 2015: 121) and may have been her partner in some of Crowley's erotic rituals (LOPES, 2008: 62). Understandably,

Florbela asks herself whether Pessoa was more in danger from Hanni's welcoming embrace than from the Devil's Maw, the tidal grotto near Cascais where the English magus was to fake his own disappearance as a publicity stunt.

Most of the other names in *Florbela*'s list refer to women who appear, fleetingly or repeatedly, in Pessoan poetry. Those most frequently mentioned include Lydia[6] (addressed in ten of Ricardo Reis's poems), Chloe[7] (invoked twice, as well as appearing in two by Álvaro de Campos, and in one by Pessoa 'himself') and Neera[8] (mentioned in seven Ricardian odes). Once transposed from the Horatian universe of modest maidens and confident courtesans that gave birth to them, these three, separately or together, become a metaphysical presence in the poetry of Ricardo Reis, bearing silent witness to his meditations. Others, such as Mary,[9] Daisy[10] and Cecily,[11] can be found elsewhere in Pessoa's poems.

Lydia and Daisy are two of the women to whom Ricardo Reis addresses his poem "A vida é para os inconscientes […] e o consciente é para os mortos" (PESSOA, 1993a: 134) [*Life is for the unmindful* (…) *and mindfulness is for the dead*], a poem whose paradoxical opening provides a succinct expression of Pessoa's "philosophy of acceptance". His strategy for living resonates uncannily with the personal philosophy of self-interested submission at which Florbela had hinted, many years before, notably in "A oferta do destino" (ESPANCA, 2011: 239-240) [*The gift of destiny*] and later in her short story "O resto é perfume" (ESPANCA, 2015: 145-154) [*The rest is*

[6] Pessoa also sees Lydia (a Roman courtesan) and Chloe (a timid maiden, perhaps being groomed for the profession) as classical objects of desire, invested by the poetic imagination of Ricardo Reis with just enough verisimilitude for his readers to believe they really existed (PESSOA, 1990a: 417).

[7] In the *Odes* of Horace so admired by Pessoa, the name appears four times, possibly representing successive stages in one woman's life as she transitions from a girl "inexperienced in the world of men to a mature mistress who plays the dominant role in her love affairs" (McCUNE, 2016: 573).

[8] Reputedly, Neera was also a courtesan. She is mentioned in various versions of "Olho os campos, Neera" (PESSOA, 2020: 22, 66, 140) [*I look at the fields, Neera*], "Quero, Neera, que os teus lábios laves na nascente tranquila" (PESSOA, 2020: 33) [*I want you, Neera, to bathe your lips in that languid spring*], and in the two versions of "O mar jaz; gemem em segredo os ventos" (PESSOA, 2020: 18, 49) [*The sea is in repose; winds moan under their breath*], among others (PESSOA, 2020: 45, 50, 101).

[9] The name "Mary" (as opposed to Maria) rarely appears in Pessoa's writings: once with plainly religious connotations in a poem in English in his collection *The Mad Fiddler*, and once in "Sentir tudo em todas as maneiras" [*Feel everything in every way*] from "A Passagem das Horas" (PESSOA, 1993a: 26) [*The Passing of the Hours*].

[10] In the last of Pessoa's *Three Sonnets*, which begins "Olha, Daisy, quando eu morrer…" [*Look, Daisy, when I die…*], Álvaro de Campos reminisces about a youth who may or may not have been the same Freddie, describing him as "aquele pobre rapazito | que me deu tantas horas tão felizes" (PESSOA, 2013: 13) [*that little boy | who gave to me more hours of happiness than I can say*].

[11] In the same sonnet, she is described to Daisy as "essa estranha Cecily | Que acreditava que eu seria grande" (PESSOA, 2013: 13) [*that eccentric girl Cecily | Who was so convinced that I'd be famous*]. Moreover, Pessoa himself, in Poem 21 of his *English Poetry*, expresses the hope that, against all the odds, a nun called Cecily might see fit to include him in her prayers (PESSOA, 1995: 368).

perfume].[12] Maria Manuela VALE (1988: 72-82) explains Pessoa's stoic stance of principled passivity, as evidenced in his Ricardo Reis poems, as follows:

> O Amor, como a vida, é regido pelo Fado. Para o fruir assume a máscara da "inconsciência", da distracção, construindo uma forma de "estar" misto de estoicismo-epicurismo, gozando a liberdade que o Destino lhe permite gozar, evitando sabiamente o sofrimento, sabendo a ataraxia, condição essencial de felicidade.
>
> [*Love is governed, as is life, by fate. To experience either, we must don the mask of 'unmindfulness', or rather [conscious or mindful] distraction, and construct a way of 'being' that blends stoicism and epicureanism, by which we may enjoy the liberty our destiny allows us, prudently avoid suffering, and attain ataraxia [equanimity], the essential condition of happiness.*]

As an epigraph to the *Máscaras do Destino* stories which she dedicated to her recently-deceased brother (ESPANCA, 2015: 113), Florbela chose a quotation from the Roman emperor and stoic philosopher MARCUS AURELIUS (1908: 73): "Several grains of incense, all destined to burn, are cast upon the same altar. One grain falls sooner, another later; but what difference does that make to them?" Seemingly, Florbela shared Pessoa's view that happiness depends on the serenity with which we bear the burdens Destiny imposes on us: by being true to ourselves and to what is good in each of us, we can be sure of leading a good life and, when our allotted time is over, we need have no fear of what awaits us.

Towards the end of her list of Pessoa's female acquaintances, *Florbela* asks about the fate of one remaining character. Though his gender remains unspecified and he shares Pessoa's pet-name for Ophélia,[13] "Freddie the Baby" appears to be to an adolescent male. *Florbela* quotes Pessoa's words to answer her own rhetorical question: "nobody really knows" Freddie's whereabouts, adding enigmatically that "Ignoramos […] Somos estrangeiros onde quer que estejamos" [*(w)e're all foreigners wherever we happen to be*].[14] However, the mysterious Freddie had already made his debut as early as 1916 in a parenthetical aside towards the close of "A Passagem das horas" (PESSOA, 1993a: 26) [*The passage of the hours*] when Álvaro de Campos reminisces over past lovers, both male and female (CASTRO, 2008: 243). Using masculine adjectival endings, the poet explains Freddie's nickname as follows: "Eu

[12] António José da Silva Pinto—writer, critic, Balzac's translator, and editor of Cesário Verde's poetry, was a favourite of Florbela. Her adaptation of his oriental parable describes her lifelong quest for a soulmate (ESPANCA, 2015: 240), and in her *conto* "The rest is perfume", it is the dead who hold all the secrets of life, and the living who are mere epiphenomena of those who have passed on.

[13] *Bebé* [Baby] was the nickname Pessoa used most frequently with Ophélia and may have had something to do with to their age difference, she being only 19 and he 31 when they first met. They also favoured diminutives such as *Ofelinha* and *Nando* or *Fernandinho* and, in 1929, when the relationship was briefly resuscitated, Pessoa sometimes called Ophélia "Vespa" [*wasp*] or "Fera" [*wild thing*], reflecting perhaps the confidence and assertiveness she had acquired in their years apart.

[14] The origin of the phrase is a 1932 poem by Ricardo Reis (PESSOA, 2020: 115).

chamava-te Baby porque eras louro, branco e eu amava-te" [*I called you Baby because you were blond, white and I loved you*]. Then, with barely a pause for breath, he admits to being unable to count "quantas imperatrizes por reinar e princesas destronadas" [*(h)ow many yet-to-be empresses and deposed princesses*] Freddie had been to him, this time deploying female nouns in a seeming attempt to effeminise Freddie. Campos then recalls Mary—beside whom he read Burns and dreamed of an uncomplicated suburban life—a nostalgic indulgence he abruptly dispels by rebuking Freddie, Mary, and the others for never giving him a second thought, and lamenting how little impact he had had on their lives (PESSOA, 2014: 136-137).

Completing *Florbela*'s role-call are all the nameless "inverts"[15] Pessoa has ever known. He used this term in a social and a sexual sense, firstly applying it to women who challenged the "natural" order of gender relations by abandoning their role as hunters of husbands, choosing to earn their own livings in professional spheres monopolised by men. He also applied it specifically to lesbians who, whatever their role in the division of labour, seemed to be colluding in a broader sapphic rejection of male tutelage and companionship (PESSOA, 1990b: 425).[16]

> Primeiro, a mulher desvia-se do seu papel normal de captar o homem. Feito isso, ela já está invertida, está homem. Safo, por exemplo, caindo no erro terrível e imoralíssimo, de, sendo mulher, escrever versos, ficou *ipso facto* invertida; uma vez invertida, tomou-se psiquicamente homem.
>
> [*First a woman departs from her normal role of capturing a man. Once this has occurred, she is already inverted, already a man. Sappho, for example, committed the awful and most immoral error of writing verses, even though she was a woman, making her* ipso facto *an invert; and once an invert, she became psychically a man*.]

Pessoa further asserted that "no woman has a right to be a sexual invert; in a woman, that is degeneracy", suggesting that he considered male homosexuality, broadly speaking, a legitimate expression of superior aesthetics and its female counterpart a deplorable sexual deviation.

Elsewhere, Pessoa even used the concept of "inversion" to portray his own sexuality, claiming that in his case the process was incomplete "uma inversão sexual fruste", and that he had "um temperamento feminino com uma inteligência masculina" (PESSOA, 1966a: 28) [*a feminine temperament and a masculine intelligence*]. In matters of the heart, he admitted a strong preference for passivity over proactivity: "sempre gostei de ser amado, e nunca de amar" [*I always liked being loved,*

[15] The early psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) viewed homosexuality as an "inversion" of cerebrally-imprinted gender traits occurring before birth, causing some males to feel they are women "trapped" in a man's body, and some women to believe they are men "occupying" a female form.

[16] By opting to work for a living, females lose sight of their fundamental purpose—says Pessoa—prostitutes being the only women not "spoiled" by working for a living (PESSOA, 1990a: 425).

but never enjoyed loving back] he admitted, though the intensity of his courtship of Ophélia suggests his self-diagnosis was somewhat inaccurate.

Taken at face value, Pessoa's attitude to life and love would appear to diverge totally from Florbela's credo of loving whomsoever she wanted, whenever she wanted, unconstrained by social convention and without becoming anyone's property. Yet she and Pessoa were stubbornly averse to moderating their single-minded commitment to their art, both suffered bouts of physical ill health, and endured periods of profound depression and torpor that deeply marked their psyches. Thus, their respective psychologies appear to converge as much as they diverge, with Pessoa's pensive passivity and Florbela's hyperactive hedonism leading inexorably from their own particular points of departure to the same destination of regret and frustration: patient Ibis, gazing out to sea, and the restless eagle forever soaring into an empty sky.

Poem III

No dia em que festejavam os meus anos
festejam
hoje
a minha morte.
Já não ouço passos no segundo andar, estou
sozinha com o universo inteiro.
Oh inexplicável horror
de saber que esta vida é a verdadeira!
Qualquer que seja ela
é melhor que nada!
Perante a única realidade que é
o mistério de tudo
(e tudo é certo, logo que o não seja)
confesso-te, Nando:
sempre te esperei.

Emissário de um Rei desconhecido
passaste (entanto)
ao largo desta Princesa Desencanto,
órfã e órfica!
Jamais vieste ter comigo naquela
rua da Baixa
e entretanto cruzaste por mim
que vim ao mundo só para te achar –

embora na vida nunca me encontrasses!

[*On the very day when they used to celebrate my birth*
nowadays
it's
my death instead.
I can no longer hear footsteps on the floor above, I'm all alone with the entire universe.
Oh, the inexplicable horror
of knowing that this *life is the real one!*
Whatever it may be
it's better than nothing!
Faced with the only reality, namely that
everything is a mystery
(and everything's certain, so long as that's ne'er the case
I must admit, Nando:
I was always waiting.

Messenger of some King as yet unidentified,
past me you went (although)
at a good distance from Princess Disenchantment,
the orphaned oracle!
You didn't seek me out and approach me on that
city-centre street
nevertheless, our paths did overlap,
I, who only came into this world to find you—

though in life you'd never meet me!]

Poem III. Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?

At the start of Poem III, *Florbela* hints that she now inhabits a realm of death quite distinct from the Christian heaven, where she finds herself in the company of those for whom she has greater affection than those she has left behind.[17] To symbolise what might seem *Florbela*'s isolation, Maria Lúcia evokes a building quietening as its residents prepare for sleep, as described in the Álvaro de Campos poem "Começa a haver meia-noite, e a haver sossego" (PESSOA, 2013: 162) [*Midnight is drawing near, and its quietness too*]. And yet *Florbela*'s sense of being "sozinha com o universo inteiro" [*all on my own* with *the entire universe* (my emphasis)], a quote from the self-same poem, contains a paradox, combining feelings of isolation (from much of humanity and its values) with an intense sense of belonging (to a much vaster cosmic scheme of things). While this conflicted state of being is often present in Florbela's poetry, it can also be found in her prose, particularly in the *Máscaras do Destino* stories, throughout which her thinly-disguised brother Apeles or one of her *alter egos* appear as lone, almost heroic, figures struggling to discover how to frustrate the huge forces life has ranged against them.

Florbela admits that while the life we are all fated to live is no illusion, it is "better than nothing," a cliché that conceals a more nuanced subtext: life may well be better than the *nothingness* the atheist predicts will follow death, but the afterlife as perceived by the pantheist is infinitely preferable. She also understands that life will remain a mystery in the fullest Orphean sense of the term unless and until we discover the deeper truth to which only initiates are privy. Her words come from the opening lines of a poem by Pessoa's Álvaro de Campos: "Ah, perante esta única realidade, que é o mistério, | Perante esta única realidade terrível — a de haver uma realidade" (PESSOA, 1992: 281-282) [*Ah, faced with this one reality, that after all it's all a mystery, | Faced with the one awful reality that reality does exist*], thoughts that are also echoed in the opening line of Theme 2 in Pessoa's "Fausto" (PESSOA, 1988). With words from another poetic fragment (PESSOA, 1956: 107), *Florbela* adds a proviso, employing the word "certo" with seemingly deliberate ambiguity to capture not only the truism that all is well until it is not, but also the philosophically more challenging notion that the precondition for certainty is its total absence.

Sim, tudo é certo logo que o não seja,	[*Yes, everything's certain, so long as that's ne'er the case*
Amar, teimar, verificar, descrer –	*Loving, resisting, proving, disagreeing—*
Quem me dera um sossego à beira-ser	*What I'd give for a calmer edge to my being*
Como o que à beira-mar o olhar deseja.	*The sort that, at the ocean's edge, our eyes yearn to embrace.*]

17. Florbela speaks of "Amigos vivos que me morreram, amigos mortos cheios de vida" [living friends who are dead to me, and dead friends full of life] in her "Carta da herdade" [*A Letter from the farm*], published in 1930 (ESPANCA, 2002: 81).

Also, by describing herself as an "órfã e órfica" [*orphaned oracle*], *Florbela* adds a few more scraps of personal information reflecting both the fractured family environment in which she grew up, and the mysticism that underpins much of her writings. Surprisingly, perhaps, taking "orphaned" in the widest and "oracular" in the fullest sense of the terms, this epithet fits Pessoa as well as it does Florbela.

Florbela's biological mother left following the birth of a second child, and died young; her stepmother was divorced by Florbela's father, who only legally recognised his paternity long after his daughter's death; and her younger brother Apeles, her only sibling, whom she considered her "alma gêmea" [*twin soul*], predeceased her. Moreover, by describing herself as "órfica" *Florbela* suggesting she is the equal of any of the writers associated with the avant-garde and exclusively male *Orpheu,* the literary periodical in which Pessoa played such a vital role, and whose existence—albeit ephemeral—was pivotal to Portuguese modernism. The same term also identifies *Florbela* with the rites and mysteries through which Orpheus, the poet and musician of ancient myth, sought to reconcile the physical and spiritual aspects of humanity and gain the power of prophecy—aspirations with which Florbela and Pessoa would have readily identified.

As for Pessoa's family background, when he was five years old, his father fell victim to tuberculosis, and six months later his younger brother died. He was little more than seven years old when his mother remarried, and he spent the best part of the next ten years in South Africa as the new member of a family he hardly knew. Pessoa's attachment to the mystical arts is well-documented, his interests ranging from astrology and spiritualism, through esotericism and occultism, pantheism and paganism, to rosicrucianism and freemasonry. He believed himself a medium, practiced automatic writing, wrote extensively on the occult, and translated into Portuguese some of the key works of the theosophical movement.

It remains unclear—not to mention hotly disputed—to what extent these unconventional micro-contexts contributed to Pessoa's and Florbela's respective and disparate personalities. Yet it should not surprise us that, in the vortex of social and cultural change that constituted their meso- and macro-contexts, the aesthetics of conservative modernists (such as Pessoa) and radical romantics (such as Florbela) might overlap to some extent. Nor should we find it unusual, in a world of uncertainty and rapidly shifting paradigms, that mysticism—albeit more pronounced in Pessoa's than in Florbela's writings—might inform and infuse the work of artists whose perspectives, in all other respects, diverged.

Despite her own mystical tendencies, Florbela knows only too well that prophesies and real-world outcomes rarely coincide. To illustrate the arbitrariness pervading our lives, she adapts the first line of a poem by Pessoa's Álvaro de Campos, who recalls being stopped in the street by a beggar whose distress had given him pause for thought: "Cruzou por mim, veio ter comigo, numa rua da Baixa" (PESSOA, 2013: 174) [*Our paths crossed, he just came up to me, in a street in*

downtown Lisbon]. Her choice of words is an implicit reprimand to Pessoa for having the time to converse with beggars, but none to devote to her, whose sole *raison d'être* had ever been to meet him. Further reinforcing the idea that time, place and intent rarely coincide to produce an outcome other than that which Destiny ordains, *Florbela* wonders—as Pessoa himself had in the first of what he called his "intersectionist" poems (PESSOA, 2006: 38)—if she may be no more than a figment of his imagination, conjured up, kept alive, but never actually encountered. Thus, Poem III ends with words recycled from Florbela's *Livro de Mágoas* sonnet "Eu…"(ESPANCA, 2012a: 85) [*I…*]:

Sou talvez a visão que Alguém sonhou, Alguém que veio ao mundo p'ra me ver, E que nunca na vida me encontrou!	[*I may be a vision that someone else dreamed,* *Someone who came into the world just to see me,* *And who never met me in life, so it seems!*]

Poem IV

Prince Charmant, vi-te nas névoas da manhã quando ias de carro prô Lumiar. Seguias (recordas tal estranha geografia?) para o Pombal e para a Índia,	[*Prince Charming,* *one misty morn I saw you from afar* *when you were on the tram to Lumiar.* *You were heading (do you recall how foreign the geography* *was?) first to Pombal and then* *to India,*
e eu para a minha Conchinchina. Ah, as malhas que a República tece! Comigo, o meu Alferes; contigo, a tua Bebé das calcinhas rosas – a amorosa shakespeareana.	*and I was going to my Conchinchina.* *Ah, the tangled webs the Republic weaves! Beside me* *my Second Lieutenant;* *beside you, your Baby, she of the rosy-pink panties—* *your ardent Shakespearean fantasy.*
No entanto, Fernando, jamais pressentiste que fosse eu a Olga dos oráculos?! Aquela de que tens saudade sem saber por que? Aquela que, na noite voluptuosa (ó meu Poeta!) é ainda o beijo que procuras?	*That being said, Fernando, didn't you ever suspect* *that* I *was* *the Olga the spirits prophesied?! The one* *you yearned for, not knowing why?* *The one whose kiss, in the voluptuous night (O, poet mine!)* *is still the one you're searching for?*
Entretanto, tu, ou alguém por ti na tua arca (e é do último sortilégio que se trata) tem afirmado seres a alma gêmea, igual a mim, nesse pavoroso e atroz mal de trazer tantas outras a gemer dentro da minha!	*After all, in that trunk of yours, you left,* *or had someone leave* *(surely it was a case of the latter sort of wizardry)* *a note claiming you were my soul's twin, a victim,* *just the same as I,* *of that awful, foul and pitiless curse of having* *countless other souls wailing* *inside my own!*

Mas por que chegaste tarde, ó meu Amor?	*But why couldn't you have arrived on time, my Love?*
Que contas dás a Deus	*To God, how will you account*
passando tão rente a mim	*for having passed by so close*
sem me encontrares?!	*and yet failed to find me?!*]

Poem IV. Streetcars named 'Desire'

Poem IV is predicated on the fact that, as documented in the published letters of both poets (ESPANCA, 2008; PESSOA & QUEIROZ, 1996), they regularly took long tram journeys across Lisbon in order to discretely conduct romantic assignations with their respective sweethearts. During 1920, Florbela wanted above all to avoid the scandal of being seen with her lover, 2nd Lieutenant António Guimarães, at the time stationed in Lisbon, until her divorce with her first husband Alberto Moutinho had been granted. As for Pessoa, the letters he exchanged with Ophélia during the two phases of their courtship (1919-1920 and 1929-1930) often refer to the strategies they adopted in order to spend more time together than the chaperoned rituals at Ophélia's home allowed. In the first flowering of their relationship, they often arranged to meet at her dressmaker's shop or at various public buildings. Also, Pessoa would walk past Ophélia's house at a predetermined hour, and she would similarly ride on a tram that passed his home, with the sole purpose of catching a glimpse of each other.

The specific ploy of using tramcars for their courtship developed early; in their letters during May 1920, both comment on the inconvenience of having to use the coastal train service during a strike by tram-workers. By the time their relationship briefly revived in 1929, Pessoa was using the n.º 28 tram to travel from his home in Campo de Ourique the centre of Lisbon; since it passed close to Ophélia's house, it soon became a favourite of theirs. Also, the resumption of their courtship was in part the result of a chance meeting on a tram: Ophélia's cousin had shown her a photograph of Pessoa drinking during working hours, and when she asked her cousin to procure a copy, Pessoa obliged, scrawling on the back "in *flagrante delitro*" as a reminder of his prodigious appetite for wine (MORAIS, 2013; PIZARRO, FERRARI & CARDIELLO, 2013: 169-170). In his reply to Ophélia's thank-you letter, he mentioned having seen her recently on a tram and apologised for showing no sign of recognition (PESSOA, 1978: 139).

To maximise their time together, both pairs of lovers needed to take the longest journeys possible, often travelling from one terminus to another and back again. Lumiar, on what would then have been the northern outskirts of the city, was the terminus of a tram route that began in the bohemian quarters of the old city centre, and would have figured prominently in Pessoa's clandestine meetings with Ophélia. The Avenida da Índia route would have been another favourite, as it followed the river estuary westwards out of the city, as would the Poço do Bispo

line, which hugged the banks of the Tagus as it proceeded upstream to the new factory districts around Chelas (PESSOA, 1978: 35).

According to DAL FARRA (2015: 124), Pessoa and Ophélia transformed the names of key tram routes and termini into their own libidinous lexicon, thereby creating their own "estranha geografia" [*weird geography*]. For example, Praça Marquês de Pombal [*Marquis of Pombal Square*], a major crossroads between Lumiar and the old city centre, not only bears the name of the 18th century Portuguese reformer, but also evokes the traditional *pombal*, or rounded dovecote, thus acting as Pessoa's architectural euphemism for Ophélia's breasts. Moreover, since the Avenida de Índia line evoked the South Asian subcontinent, it served admirably as a geometrical and climatic signifier for her loins. When their courtship resumed, Pessoa even felt the need to remind Ophélia of the erotic code contained in the names of the tram stops: "Queria ir, ao mesmo tempo, à Índia e a Pombal. Curiosa mistura, não é verdade? Em todo o caso, é só parte da viagem. Recorda-se desta geografia?"] (PESSOA, 1978: 40) [*I want to go to India and Pombal at the same time. A curious combination, eh? In any case, that's only part of the journey. You do remember the geography, don't you?*]. Pessoa seems to be hinting that the relationship might move to a new level, with stolen kisses and furtive caresses replaced by more complex physical and emotional entanglements.

Among the tram routes Florbela mentions by name in connection with her own liaisons (ESPANCA, 2008: 107) is the "Co(n)chinchina" line which, by the late 1920s, terminated before the Monsanto Forest on the city limits on a road leading north-westwards to the hills around Sintra. In the Iberian imaginary, "Co(n)chinchina" symbolised the farthest ends of the earth, just as Timbuktu once did for many Northern Europeans. The Portuguese, having been among the earliest Western visitors to the Far East, before establishing themselves at Macau, baptised present-day Vietnam by appending the "China" suffix to the name of their Indian settlement at Cochin. For Florbela, the erotic charge may have originated in the toponym's exotic alterity or its similarity to "conchinha", a word denoting the intimate position couples adopt when sleeping 'like two spoons in a drawer'. But a military man such as Guimarães, familiar with maps of European possessions in Asia, would surely have noted a resemblance between the male member and the coastal strip French colonisers called "Tonkin, Amman and Cochinchina."[18]

Florbela's reaction to these complex courting rituals is to exclaim "Oh, the tangled webs the Republic weaves"—a reference both to the regime that replaced Portugal's monarchy in 1910 and to the central Lisbon thoroughfare named in

[18] To Europeans, Cochin-China had become synonymous—deservedly or not—with factionalism, profligacy, nepotism, and a subservient civil service (BARROS, 2021: 182). In Spain, the word was used to universalise a 'local' practice; parents would tell their children, for example, "Que no se habla con la boca llena, se sabe acá y en la Conchinchina" [*Everyone, from here to Conchinchina, knows you don't speak with your mouth full*].

honour of the event. This phrase echoes Pessoa's parenthetical aside "Malhas que o Império tece!" [*The webs the Empire weaves!*] towards the end of his elegy for a soldier killed in a distant military campaign (PESSOA, 2006: 62-63).[19] It may even have its origin in the aphorism "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive!", from *Marmion*, the verse romance by Sir Walter SCOTT (1835: 228), a writer whose work Pessoa knew well but did not altogether appreciate.

According to Teresa Rita Lopes (PESSOA, 1990b), in one of his frequent psychic experiments, Pessoa asked the spirits to tell him who was destined to bring about his sexual awakening and understood the reply to have been "Olga". Though he concluded, after meeting Ophélia, that the spirits had been mistaken, *Florbela* cannot understand why it never occurred to Pessoa that *she* and not Ophélia might have been the chosen one, since all three women's names have several letters in common.[20] *Florbela* pushes her claim further by submitting as evidence the unsigned type-written poem found among Pessoa's unpublished manuscripts, describing her as "alma sonhadora | irmã gêmea da minha" [*the dreaming soul that is twin to my own*]. Surely, she thinks, this proves that Pessoa admired her work, was drawn to its creator and had left the poem as a sign that he was a contender for the vacant position as her soulmate?[21]

Florbela's empathy for Pessoa also grows because she suspects that he, too, has long struggled with his mental health: his compulsive use of heteronyms suggests a disorder akin to multiple personality[22] and, rather like her, he was prone to manic-depressive mood swings. She quotes from the last tercet of "Loucura" (ESPANCA, 2004: 355) [*Madness*], the poem around which she conceived—surely with her ex-husband in mind—her *conto* "À margem dum soneto" (ESPANCA, 2019: 126-135) [*In the margins of a sonnet*], in which an army officer becomes convinced that his novelist wife is possessed by the women characters who populate her stories.

Pre-empting any accusation that she might shoulder some of the blame, the poem ends with *Florbela* asking her improbable Prince Charming how he intends to explain to God their failure to meet. To achieve the desired effect, she uses the last

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[19] This poem, "O Menino da sua Mãe" [*His mother's boy*], was first published in 1926 in the Lisbon literary review *Contemporânea*, 3rd series, n.º 1. The hostilities referred to in the poem could have taken place during Portugal's participation in World War I, or as part of a colonial policing operation.

[20] Olga was a name Pessoa could not entirely erase from his memory. Hoping to resolve his often-parlous financial situation, he once devised a rather improbable plan to write, under the pen-name "Olga Baker", a series of popular manuals covering women's attire, housekeeping, and motherhood.

[21] The author was, in fact, a certain Eliezer Kamenezky, a Jewish *émigré* from Donetsk, whose poetry Pessoa was translating (DAL FARRA, 2015: 117, note 4, citing personal communication, Jerónimo Pizarro, May 11th, 2015).

[22] See, for example, "Vivem em nós innumeros" (PESSOA, 2016:175) [*Those who dwell in us are without number*] attributed to Ricardo Reis, and his own "Não sei quantas almas tenho" (PESSOA, 2005: 375) [*I know not how many souls I have*].

lines of "Tarde demais" [*Too late*] from her *Soror Saudade* (ESPANCA, 2012b: 119) collection [*Sister Yearning*].

E há cem anos que eu era
nova e linda!...
E a minha boca morta grita ainda:
Porque chegaste tarde, ó meu Amor?!

[*Now a hundred years have passed since I was*
that handsome prize!…
Yet even so from my dead mouth the self-same question flies:
How is it possible you missed me, my Love?!]

Poem V

E agora que te vejo e que te falo
não sei se te alcancei
se te perdi.
É que guardo antiga zanga contra ti,
Fernando.
Deploro o que não fizeste por Judith
e por toda a sua troupe da *Europa*
– gente que, afinal, ficou sem!
eira nem Teixeira

[*And now that I can see you and I'm talking to you*
I don't know if I had you
figured or not.
The thing is, I still have that old grudge against you,
Fernando.
It's odious what you didn't do for Judith
and for her whole Europa *gang*
—people who, without her, were left with neither
hearth nor home!

Quem incinerou-lhe os versos só lhe viu
a carne *Nua* (que *viande de paraître*)
e tosquiou-a verrinamente em efígie.
Mas era também
De Mim que ela falava, de todas nós, as outras:
do nosso direito à vida, à ética, à arte
— à luxúria!
E pensar que tu, Pessoa
(honra da *Literatura de Sodoma*!)
só foste leal ao Raul e ao Botto (o invejoso):
Judith jamais te existiu!
Seria a tua célebre fobia a...
trovoadas?
Afinal, sempre conheceste
alguém que tivesse levado porrada!

Those who had her verses burned saw no more in them than
Judith Naked *(oh, such* viande de paraître*);*
The press lampooned her, as if burning an effigy.
But she was speaking
Not just About Me*, but of every woman, all we others:*
and the right to our lives, to our own ethics, to our own art—
and to our own lust!
And to think that you, Pessoa,
(such is honour in the Literature of Sodom*!)*
were loyal only to Raul and to Botto (the envious):
Judith never existed for you!
Would that be something to do with your famous fear of…
thunderclaps?
So, after all, you really did *know*
someone who'd been given a good slapping!

Mas hoje que a tarde é calma e o céu tranquilo:
– cadê o teu decadentismo?
Teus *Poemas* também são de *Bizâncio*,
caro Íbis,
e (talvez por isso)
foste embirrar com a única mulher modernista!
Deveras. O dia deu em chuvoso.

But today, on a calm afternoon with a tranquil sky:
—where's your decadentism now?
I'd say your own Poems *are rather* Byzantine*, too,*
my dear Ibis,
and (perhaps that explains)
why you were so irked by the only woman modernist we had!
Indeed. The day turned out rainy, after all.]

Poem V. The *Literatura de Sodoma* affair

The whole of Poem V is devoted to Portugal's greatest literary scandal since Camilo Castelo Branco and Ana Plácido were arrested for adultery some 60 years before. In 1923, the right-wing Lisbon Students' Action League pressed for the city's Civil Governor to have books by António Botto, Raul Leal, and Judith Teixeira seized and destroyed as examples of what one reviewer described as the *Literatura de Sodoma*. While Botto and Leal were members of Pessoa's intimate circle, notwithstanding her modernist credentials, Judith Teixeira was no more than an acquaintance. After all, in his dealings with the opposite sex, Pessoa was drawn more to much younger women such as Hanni, Ophélia, and Madge Anderson[23], than members of his own generation. As suggested above, Pessoa felt a certain disquietude regarding female professionals, adhering to the then-prevalent bourgeois view that a woman's role was merely to be decorative (to secure a husband and act as his trophy) and procreative (to reproduce the same cycle indefinitely).

Just as Botto's poetry had a strong homoerotic charge, and Leal's aesthetics affirmed the superiority of male homosexual relations over all others, Judith's poetry was a paean to her own same-sex preferences, an "error" for which she was punished severely (PESSOA, 1990b: 425), not only by those from whom she could expect no mercy, but also by those on whom she may have thought she could depend. Despite the work of all three authors being impounded and destroyed for outraging public decency, as a lesbian, Judith was treated by press and critics alike with a violence reserved for those most loathed by the establishment. Her later work also attracted vicious hostility: in 1926, under the heading *viande de paraître* (i. e. "meat on view", a pun on the French term for "hot off the press"), the periodical *O Sempre Fixe* [*Always In Vogue*] marked the launching of Judith's next collection of poems, *Nua – Poemas de Bisâncio*, [*Naked – Byzantine Poems*], by publishing a caricature portraying a Rubenesque Judith naked, attended by Eros (averting his eyes in disgust), a dog (panting lasciviously), and a handgun (firing at her head).

Poem V opens with *Florbela* doubting how accurately she had imagined Pessoa: seeing him (from afar, in the misty distance of the afterlife), and speaking to him (albeit by letter, thus far unanswered), she identifies two main caveats—both reflecting Pessoa's passivity—that tarnish his eligibility as her chosen one. In her view, he made no effort either to seek her out (referred to in Poem IV) or to defend a fellow modernist (addressed her in Poem V). Regarding the latter, *Florbela* contradicts Pessoa's claim—made by Álvaro de Campos in "Poema em linha recta" [*Straight line poem*]—never to have known anyone who had taken a sound beating.

[23] Around Easter 1935, Pessoa met and subsequently corresponded with Madge Anderson, who went on to work as a wartime cryptographer at Bletchley Park and with military intelligence in London (BARRETO, 2017: 599 *et seq.*).

Notwithstanding the poem's intensely ironic tone, its author would not have counted someone ostensibly as insignificant as Judith among the "princes" and "champions" with whom he habitually mixed (PESSOA, 2013: 180). *Florbela* sarcastically blames Pessoa's inaction on the bad weather: he admitted to his friends that if there were the slightest chance of rain, he would never go out without a raincoat and umbrella and, if a storm were raging, he would only feel safe at home (PESSOA, 1966a: 29). With typically dry humour, he claimed that, for as long as they lasted, only bad weather and penury depressed him (PESSOA, 1982: 71). By linking two apparently unconnected elements—Pessoa's fear of storms and his role in the *Literatura de Sodoma* affair—*Florbela* testily questions his motives for treating so unequally those being persecuted by the authorities.

Pessoa's phobia symbolises his aversion to becoming further embroiled in the controversy over the homoerotic content of Botto's verses (*Canções*), Leal's "theo-metaphysics" (*Sodoma Divinizada*) and Judith's poetry (*Decadência*).[24] His protective raincoat and uptilted umbrella could be thought of as signifying the defensive argumentation he used to demonstrate, in print, that Botto's "invertedness" was incidental to his status as an authentic aesthete (PESSOA, 1922), and that Leal was neither madman nor sodomite, but a cutting-edge philosopher (BARRETO, 2012). Avoiding the students' key complaints, Pessoa took pains to "distance himself from the polemical poetess" (ALONSO, 2015: 25, *apud* DELGADO, 1999) and later went as far as to declare Judith a minor protagonist in the whole affair (DAL FARRA, 2015: 119, *apud* PESSOA, 1996: 61), his comment that "não tem lugar […] entre os maiores" [*she had no place (…) among the major protagonists of the affair*] seemingly intended to denigrate her work rather than defending her by deflecting public attention from it.

A more plausible explanation is that Judith's talent and courage had not escaped Pessoa and, feeling threatened both as a modernist and a male, he churlishly failed to come to her defence. Without accusing him outright of hypocrisy, *Florbela* suggests his poems are just as "byzantine"—i. e., furtively transgressive—as Judith's. As someone who prized poetry's surreptitiousness and subversive potential, it may well have irked Pessoa to see those attributes so well deployed by someone who would later be described as Portugal's only female modernist poet (VIANA, 1977: 201).

Poem VI

No tempo em que festejavam o dia dos meus anos,	[*At the time when they were celebrating the day* *on which I was born,*

[24] While there were no complaints after the 1921 publication of the Agartha and Libânio da Silva editions of Botto's *Canções*, when Pessoa's Olisipo Press chose to publish a second edition, complete with a provocative photograph of his friend, it attracted the attention of conservative students, who pressed for the authorities to have the book impounded and destroyed.

uma como que lembrança do meu futuro féretro
me estremece o cérebro.
Nesta hora absurda –
pousada sob o fausto do meu claustro
de *Sóror*
(ó suntuoso túmulo de morta!)
virada no avesso e sem meus ossos
– tropeço na sombra lúgubre da Lua que
lá fora (Satanás!)
seduz!
Tenho ódio à luz e raiva à claridade
e não estou de bem com Deus só por medo
do Inferno. Que ninguém
me faça a vida! Deixem-me ser eu mesma!

Esta sou eu: a Bela
a Intangível, a leve águia na subida

– tal como resultei de tudo.

something like a memory of my resting-place-to-be
is making my head spin.
And at this absurd hour—
Saudade my body buried amid the splendour
of Sister Saudade*'s cloisters*
(for a dead girl, a truly sumptuous tomb!)
turned inside out and relieved of every single bone
—I stumble around in the pall cast by a Moon that
outside (Devil knows!) so
enthrals!
Sunlight I hate most of all and rage against its brightness
and I'll not try to stay in God's good books just out of fear
of the flames. Let no-one
try to run my life! Just let me be myself!

Who I am is Bela
the Intangible; lithe eagle flying ever upward

—and that's exactly the way it turned out.]

Poem VI. "There are those who rise as they descend"

Poem VI begins with *Florbela* recalling her birthdays, and how unnerving it had been, on one such occasion, to have seen so clearly where her final resting-place would be, almost as if it were already a memory.[25] While her bones lay encased in sumptuous marble, her spirit was stumbling around in the shadows, deprived of the moonlight that had always thrilled and nourished her. In this disembodied liminal state, *Florbela* feels incomplete and impotent, rather like the young woman whom death separates from her lover in the short story "A Morta" (ESPANCA, 2015: 125-132) [*The Dead Girl*]. She quotes the opening lines of the sonnet "A minha tragédia" [*My tragedy*] to explain why it is "Tenho ódio à luz e raiva à claridade | do sol" [*(s)unlight I hate most of all and rage against its brightness*]: she prefers "Gosto da Noite imensa, triste, preta" [*the immense, sad blackness of the night-time*], because she fears daylight "eu tenho medo | que me leiam nos olhos o segredo | de não amar ninguém, de ser assim!" (ESPANCA, 2012a: 109) [*will reveal the secret in my eyes, | that I love no-one and that's the way I am*].

And yet, in life, Florbela felt herself driven ever onwards and upwards by the sad remembrance of what she had lost and what had eluded her, and her yearning for what her future might hold. However, many of those around her, including her third husband Mário Lage, had already concluded that she was caught in a downward spiral into neurosis. Her friend BOTTO DE CARVALHO (1919: 39) dedicated

[25] In 1964, amid considerable controversy, Florbela's remains were transferred from the North to her birthplace in the South. Mário CLAÚDIO (2011) claims that one of her admirers went as far as stealing a bone to keep as a relic.

a poem to her when she was still at the Faculty of Law in Lisbon, vividly memorialising the physical marks her dogged self-destructiveness had left:

Frio e esguio, num dos seus pulsos,	[*Across one of her wrists, candidly unswerving,*
Finos, nervosos, convulsos,	*Pulsing with life, so unnerving,*
Terrível, pequenino, inapagável,	*The narrowest, most awful and indelible*
O primeiro sinal de um suicídio em vão…	*Tell-tale sign of a first dalliance with self-immolation…*
Firme, inalterável,	*Fixed, unchangeable*
Como vontade sublime e acesa,	*As the will, sublime in its stubbornness,*
Da Princesa	*Of the Princess*
Desolação.	*Desolation.*]

In contrast, Florbela was convinced that her personal journey, while admittedly vertiginous, was transcendental, for "há quem suba a descer" (ESPANCA, 2015: 165) [*there are those who rise as they descend*]. In the sonnet "Mais alto" [*Higher!*], Florbela imagines herself rising above all earthly cares, like a Virgin Mary ascending into heaven, or a bird soaring ever higher (ESPANCA, 2013: 123); in her set of tributes to Camões, having asked a golden eagle to guide her upwards from defeat (ESPANCA, 2013: 39), she observes that "quanto mais funda e lúgubre a descida, | mais alta é a ladeira que não cansa!" (ESPANCA, 2013: 148) [*the deeper and more gloomy the steep descent may be | the higher the summit that tirelessly I'll climb*].

In an essay accompanying a selection of Florbela's works (ESPANCA, 2002: 22), Maria Lúcia explains this single-minded motivation in the following terms:

> […] nesse impulso ascensional, Florbela devaneia em se tornar a Intangível, a Turris Ebúrnea, uma Virgem Maria envolvida pela luz brilhante e incorruptível dum impossível. Mas trata-se de uma Virgem que, em lugar de pisar "o mal da vida" […], deseja, ao contrário, acolhê-la nos seus braços, nos seus já "divinos braços de Mulher".
>
> [*Florbela is impelled forever upwards and dreams of becoming the Intangible, the Ebony Tower, a sort of Virgin Mary surrounded by the brilliant and incorruptible light of the impossible. But this is a Virgin who, rather than treading the world's evil underfoot (…) wants to offer it the embrace of a woman who already knows what it is to be divine.*]

And, in her short story "The Passion of Manuel Garcia" from *The Masks of Destiny*, Florbela herself hints at what it means to become the object of such worship (ESPANCA, 2015: 163-164):

> […] não era dele, não, meu Deus! Não a podia cobiçar sequer, mas não era de ninguém. Vaso sagrado por onde nenhuma boca matara a sede, templo que nenhuns passos tinham profanado ainda, torre de marfim do seu amor a que nenhum olhar subira, não era dele, não, mas era a Pura, a Intangível, era *A que não era de ninguém!*
>
> [*Though she was not his — Lord knows she wasn't, nor could he even bring himself to covet her — at least she did not belong to anyone else. She was a sacred vessel on whose contents no mouth had ever slaked its thirst, a temple still unprofaned by the tread of human feet, an ivory tower of love whose*

pinnacle no eye had yet yet beheld; she wasn't his, oh no, but she was untouchable, purity personified,
She-who-belonged-to-no-one!]

Could this be the same Florbela who, in her sonnet "Amar!" (ESPANCA, 2013: 115) aspired to "Amar só por amar: aqui... além... | Mais este e Aquele, o Outro e toda a gente..." [*Love just for love's sake, love hither and yon… | First this one, then that one, then the other ones"?*].

Only those with the potential to become her soul-mate would be able to resolve the contradiction between Florbela the saint and Florbela the libertine. Though in society's eyes she risked descending into depravity, from her own perspective she had found the path towards her true identity, a way of rising above and beyond the "O mundo [com] os seus preconceitos idiotas, as suas leis inumanas e ilógicas" (ESPANCA, 2019: 166) [*the world (with) its stupid prejudices and heartless, illogical laws*] life imposes. An initiate into mysteries revealed to only a very few, she is ready to take a leap into the unknown, where she will become just one more ripple on the cosmic sea[26] or, as she puts it in her sonnet "Nostalgia", "Ah! Não ser mais que a sombra duma sombra | Por entre tanta sombra igual a mim!" (ESPANCA, 2013: 116) [*nothing more than a shadow's shadow | Amid so many shadows the same as me*].

Poema VII

Ah, um verso meu de amor
que te fizesse ser eterno por toda a eternidade,
ó Desejado, Eleito, Infante, Amante!
Minha boca guarda uns beijos mudos,
minhas mãos uns pálidos veludos,
e noite e dia
choro e rezo e grito e urro –
e ninguém ouve... ninguém vê... ninguém...

Se me quiseres, Fernando,
hás de ser Outro e Outro num momento
princípio e fim, via láctea fechando
o infinito!
Eu sonho o amor de um deus!...

Vê, repara, Nando, dá-me as tuas mãos.
Alguma coisa em mim nasceu antes dos astros

[*Ah, that a love poem of my own*
might have the power to make you eternal for all eternity,
My heart's Desire, my Chosen One, Prince and Lover!
My mouth yet holds a few mute kisses for you,
My hands stretch out, skin downy, pale of hue;
all night and all day
I weep and pray, call out and howl—
and no-one hears… no-one sees… no-one…

If you want me, Fernando,
You must be that other One, that Other One, at once
my alpha and my omega, my Milky Way sealing off
the infinite!
What I dream of is the love of a god …!

Wait Nando, it's like this, you see… give me your hands.
Something in me was born before the stars

[26] This phrase comes from the closing lines of Florbela's short story "A Morta" [*The Dead Girl*]. Elements of Florbela's philosophy of life and death can be found in several of her short stories, notably "Amor de outrora" [*A love from times long past*], "O resto é perfume" [*The rest is perfume*], "A Morta" [*The dead girl*], and "A paixão de Manuel Garcia" [*The passion of Manuel Garcia*].

e viu	*and saw*
lá muito ao longe	*in the far, far distance*
começar o sol...	*the sun's beginning…*]

Poem VII. "What I dream of is the love of a god!"

Inured to the pity of those closest to her and the disdain of those outside her circle, Florbela yearned to be worshipped by the lover she felt she deserved. In order for her to love, be loved, and yet *belong* to no-one, she needed her chimerical soul-mate to make his presence felt, and to prove himself to be in all respects 'the one.' Poem VII opens with *Florbela* accepting part of the responsibility for her plight, for she has been unable to write verses with the power to conjure up her Prince Charming. And yet, with words borrowed from "Sonho Vago" (ESPANCA, 2004: 336) [*Vague Dream*], she also blames him for failing to appear, for not putting an end to her suffering:

Onde está ele o Desejado?	[*So where is he then, my heart's Desire?*
O Infante?	*Where is my sweet dauphin?*
O que há de vir e amar-me em	*He who should be here now to love me with*
doida ardência?	*a passion that is rare?*
O das horas de mágoa e penitência?	*He of my many hours of penitence and of despair?*
O Príncipe Encantado? O Eleito?	*Where is my Enchanted Prince, my Chosen One?*
O Amante?	*My lover-man?*]

Using the last lines of the sonnet "Languidez" [*Languor*], *Florbela* assures her elusive lover that she not a spent force, and still has plenty to offer him (ESPANCA, 2012a: 105):

E a minha boca tem uns beijos mudos…	[*My mouth yet holds a few mute kisses for you…*
Minhas mãos, uns pálidos veludos,	*My hands stretch out, skin downy, pale of hue,*
Traçam gestos de sonho pelo ar …	*Tracing dreamy arabesques in the air …*]

Not for the first time, we can sense the tension between, on the one hand, Florbela's lack of self-esteem (because she remains a mystery both to herself and to others) and, on the other, her self-affirmation, as embodied in her avatar's defiance before God, Destiny, and society: "Let no-one | try to run my life! Just let me be myself!". But, more often than not, it is her self-absorption—referred to by some as her narcissism—that, prevails. Indeed, in two love-letters written to António Guimarães (ESPANCA, 2008: 91; 99), she explicitly advises him that the terms of any future relationship would be set by her and her alone:

> Tens que me aceitar como eu sou visto que só assim eu creio que me possam ter amor [7 Março, p. 91] […] Meu amigo, se esperas ter uma mulher sem areia nenhuma morres de aborrecimento e de frio ao pé dela e não será com certeza ao pé de mim. […] Hás de gostar mais de mim assim, do que se eu fosse a própria Deusa Minerva com todo o juízo que todos os deuses lhe deram [9 Março, p. 99].

> [*You have to take me as I am because, I believe, that's the only way you can love me, (7th March) (…) My friend, if you're after a woman with no quirks or foibles, then you may die of boredom and of cold by her side, but that won't be me, that's for sure. (…) But you'll like me all the better the way I am than if I were the goddess Minerva herself with all the wisdom the gods gave her (9th March).*]

Marriage to Guimarães turned out to be a mistake, for while he was a source of earthly, physical passion, she sought a more powerful, transcendent love that only someone who followed the same star could provide. "What I dream of is the love of a god!", *Florbela* cries, echoing the closing line of her sonnet "Ambiciosa" (ESPANCA, 2013: 117) [*Ambitious*]. Adapting the text of an unfinished, untitled poem still lacking its opening stanza, and in a tone far less conversational than the love letter cited above, *Florbela* warns Pessoa that she refuses to belong to anyone, and that it is he who must change (ESPANCA, 2004: 350):

Eu não sou de ninguém!… Quem me quiser	[*I'll be no-one's … If it's me that you want*
Há-de ser luz do Sol em tardes quentes	*On a hot afternoon my sun you must be*
[…]	(…)
Há-de ser Outro e Outro num momento!	*You must be that Other One, that Other One right now!*
Força viva, brutal, em movimento	*living brute force, advancing, never bowed*
Astro arrastando catadupas de astros!	*A star trailing behind it, its own stellar train!*]

At the end of the poem, *Florbela* imports a phrase from Jorge de Sena's Portuguese translation of Pessoa's "English Sonnet XXIV" (ALONSO, 2021: 153).[27] In Pessoa's original English version, he proclaims: "Something in me was born before the stars | And saw the sun begin from far away" (PESSOA, 1966b: 20-21; PESSOA, 1974: 180), words that recall Florbela's own pantheistic beliefs, according to which the matter from which all life is made dates back to the dawn of time and disperses at our death, ready to play a new role in the permanent process of creation. She understood that only those able to penetrate beyond the limits of their earthly existence would learn that they were present at the very beginning, long before the earth took shape and humanity appeared. *Florbela*'s words spell out her demands—her soulmate must know how to transcend himself and fulfil her every desire, for only a god will suffice.

Poem VIII

Se ridículas são todas as cartas de amor	[*If it's the case that all love letters are ridiculous*
as minhas	*then mine*

[27] Most of the sonnets that Pessoa originally wrote in English were translated into Portuguese by Jorge de Sena, Adolfo Casais Monteiro, and José Blanc de Portugal. Many of them can be viewed in a bilingual presentation: https://periodicos.fclar.unesp.br/alfa/article/viewFile/3280/3007

(em verdade)	*(if truth be told)*
não passam de uma necessidade voraz	*Signify no more than my voracious need*
de fazer frases.	*to feed the world with words.*
Tão pobres somos, Nando,	*Such paupers are we, Nando,*
que as mesmas palavras usamos	*that we will employ the same expression*
para afirmar ou falsear.	*to affirm the truth or falsify.*
Mas aclara-me, Fernando	*So, please explain to me, Fernando:*
O que impede um vero e injusto Fado	*Is there a force that can mitigate a real yet*
de ser criado?	*undeserved Fate?*
Tudo coexiste! O mundo	*Everything coexists! The world—*
é uma teia urdida só de sonho e erro.	*it is nothing but a web woven out of dream and error*
A vida... branco ou tinto, é o mesmo:	*And life... be it white or red... it matters not a jot:*
é p'ra vomitar!	*Go on! Throw it up!*
Brindemos ambos, inda que não mais possamos:	*So let's raise a glass—though neither one of us now can:*
– viva o bicarbonato de soda!	*—our toast shall be: bicarbonate of soda!*]

Poem VIII. Love letters straight from the heart

In the final poem of the sequence, *Florbela* takes up the theme of love letters, on which she and Pessoa expended much time and which, alongside amorous tram-journeys, were key to their respective courtship strategies. In one of his Álvaro de Campos poems, Pessoa queries the value of expressing romantic sentiments in epistolary form, going as far as to dismiss every item of his correspondence as "ridiculous" (PESSOA, 2013: 169):

Todas as cartas de amor são	[*Every single love letter is*
Ridículas.	*Ridiculous.*
Não seriam cartas de amor se não fossem	*How could they possibly be love letters if they weren't*
Ridículas.	*Ridiculous.*
Também escrevi em meu tempo cartas de amor,	*I must admit that in my time, I've written love letters,*
Como as outras,	*Like all my others,*
Ridículas.	*Ridiculous.*]

For her part, in the diary she kept during the last year of her life, in the entry for July 16th, 1930, Florbela freely admits that "Até hoje, todas as minhas cartas de amor não são mais que a realização da minha necessidade de fazer frases" (ESPANCA, 2019: 67) [*to date, every one of my love letters has done no more than meet my need to spin phrases*]. So powerful and compulsive was her vocation as a writer that, from an early age, she indulged in what might be called performative epistolography, in which she was the writer (in both senses of the term), with the recipient acting as

both reader and audience.[28] For Pessoa, too, notwithstanding his comments to the contrary, letter-writing was a serious matter and an authentic act of literary creativity: he kept carbon copies of much of his correspondence and, in his letters, often criticised his own style or clarity. *Florbela* admits that writing is such a complex process and the means of expression available to us so poor that, if her elusive soulmate was to finally appear, she wonders if she would have anything novel or sincere to say to him (ESPANCA, 2019: 67).

Florbela now returns to the question of destiny, where we encounter a second phrase from de Sena's Portuguese translation of Pessoa's *English Sonnets*, this time from Sonnet VII. Pessoa interrogates the immutability of fate: once the lot is cast, is there really no turning back, as depicted in the tragedies of Ancient Greece? Or do we have access to a countervailing force that can protect us, individually or collectively, from an arbitrary and unjust fate? In his original, Pessoa asks "Yet what truth bars | An all unjust Fate's truth from being believed?!", rendered by de Sena as "O que impede um vero e injusto Fado de ser criado?!" [*What bars | An unjust Fate from being created?!*], a translation that omits the noun "truth" and replaces the verb "believe" with "create" (PESSOA, 1966b: 12-13; PESSOA, 1993c: 70 and 98-99). It seems unlikely that de Sena thought "criado" [*created*] an acceptable translation of "acreditado" [*believed*]. A more likely explanation is that, in order to reproduce Pessoa's hendecasyllabic line, de Sena opted for the archaism "crido" [*believed*], a word the typist or typesetter failed to recognise and, believing it to be a lapse by the translator, mistakenly 'corrected' it, inadvertently producing an internal rhyme (*fado – criado*) that is absent in the original.

Using a final quotation from the *English Sonnets*, this time from Sonnet XXVI, *Florbela* approaches from a different angle the world in which we live out our days and the manner in which we try to make sense of life's perplexities. While her phrase in Portuguese "o mundo | é uma teia urdida só de sonho e erro" is identical to Sena's version, my own translation lengthens Pessoa's succinct and highly Shakespearean first line "The world | is woven all of dream and error" in order to match Maria Lúcia's syllable count without departing too much from Sena's own choice of words (PESSOA, 1966b: 21-22; PESSOA, 1993c: 116-117).

In his original sonnet, Pessoa had deployed the metaphor of the mirror to explore the compulsive yet ultimately futile nature of philosophical speculation. In a mirror's reflection we perceive a reversed image of ourselves and the world around us and, despite knowing this image to be false, we continue our struggle to see "what is true". In the words of Saint PAUL (1 Corinthians 13:12), though today we only "see through a glass darkly", at some point in the future everything will

[28] Florbela's letters to 'Madame' Carvalho, the Director of the women's periodical *Modas e Bordados* [*Fashion and Embroidery*] and, in particular, to Assistant Director Júlia Alves, are full of examples of this 'performative' letter writing (ESPANCA, 1986: 28-97).

become clear. In Pessoa's contrasting view, strongly influenced by stoicism, we persist in peering into the gloom, in spite of "sabendo que jamais sabemos" (PESSOA, 1966b: 21) [*knowing we ne'er shall know*]. For Pessoa, life remains a conundrum: it is too short, passes too quickly, and we can only guess what lies beyond it. The advice of his heteronym Ricardo Reis is to "Circunda-te de rosas, ama, bebe | E cala. O mais é nada" (PESSOA, 2020: 94) [*(s)urround yourself with roses; love, drink | And keep silent. All else is worth naught*], a desideratum Pessoa himself managed to fulfil only partially and sporadically. The main distinction between these sentiments and Florbela's own philosophy, both of which contain stoic and epicurean elements, lies in the *vigour* with which the two poets led their respective lives—he with passive gravity, she with passionate (almost manic) animation. Though Florbela lived for the moment, wanting to "love with abandon", her unquiet spirit drove her to pursue chimeras; while she yearned to surround herself with beauty, she encountered more thorns than roses; and, as an analgesic, temporary or otherwise, against life's tribulations, she favoured barbiturates over alcohol.

The final poem nevertheless ends with *Florbela* wishing she could join Pessoa in drinking to the health, if not of life, then of their respective literary posterities, even though they have yet to meet, and their ethereal state would probably prohibit such a celebratory gesture. ALONSO (2019: 13) explains that "by appropriating Pessoa's personal irony, [Maria Lúcia's] Florbela is able to propose a toast to a means of survival that remains available to them both". Were it possible for the two spirits to physically raise a glass, in *Florbela*'s view, the toast should be "To bicarbonate of soda!", the antacid powder that, in the eponymous poem by Álvaro de Campos, symbolises whatever measures we choose to take in order to relieve the pain of being alive (PESSOA, 1950: 285).

In several of his poems, Pessoa develops his thesis on the complex relationship between physical and metaphysical malaise, and proposes a variety of remedies for life's anguish, *ennui*, and desolation, ranging from patent medicines, through prescription drugs, to alcohol or, as a last resort, suicide. In the poem "Bicarbonato de soda", Pessoa's Álvaro de Campos vacillates between taking his own life and easing his discomfort in a less drastic and irreversible way. "devo tomar qualquer coisa, ou suicidar-me?" [*Should I take something, or kill myself?*], he ponders, with mischievous ambiguity, for in Portuguese the phrase "tomar alguma coisa" can apply just as well to alcohol as to medicine. Pessoa thus hints at the absence of any meaningful choice in life, and suggests that the outcome is the same whatever we decide to do.

Florbela ends her missive by expressing a view of life and death, compatible in most respects with that of her putative soulmate. The distinction lies in the fact that, while her philosophy also contains elements of fatalism, passivity, and submission, above all it is driven by a determination to *act*. Her one caveat, however, is that while enjoying life to the fullest extent that destiny permits may well be better

than nothing, doing so risks becoming so contaminated by life that we lose our capacity to take the one decisive step that would free us from its clutches. Borrowing words from the last couplet of "Vilegiatura", an Álvaro de Campos poem (PESSOA, 1990a: 330) that deploys his much-favoured regurgitation metaphor to express his desire to efface memory or thought, his own self or even our shared existence, *Florbela* invites us to renounce life, whatever we had once believed the contract promised: "E a vida... branco ou tinto, é o mesmo: é p'ra vomitar!" [*Life... be it white or red... it matters not a jot: Go on! Throw it up!*].[29]

[29] The expression "Throw it up!" has the advantage of ambiguity, signifying both the act of vomiting and that of relinquishing a job or opportunity.

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Note on digital sources. Readers wishing to gain rapid access to specific works on which Maria Lúcia Dal Farra has drawn for her poems, or to which I have referred in the commentaries, may wish to consult two sites on which Fernando Pessoa's and Florbela Espanca's works are published in Portuguese in digital form: the *Arquivo Pessoa* (http://arquivopessoa.net/) and the *Biblioteca Digital do Alentejo* (https://www.bdalentejo.net/index.html), respectively. Though the Pessoa archive has a useful—albeit rudimentary—search facility, the site should be used with caution, as its texts do contain errors of transcription and referencing, and its sources tend to be outdated non-critical editions. Nor does the Espanca archive use recent, critical editions of Florbela's poetry and prose, but it nevertheless has the advantage of displaying digitalised pages (rather than transcriptions) from the usually reliable Gonçalves, Dom Quixote, and Bertrand editions of her works.

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