

Putting Your Heart to Sleep with Pentameters: A Prosodic, Lexical, and Syntactic Analysis of Fernando Pessoa's Sonnet X

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Language and Self, Parody, Sonnet Form, Sound and Sense, *35 sonnets*.

Abstract

This article analyses Fernando Pessoa's Sonnet X ("As to a child, I talked my heart asleep") as a modernist parody of the Shakespearean sonnet. The presence of that highly constrained form is clearly recognizable at the level of both versification and language. At the same time, a number of "marked and essential differences" indicate that this poem is not a mere stylistic or thematic imitation of its model. The text's reflexive reference to the possibilities of splitting and binding sound to sense, on the one hand, and of splitting written self from writing self, on the other, highlight Pessoa's awareness of a self who is constituted in and through language. Weaving word-as-sound and word-as-sense with self-as-grammatical person, the text becomes the material evidence for the self-inventing and self-deceiving nature of literary activity.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Linguagem e Eu, Paródia, Forma do Soneto, Som e Sentido, *35 sonnets*.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o "Sonnet X" de Fernando Pessoa ("As to a child, I talked my heart asleep") como uma paródia modernista do soneto Shakespeariano. A presença desta forma tão constritiva é claramente reconhecível em ambas as dimensões da linguagem e da versificação. Ao mesmo tempo, um número de "marked and essential differences" (diferenças marcadas e essenciais) indicam que este poema não é apenas uma imitação estilística ou temática do seu modelo. A referência reflexiva do texto às possibilidades de dividir e amalgamar som e sentido, por um lado, e de separar o eu escrito do eu escritor, por outro lado, enfatizam a atenção de Pessoa a um eu que é construído na e através da linguagem. Entrecendo palavra-como-som e palavra-como-sentido com o eu-como-pessoa-gramatical, o texto torna-se a evidência material para o inventar-se e o iludir-se característicos da atividade literária.

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Introduction

In an earlier essay, focused on Fernando Pessoa's Portuguese translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," I showed that his version recreates rhythm, meter, rhyme and other sound recurrences of the original in a way that seems to prove Pessoa's notion of translation both as linguistic parody and authorial plagiarism (PORTELA, 2010). Translation is practiced as a total recreation of one form in another system of poetic and linguistic relations, as if it were possible for a given textual form to cross over the asymmetric and heterogeneous space between discursive and literary systems. This notion of translation as a parody of a specific authorial expressive form in another language suggests that the role of the translator is to create homologies between the material properties of different languages by means of compositional principles. Translation is not so much the translation of words and sentences as it is the translation of a complex space of formal relations across different systems, including the compositional processes that are internal to the particular language-form of the original text. The success of the translation depends on the recognition of parody, that is, of a relation between textual form in the original and textual form in the translation.

What I propose to do in this essay is a detailed analysis of one of the sonnets published in *35 Sonnets* by Fernando Pessoa (a self-published book, originally printed in 1918), whose original composition and initial stages of revision, according to the critical edition by João Dionísio, date from 1910-1912 (PESSOA, 1993: 8-14).¹ My reflection is concerned with the relations between the Shakespearean sonnet and Pessoa's parody of this form.² I will show how this parody takes place at several levels, including metrical effects and other sound patterns, lexical and semantic fields, syntactical and rhetorical structure. Going beyond mere pastiche or imitation, the use of the Shakespearean sonnet as a model allows him to explore the constraints of the sonnet form to construct complex rhythmic and semantic structures that distance themselves from their model. The tension between the sonnet's archaic appearance (including its highly regular patterns) and its modernist subject-matter, including its reflexiveness about

¹ For a genetic description of the first manuscript version of Sonnet X (BNP/E3, 49B³-49^r) see João Dionísio (PESSOA, 1993: 198-200). There are two copies of the printed version of the *35 Sonnets* with several autograph annotations for revision, but Sonnet X is one of several that has no further authorial annotations (cf. BNP/E3, 98-1 and 98-2).

² Parody is used in this article in the sense of a formal critical variation on a previous form, without any implication of ironic distance to or derision of that form. Parody became frequent in modernist and postmodernist literary and artistic practices as the limits and problems of representation and convention were foregrounded in many works. See, for instance, Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Hutcheon's definition of parody as "repetition with a difference" (101), and as "an important way for modern artists to come to terms with the past" (101) are useful in this context.

language and literary form, is a major source for effects of defamiliarization and difference.

1. “In the meting of its measure”: the poetry generator

The sonnet has been one of the most generative and productive poetic structures in Western literature. It has been calculated that, in the sixteenth century alone, more than 300,000 sonnets were produced in Western Europe. Although not as fashionable as it was during the Renaissance, the sonnet remained in constant use in various languages and poetic traditions, with particular surges at different periods. As an *a priori* structure it has evolved into many different forms, including many parodic forms in the modernist and post-modernist periods. From Gerard Manley Hopkins to e.e. cummings, Robert Lowell, Edwin Morgan, Geoffrey Hill, bpNichol or Tony Harrison, in English, or from Antero de Quental to E. M. de Melo e Castro, Fernando Aguiar or Manuel António Pina, in Portuguese, it has remained a powerful signifier and medium for poetry in the 19th and 20th centuries.³ Sonnet parodies can be based on an individual sonnet, on a particular type of sonnet or on the very structure of the sonnet. In this last instance, it is the sonnet’s bare structure that can be abstracted as a numerical generator of syllables, lines and stanzas, as well as stress and rhyme patterns. Pessoa’s sonnets could be described as parodic in the second sense, that is, as an evocation or emulation of a particular type of sonnets, the Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnet.⁴

Metrical and rhythmical complexity in Pessoa’s English poems has been extensively analyzed by Patricio Ferrari (2012a and 2012b), who has demonstrated the importance of an understanding of stanza design, metrical patterns, and rhyme scheme as aids to a paleographical or grammatical transcription of Pessoa’s poetry. Ferrari showed that Pessoa applied specific metrical patterns to many of his

³ Raymond Queneau, for instance, used the sonnet form for his work *Cent Mille Millions de Poèmes* (1961), highlighting the generative nature of the sonnet as a programmable combinatorial machine. There are now many such programmed sonnet generators that use a sample of lines as a database for random permutations. See, for example, “Shakespeare’s Sonnet Generator” (2014-2015, <http://www.nothingisreal.com/sonnet/>), by Tristan Miller and Dave Morice. For other examples of 20th-century uses of the sonnet form in English, French, Italian and Spanish, see Darras (1999). For a brief introduction to the history and form of the English sonnet, see Fuller (1972).

⁴ “Elizabethan sonnet” and “Shakespearean sonnet” are often used as synonyms, despite the fact that poetic patterns and literary styles vary considerably when we compare sonnets by Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson or John Donne, for instance (Prince, 1977). Literary historians generally consider Shakespeare’s 154 sonnet collection as the pinnacle of the Elizabethan sonnet, and they highlight the conventionality of images, metaphors and rhymes used by most Elizabethan sonneteers. “English sonnet” is the generic designation of the sonnet structure with 4+4+4+2 lines, which become the most common in English, although the Italian sonnet ([4+4]+[3+3]) continued to be used by several poets, namely Milton.

unfinished and fragmentary poems, and that he self-consciously experimented with Miltonic and Shakespearean models in English, and with Baudelairean models in French (2012b). He has also suggested that Pessoa's early compositions in regular verse in English and French, according to different metrical models, may have contributed to his stylistic versatility in these languages: "In the pursuit to develop stylistic identities (his own as well as that of the fictional writers he gradually shaped), the poetic diction and metrical versatility attained by Pessoa before the decisive return to his native Portuguese is worth investigating and his incursions in French verse are rather telling in this respect." (2012b: 12).

Geoffrey Russom (2016) has further shown that Pessoa's sonnets were not a failed imitation of the metrical form of the Shakespearean sonnet, but rather a complex elaboration of its prosodic and grammatical patterns to accommodate his modernist diction and discursive self-awareness. Russom's detailed linguistic analysis of foot boundaries, metrical positions, and stress distribution (including inversions) in relation to lexical units, phrase units, sentence structure, and line closure demonstrates that Pessoa's metrical complexity in the *35 Sonnets* is, in fact, an appropriation and transformation of the Shakespearean iambic pentameter. The various types of rhythmical variation that Russom found in the *35 Sonnets* highlight not only Pessoa's knowledge of versification in English, obtained by reading and studying works by Shakespeare and Milton, but also his attempt to explore the basic iambic pentameter pattern in new ways, of which the use of function words as rhyming words and his experimentation with enjambments are two significant examples.⁵

It was Fernando Pessoa himself who claimed the proximity of the style of his English poems to the style of Elizabethan poetry. In a copy of a typewritten letter, dated 26 December 1912 and written in English, when he was writing sonnets, we read:

The state of mind of what is high and poetic in contemporary Portuguese souls being precisely similar to the Elizabethan state of mind [...], it is clear that a contemporary Portuguese, not altogether a foreigner to more than the vestibule of the house of the Muses, who should possess in an equal degree the English and the Portuguese languages, will, naturally, spontaneously and unforcedly, lapse, if he write in English, into a style not very far removed from the Elizabethan, though, of course, with certain marked and essential differences. I am, as far as I can confess, in this position [...]

(PESSOA, 1993: 36, n. 3)⁶

⁵ See Geoffrey Russom's essay "Metrical Complexity in Pessoa's *35 Sonnets*," also in this issue.

⁶ Referring to this letter, Jorge de Sena argues that Shakespeare is only mentioned as a symbol of a literary age to a friend who did not know English literature, claiming that Pessoa's sonnet sequence is a modernization of Elizabethan and Jacobean sonnet sequences not necessarily limited to Shakespeare's: "Na verdade, a sequência, na extrema complicação estilística e na análise das relações abstractas do conhecimento e da linguagem, era muito mais uma modernização das

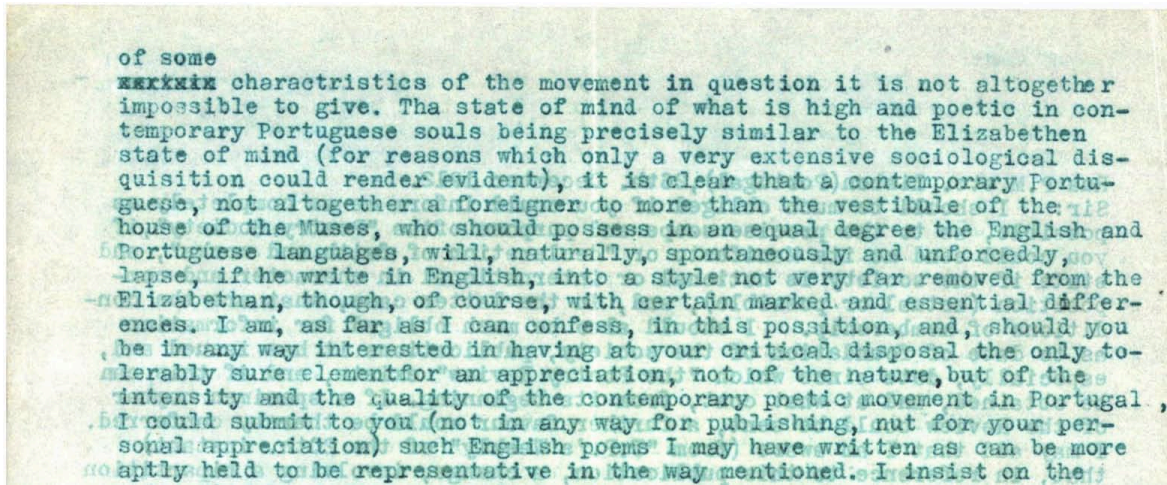


Fig. 1 Part of a letter dated December 26th, 1912. BNP/E3, 114-57^v. Detail.

Besides indicating his poetical affinities and aspirations, the proximity that Pessoa suggests between “the state of mind” in those two historical moments serves the rhetorical function of justifying precisely what would seem most “unnatural” to a reader of his English sonnets: the anachronistic stylistic proximity between texts written in English by a Portuguese poet of the early twentieth century and the style of an Elizabethan English poet of the early seventeenth century. His naturalization of this programmatic anachronism is further based on a second paradoxical assumption: that this manifestation of a contemporary Portuguese poet in the style of an Elizabethan English poet results from an equivalent level of fluency in both languages, as if the mastery of those two languages could only lead a contemporary Portuguese poet to write as an Elizabethan English poet. The unstated assumption is, of course, that Pessoa (“not altogether a foreigner to more than the vestibule of the house of the Muses”) would mean for Portuguese literature what Shakespeare means for English literature. The question is not so much a question of style as it is a question of symbolic value.

From this rhetorical attempt at naturalizing the stylistic disparity resulting from the use of two different linguistic and poetic codes, several other questions can be asked: under what circumstances is identical fluency in two languages really possible (“possess in an equal degree the English and the Portuguese languages”)? Do not linguistic competence asymmetries necessarily depend upon asymmetries in the socialization in each language, as it happens when one is

numerosas seqüências de sonetos dos reinados de Isabel I e de Jaime I, que propriamente dos sonetos de Shakespeare, cuja complicação intelectual é compensada por uma directa paixão lírica que não há nos de Pessoa.” [In effect, in its extreme stylistic complexity and in its analysis of the abstract relations of knowledge and language, the sequence was much more a modernization of the numerous Elizabethan and Jacobean sonnet sequences than strictly of the sonnets by Shakespeare, whose intellectual complexity is offset by a direct lyrical passion that cannot be found in Pessoa’s.] (PESSOA, 1974: 39, n. 1).

developed mainly within a school environment or based mostly on the reading of texts or on exposure to a second language at a certain age? On the other hand, asymmetry and interference between the codes of two or more languages are not themselves powerful mechanisms of poetic creation, as seems to have happened with many modernist and twentieth-century writers who worked in that space across two languages? Pessoa's mythic claim is also an indication of his still shifting identity between Portuguese and English as the major language for his writing.

Pessoa's ability to master the rhythms and structures of both languages and to experiment with their interference can certainly be demonstrated in the case of his translation of "The Raven." His extraordinary sense of the plasticity of linguistic forms has benefited from this extended linguistic space offered by the English and Portuguese languages. In some cases, this is also true of the rhythmic repertoire he used: in his translation of "The Raven," for instance, he has attempted to integrate the syllabic-based prosody of Portuguese popular poetry with the stress-based prosody of Poe's highly constrained meter. Poe's varied uses of trochaic feet (structured into octameters, heptameters and tetrameters) are translated using the traditional Portuguese seven-syllable verse of popular poetry (PORTELA, 2010: 47-49). At the same time, Pessoa was able to recreate Poe's trochaic rhythm in many lines (FERRARI, 2012a: 150-152).

However, the "naturally, spontaneously and unforcedly" passage of a Portuguese bilingual poet writing in English into a style "not very far removed" from the Elizabethan is contradicted both by close reading of the sonnets, and by genetic analysis of first drafts as well as manuscript annotations of a printed annotated copy of his *35 Sonnets*, where one can document the conscious effort to approximate the Elizabethan metrical and argumentative form. In the analysis of "As to a child, I talked my heart asleep" I will show how Pessoa "lapses" into "a style not very far removed from the Elizabethan," in particular into the style of the Shakespearean sonnet, although with "certain marked and essential differences." In this case, the interesting question – to which this article offers my tentative answer – is precisely this one: what are these "certain marked and essential differences" in the pseudo-Elizabethan diction that Pessoa invented for his sonnets? What are the particular poetic effects obtained by using this highly abstract form? And why, if you are in Pessoa's position as a modernist bilingual poet, would you "lapse" into that earlier style? Is he actually writing "modernist" Elizabethan sonnets?

The reflexive nature of the sonnet as a self-conscious self-contained literary form provides a constrained structure particularly suited for exploring the tensions and contradictions of self-consciousness in language. My analysis starts with a series of graphic representations depicting sound patterns in Sonnet X: analysis of meter and rhythm, including the identification of the basic pattern – iambic

pentameter [5 x (X /)] – and variations on this pattern; analysis of relations between word-boundaries and syllable-boundaries; analysis of final rhymes, including identification of semantic relations sustained by sound associations; analysis of other sound recurrences: assonance, consonance, alliteration and internal rhymes (Tables 1-4). Sense patterns are also analyzed through a series of tables: identification of semantic and lexical fields; polysemy and semantic ambiguity; metaphors, metonymy, images and comparisons; similarities, differences, and oppositions; verbal tense, verbal modality, and verbal aspect; deictic markers, including pronouns, and temporal/spatial references (Tables 5-9).

2. “My words made sleep”: a library of rhythms

The communicative constraints imposed by rhythmic patterns are an integral element in shaping a particular voice as both written and aural expression. Writing in heteronyms is also speaking in rhythms as if each particular scripting act was scanned or meant to be read aloud. In fact Pessoa’s writing could also be described as an extended experiment with the living rhythms of language. Arguably, the fiction of his heteronyms is sustained not only through a unique psychology, biography and writing style, but also by means of a distinct prosody in both prose and poetry texts, as Ferrari has claimed (2012a). Voices emerge as particular verbal rhythms become entangled with certain syntactic, semantic and discursive patterns. In Pessoa’s work we are made constantly aware of literature as a library of rhythms that bind together the double helix of emotion and thought.

This binding of written and aural is instantiated in the adoption of the Elizabethan iambic pentameter as a metrical model for his English sonnets. One of the implications of any metrical organization of language is the fact that it requires patterns to be constructed at the infra-lexical level of the syllable. In a language with high frequency of monosyllabic words,⁷ the act of producing regular rhythms based on metrical patterns often implies a contextual rearrangement of the metrical stress for certain types of words, so that they satisfy the conditions of unstressed or stressed position within a given metrical pattern. In Pessoa’s Sonnet X, the relation between word division and syllable division shows the following ratios (the first number indicates number of words per line, the second number indicates number of syllables per line):

⁷ Editor’s note: Having an abundant syllabic repertoire, English is a language rich in monosyllables (MELHER and NESPOR, 2004: 219). According to DUFFELL (2002: 305), monosyllables account for circa 75% of the words employed in Modern English poetic texts. Friedberg’s percentage is even higher: 78.2% (FRIEDBERG, 2011: 11). Portuguese has longer prosodic words (FROTA *et al.*, 2012).

Line 1: $9/10 = 0,9$
 Line 2: $7/10 = 0,7$
 Line 3: $9/10 = 0,9$
 Line 4: $10/10 = 1$
 Line 5: $10/10 = 1$
 Line 6: $7/11 = 0,63$
 Line 7: $9/10 = 0,9$
 Line 8: $8/11 = 0,72$
 Line 9: $10/10 = 1$
 Line 10: $7/10 = 0,7$
 Line 11: $8/11 = 0,72$
 Line 12: $7/10 = 0,7$
 Line 13: $8/10 = 0,8$
 Line 14: $8/10 = 0,8$
 Total number of words= 117
 Total number of syllables= 143
 Word/syllable ratio= 0,81

There are 26 disyllabic words (22%) and 91 monosyllabic words (78%) (including words such as “talked” or “cared” which are scanned as one metrical syllable) in this sonnet (Table 1). Its ratio of monosyllabic to multisyllabic word frequency (3,5) is slightly higher, for instance, than the ratio that we find in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Three lines out of fourteen with 10 monosyllabic words is also a slightly higher frequency than what we find in most Shakespeare’s sonnets. This means that echoes of the Elizabethan sonnet prosody can be found even in this syllabic ratio, and not only in the basic iambic pentameter (X/) and rhyme pattern (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG) or in the relative frequency of the lexical items mentioned below, suggesting that Pessoa carefully studied not only meter and rhyme patterns but also syllable and word boundaries in the vocabulary of Shakespeare’s sonnets.⁸

⁸ One significant prosodic feature in Shakespeare’s sonnets is the fact that lines with 10 monosyllabic words (i.e., where syllable boundaries and word boundaries coincide) often occur in the closing couplet, thus reinforcing sound-sense correlations at the crucial moment of concluding the argument.

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep	
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,	
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep	
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.	
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake	
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take	
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for	
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,	
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.	
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart	
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.	

Table 1. Syllable boundaries and word boundaries in Sonnet X: the ratio of disyllabic to monosyllabic words.

As sonic devices for controlling the relative duration or the relative stress of each syllable according to specific clusters of short and long or unstressed and stressed syllables, metrical patterns control the articulatory and acoustic rhythm of a given textual string. Meter can even be seen as a factor in the syllabification of words, that is, in defining syllable boundaries and introducing modifications in order to accommodate particular patterns, and thus reconcile word morphology with the sound dynamics of the line (Table 2). There are textual strings in which the tension between lexical stress and metrical stress will result in the modification of the basic metrical pattern: a trochaic instead of an iambic foot, as happens in lines 7 and 11; a catalectic extension of half foot at end of lines 6, 8 and 11, generally referred to as “feminine ending” in English poetry.

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep	
X	(/)	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,	
X	/	X	/	X	(/)	X	/	X	/	
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep	
X	(/)	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.	
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake	
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	(/)	X	/	
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take	
X	(/)	X	/	/	X	X	/	X	/	
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	(/)	X	/	X
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for	
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,	
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er
/	X	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.	
X	(/)	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart	
X	(/)	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.	
X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	

Table 2. Pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables: the iambic pentameter.

Three sonic features are noticeable when we compare the two initial quatrains: frequency of sound recurrences within the first quatrain is higher and more regular than those in the second quatrain; there are more disyllabic words in the second quatrain (the ratio is 8 to 5) with one trochaic disyllabic word breaking the metric pattern; the falling-rising intonation of the iambic pentameter pattern perceptible at word level – which defines the rhythm of the entire poem – is submitted to an overall rising intonation at the sentence level when sentences become questions in lines 5-6 and 7-8. Those sound changes match the rhetorical movement of the text, which moves from the initial lullaby effect that induces the state of sleep to a logical argument about the relation of meaning to wakefulness and about the soothing effect of measured language. Recurrences of /f/, /m/ e /s/ as well the text's rhyming patterns associate the various textual moments and

reinforce the text's repetitive sound texture, making alliteration, internal rhymes and final rhymes work in conjunction with the semantics to offer the sonnet as a rhythmic embodiment of its meaning (Tables 3 and 4).

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep		a
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,		b
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep		a
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.		b
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake		c
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?	d
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take		c
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?	d
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for		e
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,		f
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er	e
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.		f
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart		g
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.		g

Table 3. Final rhyme scheme: abab cdcd efef gg.

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep		t/s
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,		p/m
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep		s/m
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.		s
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake		f/w
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?	k
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take		n
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?	m
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for		s
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,		p/s
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er	f
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.		s
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart		d
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.		s

Table 4. Other sound recurrences: assonance, consonance, alliteration and internal rhymes.

3. "What their sense did say": a promise of meaning

An analysis of the lexical and semantic fields of the sonnet confirms a significant intersection with the lexicon of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, suggesting that Pessoa is writing with the memory and reference of those sonnets also at the lexical and

semantic level. The most frequent lexemes in this poem (with two or more instances) also occur in the 154 sonnets: in descending order, “heart,” “day,” “words,” “sleep,” “sense,” “joy,” “care,” “flower,” “deceive,” “measure,” and “promise.”⁹ Word-cloud visualization allows us to represent the relative frequency of words in Sonnet X by Fernando Pessoa (excluding prepositions, articles and other connectors) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Lexical and semantic fields: word-cloud of word frequencies.

Relations among the various lexical items suggest that they structure the semantic fields in the text around three major networks: language and poetry; sleep and wakefulness; feelings and actions (Table 5). A closely knit network of semantic relations based on a limited and repeated number of lexical items, which are associated in terms of metaphorical and metonymic similarities and contrasts, is one of the sources of conceptual unity in the Shakespearean sonnet. Semantic closure, in this instance, is provided by the word “heart,” used in the opening line, and again in the final couplet as a rhyming word. If we add the role that conceptual word games, including puns, play in the Elizabethan sonnet, exploring double meanings and ambiguities, we can see further aspects of the relationship between model and parody. The process of creating ambiguity usually depends on using the same word but making modulations and inflections through processes of verbal recontextualization that change the word’s meaning.

Two key moments in this sonnet show how one word can be perceptually modulated at both the phonetic and semantic level. The first one is the very

⁹ In Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, the number of occurrences for those words are as follows: “heart” (58 instances, of which “my heart” (23) [+ “hearts” (4)], “day” (26) [+ “days” (17)], “words” (10), “sleep” (7), “sense” (8) [+ “senses” (2)], “joy” (8) [+ “enjoy, enjoyed, enjoyer” (8)], “care” (6), “flower” (5) [+ “flowers” (8)], “deceive” (2) [+ “deceived (2) + “deceivest” (1)], “measure” (2) [+ “measured” (1)], and “promise” (1).

inflection on the word “sense” that results from its dislocation from an alliterative context to a non-alliterative context: “Than from a thought of what their sense did say. | For did it care for sense, would it not wake.” Those occurrences signal the split between sound and sense at the heart of language and which is a driving theme in this poem. Placed at the end of the first quatrain within the alliterative pattern “sense did say,” it becomes part of the self-reference to the pleasure derived from listening to language and feeling its quieting effect as lullaby. On the second instance, on the contrary, placed immediately before a comma-length caesura, and isolated from any strong sound recurrence with its adjacent neighbors (“care for sense, would it”), the emphasis is placed on the semantic reference. The priming of sound over sense resulting from phonetic repetitions is replaced by the priming of sense over sound: this line marks the beginning of the counter-argument in the second stanza which substitutes the sleeping-inducing sound recurrences of lines 1-4 by the more stark logical reasoning of lines 5-8. Finally the word reappears as an echo in “senses” just before the final concluding couplet: “Which the less active senses best enjoy.” The relation of “sense” to “senses” is now suggested as another aspect of the relation between sleepiness and wakefulness, between sensing sound and sensing meaning, between enjoying the flower and enjoying the fruit.

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep		a
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,		b
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep		a
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.		b
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake		c
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?	d
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take		c
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?	d
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for		e
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,		f
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er	e
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.		f
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart		g
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.		g

Table 5. Lexical items and semantic fields: LANGUAGE AND POETRY (talked, words-words, thought, sense-sense, say, meting, measure); SLEEP AND WAKEFULNESS (asleep-sleep-slept-sleepy/wake, day, morrow); FEELINGS AND ACTIONS (promise-promise-promised, care-cared, joy-enjoy, pleasure; deceit-deceit; knows); NATURE (fruit, flower); BODY AND SELF (heart-heart, self, itself, senses).

The text's enactment of temporality is skillfully divided into several moods, which are in turn inflected by tense and aspect changes: past tense in the indicative mood (first quatrain) gives way to past tense in the conditional mood (second quatrain), followed again by past tense in the subjunctive mood (first two lines in the third quatrain). The hypothetical and the conditional become grammatical expressions of the unbridgeable distance between sound and meaning (Table 6). Next, there is a transition in the verb's aspect to a continuing duration (last two lines in the third quatrain) anticipating the shift to the present tense in the final couplet, where the text's deictic temporal reference catches up with the moment of enunciation by self-referring to the writing act and thus to the poem itself as part of the self-deceiving process of measured language: "do I detain the heart," "self knows itself a part." The possibility of being in language emerges through the self's temporal presence in the very act of enunciating the text. The voice becomes self-conscious about the act of existing in the sounds of language.

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep		a
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,		b
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep		a
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.		b
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake		c
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?	d
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take		c
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?	d
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for		e
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,		f
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er	e
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.		f
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart		g
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.		g

Table 6. Verbal forms: mood, tense, aspect.

Sonnet X also conforms to the syllogistic structure of the Elizabethan sonnet, which is syntactically marked by connectors such as "and," "for," "if" or "but" in the first two quatrains – where the premises are expressed – followed by "so," "thus" or "then" in the third quatrain or in the final couplet – where the conclusion (sometimes a paradoxical conclusion) is stated. Pessoa's sonnet also develops a syllogistic argument: the second quatrain offers a counterpoint to the first quatrain in the form of two questions; the third quatrain takes the conclusion from the initial premises; the final couplet picks up the central word in the poem "heart" and states the paradoxical conclusion of the "self-deceiving" heart (Table 7). Likewise, the distribution of sentences per lines or line groups confirms the expectations of its model: one declarative sentence in the first quatrain, followed

by two interrogative sentences in the second quatrain, followed by a second declarative sentence in the third quatrain, and a third declarative sentence in the final couplet. The match between rhyme pattern and sentence distribution across the lines further confirms a close adherence to its model: sentence 1-*abab*; sentence 2 [question 1]-*cd*; sentence 3 [question 2]-*cd*; sentence 4-*efef*; sentence 5-*gg*. The only significant divergence between syntactic pauses and line-endings can be seen in the transitions between lines 7-8 (“to take | The promise”) and 9-10 (“but for | The present) where the rhythmic pause at the end of the line does not coincide with a grammatical pause.

As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep		a
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,		b
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep		a
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.		b
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake		c
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?	d
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take		c
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?	d
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for		e
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,		f
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er	e
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.		f
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart		g
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.		g

Table 7. Sentence structure and argumentation: assumptions and conclusions.

Now that I have described the network of relations that links Pessoa's to the Elizabethan sonnet, it is time to turn our attention to “certain marked and essential differences.” What are those differences that distance Pessoa's *35 Sonnets* from his Elizabethan models?

Jorge de Sena's reading of the *35 Sonnets* (PESSOA, 1974: 77-81) charts the emergence of two unifying themes that hold the sonnet sequence together: the existential paralysis that is a consequence of the undecidable split between dream and reality or thought and action; and the impossibility of self-knowledge expressed as the distance between feeling the self and communicating the self, thus anticipating Pessoa's psychological rationalization of the heteronyms and the notion of self as an empty mask. Sena finds in “Autopsicografia”'s the last stanza an echo from Sonnet X and sees it as the only poem in Pessoa's sonnet sequence in which the expression of emotion goes beyond the formal and stylistic play with the English sonnet structure, generally characterized as “exercícios de virtuosismo e de obsessão com a realidade” [“exercises of virtuosity and obsession with reality”] (80). Adopting a twelve-syllable meter, Jorge de Sena's translation is thus informed

by a retrospective reading of Sonnet X as the expression of dilemmas that we find in Pessoa's later writings:

Como criança, que fôra, o coração embalo
 Com o vago prometer do dia de amanhã.
 E ele adormece mais porque o falar faz sono
 Que por pensar sentidos no falar que digo.
 Pois, se os pensara, acaso não acordaria
 Para inquirir ao certo os gozos de amanhã?
 Não cingiria o jeito das palavras para
 A promessa conter na forma que medisse?
 E assim, se dorme, apenas é por se entregar
 Ao de hoje sono que há na prometida festa.
 Agradecendo o fruto pela prévia flor
 Que os sonos menos acordados melhor gozam.
 Eis que de enganos só meu coração detenho
 Do qual o mesmo engano sabe que é uma parte.

(PESSOA, 1974: 167)

Because it highlights the presence of Pessoa's existential and literary dilemmas, Sena's translation is another way of capturing "certain marked and essential differences." The difference introduced by Portuguese prosody and Sena's lexical choices releases the text's potential meanings from their abstract rhythmic and rhetoric constraints, providing another linguistic and poetic probe into its verbal form as distinct from its models. The sonnet's strict adherence to Elizabethan versification models and conceptual structures cannot prevent it from staging the mode of relation of writing and language to self that is specific to Pessoa's modernist consciousness. By reading this sonnet both in relation with its Elizabethan models and in relation to Pessoa's later writings, it is possible to recognize it as a complex formal parody and not a mere imitation or a variation.

It is the patterned use of language – that is, the poem itself – that talks the heart to sleep. The quieting of the heart is a physical effect of the patterned use of language: it is the rhythm of poetry, its measure, and not the "empty promise" contained in the meaning of words, which is the source of joy. And yet, the heart is a self-deceiving heart because it knows that it is being deceived by "The present sleepy use of promised joy" (l. 10). Insofar as Sonnet X can be read as an *ars poetica* about the nature and function of poetry as verbal art, it is markedly different from the Shakespearean sonnet's belief in its power in arresting beauty and preserving life or giving verbal form to love. In Shakespeare, most self-references to verses, lines, numbers and rhymes are made as an invocation of their ability to present or represent objects of beauty and love as objects of writing.¹⁰ In Sonnet X, there are

¹⁰ See, for example, the following sonnets by Shakespeare: XVII ("Who will believe my verse in time to come"); XIX ("Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,"); XXI ("So is it not with me as with that Muse,"); XXXVIII ("How can my muse want subject to invent,"); LXXIX ("Whilst I alone did

similar references to literary art and language, such as “my words,” “sense” and “measure”. The use of the archaic “meting of its measure”, to refer to metrical feet and the rhythmic patterning of language, is a lexical marker of the presence of its Elizabethan models. However, there is no particular belief in the representational power of measured language, whose numbing effect is presented as a self-deceiving promise of joy. Rhythmic and semantic effects at the textual surface are offered as evidence of the unresolvable tension of sound and sense, writing self and written self.

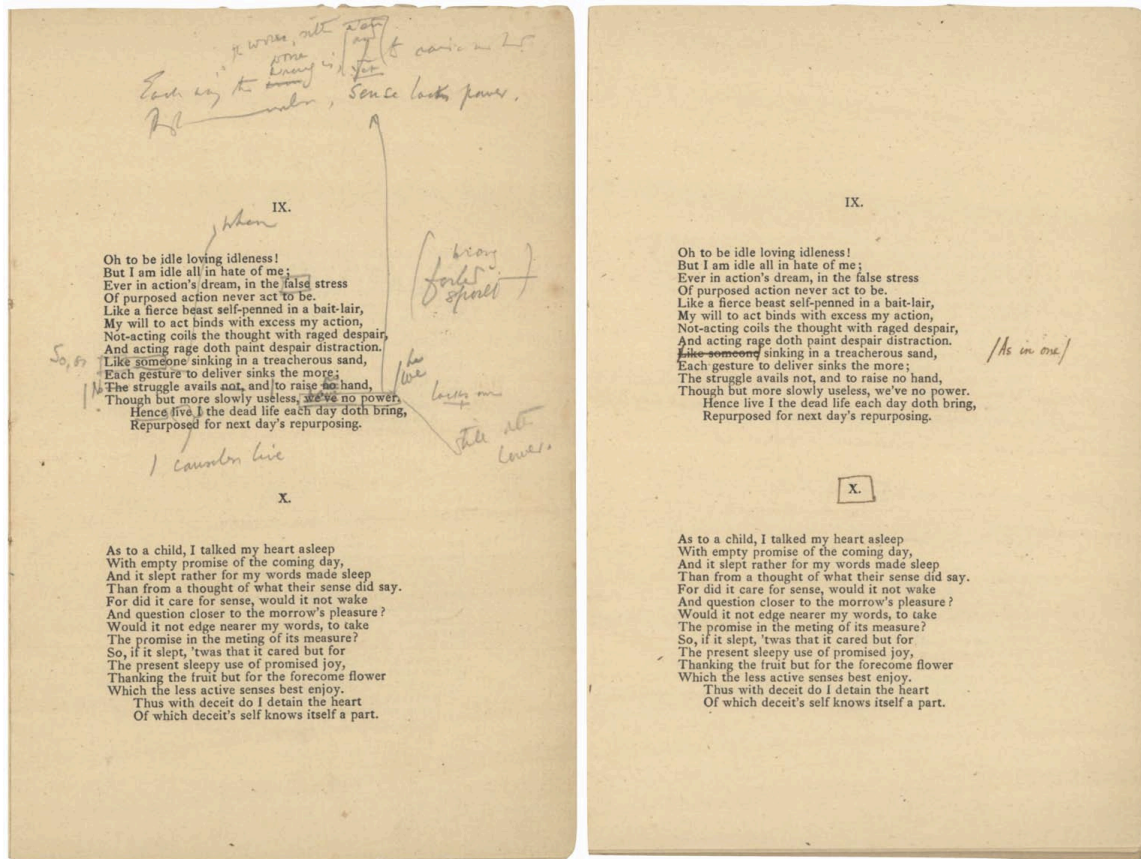
As	to	a	child,	I	talked	my	heart	a-	-sleep		a
With	emp-	-ty	prom-	-ise	of	the	com-	-ing	day,		b
And	it	slept	rath-	-er	for	my	words	made	sleep		a
Than	from	a	thought	of	what	their	sense	did	say.		b
For	did	it	care	for	sense,	would	it	not	wake		c
And	ques-	-tion	clos-	-er	to	the	mor-	-row's	pleas-	-ure?	d
Would	it	not	edge	near-	-er	my	words,	to	take		c
The	prom-	-ise	in	the	met-	-ing	of	its	meas-	-ure?	d
So,	if	it	slept,	'twas	that	it	cared	but	for		e
The	pres-	-ent	sleep-	-y	use	of	prom-	-ised	joy,		f
Thank-	-ing	the	fruit	but	for	the	fore-	come	flow-	-er	e
Which	the	less	ac-	-tive	sens-	-es	best	en-	-joy.		f
Thus	with	de-	-ceit	do	I	de-	-tain	the	heart		g
Of	which	de-	-ceit's	self	knows	it-	self	a	part.		g

Table 8. Enunciation: grammatical persons.

The poem's system of deictic references is built around the split between the first person (the speaker) and the third person (the speaker's heart). There are three occurrences for the first person: “I talked my heart” (l. 1) “my words” (l. 2) and “I detain the heart” (l.13); and there are eight occurrences for the third person referring to the heart: “it slept” (l. 3), “did it care” (l. 5), “would it not wake” (l. 6), “would it not edge” (l. 7), “its measure” (l. 8), “it slept” (l. 9), “it cared but for” (l.9) and “knows itself” (l. 14) (Table 8). Unlike the more frequent speaker-addressee deictic structure that we find in Shakespeare, Pessoa's reflexive meditation on poetry and language is based on the alterity of heart to self, i.e., of self to self. The personification of the speaker's heart is also the embodiment of the double-bind of consciousness. “It” captures the self-awareness of the subject provided by language. This is one of the “marked and essential differences” that set this sonnet apart from its Elizabethan models, and place it in a distinct system of meanings.

call upon thy aid,”); LXXXI (“Or I shall live your epitaph to make,”); LXXXVI (“Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,”); CIII (“Alack! what poverty my Muse brings forth,”); and CV (“Let not my love be called idolatry,”).

Iambic pentameter, rhyme structure, lexical fields, sentence structure, and the way the ensemble of prosodic and semantic features are intertwined to form lines of poetry all seem to converge to confirm the “natural lapse” into the Elizabethan style. A particular type of sonnet becomes recognizable as an abstract network of relations that map formal relations of sound onto formal relations of meaning, and vice versa. However, a number of variations on that mapping are enough to distance Pessoa’s sonnet from its models, and establish a parodic relation between both sonnet forms. As a highly codified signifier of poetic discourse, the sonnet becomes a generator for exploring complex patterns of measured language that interrogate the nature of poetry and the relation of the self to itself. Sound-sense correlations are shown as an embodiment of the affective power of language on self-cognition and self-perception.



Figs. 3 & 4. Pages from published copies of the 35 *Sonnets* with emendations by Pessoa; BNP/E3, 98-3r.

49 B³ - 49

As to a child, I ~~to~~ ^{talked} my heart asleep
 with empty ~~of~~ ^{of} promise of the cunning
 but it slept rather for my words ^{and} ~~was~~ ^{sleep}
 than by belief in what ~~any~~ ^{their} ~~words~~ ^{never} ~~did~~ ^{say};
 from a thought

For did it so believe ~~it~~ ^{it} would not wake
 And question closer to the ^{moment's} ~~cunning~~ ^{promise}?
 how it not ~~also~~ ^{never} ~~my~~ ^{words} ~~to~~ ^{take}
 The promise in the making of its ~~rescue~~ ^{rescue}?

So if it slept ^{two} ~~that~~ ^{it} ~~could~~ ^{not}
 How for it ~~came~~, how much ~~for~~ ^{both} ~~away~~,

And I, ^{should} ~~it~~ ^{me} ~~it~~ ^{not} ~~mind~~ ^{that} ~~it~~ ^{felt},
 with little words explained its ~~thoughts~~ ^{away}.

2

1 we do 3

Thus with deceit I ~~do~~ ^{we} ~~deceive~~ ^{do} the
 of which deceit ^{is} ~~itself~~ ^{self} knew ~~itself~~ ^{itself} a
 part.

if thus our heart deceives itself ^{part} asleep
 How ~~masked~~ ^{masked} of cunning
 is not heart to heart!

If I ~~deceive~~ ^{deceive} myself asleep with art

Fig. 5. Draft of "Sonnet X" from 35 Sonnets. BNP/E3, 49B³-49^r.

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