

Portugal's First Queer Novel: Rediscovering Visconde de Vila- Moura's *Nova Safo* (1912)

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Abstract: This study seeks to recover the novel *Nova Safo* (1912) by Visconde de Vila-Moura from the marginal status to which it has been consigned in Portuguese literary history by arguing for its momentous cultural relevance as Portugal's first queer novel. Given the extremely limited number and scope of existing critical approaches to the text, my reading is oriented by a reparative strategy that aims, first and foremost, to remedy its precarious status as an archival object. I describe the novel's inchoate and cluttered collection of references, images, and storylines as a countercultural scrapbook of queer feeling, ruled by an antiquarian sensibility, whose structures of cohesion belong less to the realm of formal aesthetics than to the sphere of homophilic affective epistemology. Further, I chart *Nova Safo*'s intersecting gestures of transitive embodiment—transnational, transgender, and transracial—by discussing the novel's mournful evocation of three recently departed icons of fin-de-siècle literary culture: Oscar Wilde, Renée Vivien, and João da Cruz e Sousa.

Keywords: Decadence, modernism, affect, scrapbook, reparative reading

Visconde de Vila-Moura's 1912 novel *Nova Safo* remains the least well known and the most underrated among the major prose works of Portuguese modernism.¹ Deferring a comprehensive discussion of its marginalization in the

¹ Reedited only once in the twentieth century (in 1921, in Brazil, with a second printing in 1923), *Nova Safo* has recently been republished in Portugal, with an introduction by Aníbal Fernandes

literary canon to a future opportunity, I here focus primarily on exploring the novel's complex engagement with the poetics and politics of dissident sexuality at the intersection of decadent and modernist aesthetic and ideological concerns. *Nova Safo* was not the first Portuguese novel to centrally thematize homosexuality—as such, it was preceded by Abel Botelho's *O Barão de Lavos* (1891) as well as by Alfredo Gallis's *Sáficas* (1902) and *O Sr. Ganímedes* (1906)—but it may be considered the inaugural exploration in this literary form of epistemic frameworks, affective energies, and creative horizons of an uncommonly diverse and inclusive queerness. Although *O Barão de Lavos* is readable as a cultural text that exceeds the limitations of its naturalist and violently homophobic design and can therefore be placed, *malgré lui*, in the national genealogy of queer recognition and emancipation, the diametrically opposed, energetically homophilic intentionality of *Nova Safo* modulates the choral ensemble of the novel's combined authorial and narrative agencies to produce an opus that, for all of its dissonant notes, is nothing less than a simultaneously mournful and aspirational hymn to queer possibility.²

Methodologically and affectively, my reading of *Nova Safo* is oriented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's call for a turn from "paranoid" toward "reparative" reading protocols, driven by a desire whose nature is "additive and accretive" (149). More specifically, this mode of reading "wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self" (149). Taking into account that the scant critical literature on *Nova Safo* has exhibited strong paranoid tendencies, my reparative approach to Vila-Moura's novel likewise follows Heather Love's implementation of Sedgwick's proposal in her exploration of the history of queer feeling, which "tends toward the descriptive rather than the critical" and toward "think[ing] with [the authors] rather than against them, identifying with them rather than critiquing their

(Sistema Solar, 2017). I quote from this edition, which reproduces the text of the 1921 Brazilian version, while adopting its modernized title ("Safo" in lieu of "Sapho") and spelling of the author's name (which varies in historical record). Since significant divergences exist, however, between the 1912 and 1921 editions, I note these differences whenever pertinent. Another recent reedition by INDEX ebooks (Lisbon), which specializes in "literatura gay em língua portuguesa a preços baixos" (in e-book and print-on-demand formats) reproduces the original 1912 edition with modernized spelling and ample explanatory footnotes.

² On visions and attitudes toward homosexuality in *O Barão de Lavos*, see Howes. Studies that comment, more or less briefly, on *Nova Safo* include Lopes 418-19; Mott 79-80; Abranches 294-97; Braga, *Filhas de Safo* 90; and Curopos 179-85.

refusals and their backwardness” (23). An engagement with Love’s work yields an additional advantage in this context, given her call for renewed attention to what she calls “backward modernism” (6). This resonates in multiple ways with the haunting of the Portuguese modernist repertoire by the specters of decadence, with *Nova Safo* as but one of several prominent exhibits that bear out this proposition. On the other hand, however, one of the consequences of the reparative strategy pursued in this reading is the relatively scarce attention it pays to contemporary debates in Anglo-American queer theory around the subjects of queer temporality and utopianism. While *Nova Safo* richly deserves to be discussed in depth in such a framing, its precarious status as an archival object makes it more urgent, for the time being, to bring its hermeneutically shapeless substance into a tentative critical perspective that is primarily descriptive and contextualizing.³

Vila-Moura’s Magnum Opus

Considering that both the author and the work are largely forgotten, it is useful to begin with a summary sketch of Vila-Moura’s life and literary career and an equally synthetic synopsis of *Nova Safo*. Bento de Carvalho Lobo (1877-1935), the first and last Viscount of Vila-Moura, received his title from Dom Carlos I in 1900, the year he finished studying law at Coimbra (Fernandes 10). Although born in Vila Moura, he spent most of his life at another family property, Porto Manso, also in the province of Douro. The most extensive source of biographical information is a book published two years after his death by João Alves, seemingly the last of several male companions who resided with Vila-Moura at Porto Manso and joined him on extended European travels. Despite the book’s soaring title, *O génio de Vila Moura: meditação sobre os problemas da literatura contemporânea*, perhaps its greatest interest lies in its portrayal of the viscount’s meticulously stylized living environment that amalgamates Douro’s feudal aesthetic with cosmopolitan infusions. This happens, for example, when naked torsos of rural workers are compared by Alves to marble statues studied by Vila-Moura in Italy (28, 171) or when Louis Fabulet, the French translator of Walt

³ César Braga-Pinto’s contribution to this issue does offer such a theoretical framing of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Brazilian literature in a discussion that is deeply pertinent as well to Portuguese literary production of the period and, in particular, to *Nova Safo*.

Whitman's homoerotic "Calamus" poems, comes visiting from Florence ("onde fora companheiro de André Gide") and is shown a dance by Douro "roughs" ("rudes"), which is staged for him as a special attraction by his Portuguese host (39).⁴

Nova Safo was the first and by far the most ambitious literary work produced by Vila-Moura, as well as his only novel. Although the list of his publications appended to Alves's study runs to twenty-five items, the short stories and novellas Vila-Moura went on to publish after 1912 in several volumes, beginning with *Doentes de beleza* in 1913, are far more modest in their narrative latitude than *Nova Safo*, in addition to remaining firmly confined to heteronormative frameworks of plot and theme.⁵ The list also includes several studies of Portuguese literary and artistic figures, "obras genologicamente difíceis de classificar, entre a biografia e o ensaio" (Braga, "Visconde de Vila Moura" 299), whose subjects include writers Camilo Castelo Branco, António Nobre, Fialho de Almeida, and Mário Beirão, as well as sculptor Teixeira Lopes and painter António Carneiro (the latter, like Beirão, was personally connected to Vila-Moura, having portrayed him and illustrated his books). While *Nova Safo* was published in Lisbon, by Livraria Ferreira, all of Vila-Moura's subsequent works appeared in Porto, for the most part under the imprint of Renascença Portuguesa. Member of parliament for the Partido Regenerador during the last two years of the monarchy, Vila-Moura withdrew from political life following the establishment of the republic, and for the remaining two and a half decades of

⁴ Gide and Fabulet worked together on the translation of Whitman in 1914 in Florence. As Gide's biographer writes, "Fabulet, another practitioner of 'ces moeurs affreuses,' was as keen as Gide to espouse the 'cause' by publishing Whitman in unbowdlerized French" (Sheridan 274). On Gide's 1918 edition of Whitman's poetry, which included Fabulet's translations, see Erkkilä 117. For additional commentary on Alves's *O génio de Vila Moura*, see Braga, "Visconde de Vila Moura" 299–300n8.

⁵ See Alves's discussion of *Nova Safo* as distinct from all subsequent literary works published by Vila-Moura, where Alves claims the novel represents "a solução total do problema decadente de Vila-Moura" (155), which is thereby purged from his writing. This claim recalls Fernando Pessoa's explanation, in his 1930 letter to João Gaspar Simões, of the genesis of his English poems, "Antinous" and "Epithalamium" (respectively homo- and heteroerotic), as a homeopathic purge of "obscene elements" from his mind: "Como esses elementos [...] são um certo estorvo para alguns processos mentais superiores, decidi, por duas vezes, eliminá-los pelo processo simples de os exprimir intensamente" (Pessoa 220). Pessoa wrote to Vila-Moura after reading *Nova Safo* (and before writing "Antinous" and "Epithalamium"), but only Vila-Moura's grateful reply to his letter survives: "A carta do meu querido amigo Fernando Pessoa é um nobre documento de talento, generosidade e boa-fé" (França 187).

his life settled permanently in the North, between Porto Manso and Porto (where he also owned a residence), spending a few months each year outside Portugal, “vaguea[ndo] pelos países da grande cultura, sobretudo pela sua querida e fecunda Itália” (Alves 24).

The narrative of *Nova Safo* displays a similar convergence of cosmopolitan and regional affinities, which are crystallized in the figure of the novel’s protagonist, a young noblewoman from Minho named Maria Peregrina Álvares de Lorena e Vila-Verde.⁶ Born in 1880 and orphaned early in life, the young woman lives independently and is able to draw freely on her large fortune, which she spends on travels and literary pursuits. She is already famous for two volumes of poetry, *Nova Safo* and *Emparedada*, when the narrator meets her on a train journey between Porto and Guimarães and is later charged with the task of writing her story from the notes Maria Peregrina passes on to him. She describes these notes as “as *minhas confissões* que marcam mais ousio [...] do que as celebradas *confissões* de Rousseau” (28), and her motivation for sharing them as stemming from a sense of future-oriented public mission: “Quero que os que estão por vir aprendam no meu caso a coragem da verdade” (28).

The self-described confessional nature of Peregrina’s narrative and the expression “coragem da verdade” allude to what Óscar Lopes names, in his hostile and didactic summary of Vila-Moura’s literary career—the only focused discussion of the writer found in canonical Portuguese literary history—as the “atitude [...] nitidamente apologética [...] em relação a diversas manifestações de ‘amor exótico’ ou ‘extravagante’ de que o livro constitui um inverosímil mostuário” (418). These “manifestations” include, most prominently, Peregrina’s various lesbian relationships, which begin, paradigmatically, with her English governess, a thirtyish “aventureira inteligente” who “tirocinara o ensino pela Alemanha, Áustria e França” (Vila-Moura 49) before settling down to care for her pupil in rural Minho.⁷ At age fifteen, Peregrina initiates her own transnational itinerancy when her guardians enroll her at St. James College in Petersfield, England, where she excels in the pursuit of learning and develops

⁶ The protagonist’s uncommon name, Peregrina, in addition to signifying her restless nature, may also have been a tribute to the prolific nineteenth-century writer from Porto, Maria Peregrina de Sousa (1809-86).

⁷ On the association of British governesses working in Portugal with lesbianism, see Abranches 290-97.

close relationships with several of her schoolmates, including Edgar, Hugh (Edgar's "companheiro constante [...] um adolescente de olhar quebrado"), Violet, and Helen, "a predilecta de Maria Peregrina" (60).⁸ As this cohort of queer teenagers holds deep conversations about life, art, and the advantages and disadvantages of "amor extravagante" vis-à-vis "amor vulgar" (58), Peregrina explains to the group the book project she is working on—*Nova Safo*—which proposes to reinvent the legacy of Sappho for the modern age.

The idyll of Petersfield is interrupted when Helen leaves to enter an arranged marriage, and Edgar (in love with Peregrina despite his relationship with Hugh) kills himself after Peregrina invites him into her bed on Helen's wedding night—in order to lose her virginity at the same time as her beloved—but then rejects his attempts to remain attached to her. By now legally emancipated and in possession of her fortune, Peregrina abandons the school and settles in London together with Violet, who receives a salary and a five-year contract as Peregrina's companion; a year later, the publication of *Nova Safo* in Portugal is met with "aplausos e protestos" (81). Eventually, Peregrina and Violet leave London and, after traveling around Europe, settle for a time in Greece, described as Peregrina's spiritual homeland (87), where in addition to studying art, exploring Greek culture, and writing, the heiress co-organizes refined orgies with like-minded wealthy expatriates. She also adds another companion to her entourage, the German dwarf Jacob, whom she rescues from a freak show and employs as a servant. After Peregrina leaves Greece for Paris in November 1900, urged by a telegram from Robert Ross to come to Oscar Wilde's deathbed, more travels follow until, ten years later, Peregrina (who has just published her second long poem, *Emparedada*) and the still-faithful Violet return to Portugal.

Having met the novel's nameless narrator in June 1910 and handed over to him the papers on which the story of the new *Nova Safo* is to be based, Peregrina leaves Minho to take up residence in Lisbon. (At this point, it bears mentioning, it becomes unclear how the narrator is able to follow and recount the novel's subsequent events, as he never reappears in the story.) There, surrounded by an aura of literary and personal notoriety, Peregrina meets another aristocrat/writer

⁸ Given its location, coeducational model, and relaxed discipline, St. James College was likely fashioned by Vila-Moura after Bedales School in Petersfield, founded in 1893 as "a humane alternative to the authoritarian regimes typical of late-Victorian public schools" ("History of Bedales").

from the North, Nuno Álvaro de Sousa e Vilar, the third Count of Nevogilde (102). Nuno de Vilar has recently formed a relationship of *amitié amoureuse* with a young sculptor and painter, Rui Augusto, and the two men soon become Peregrina's closest friends, in whose company she takes refuge from her busy society life on "aqueles [dias] em que tratava à puridade os íntimos que eram os da casa, Nuno de Vilar e Rui" (115). Another significant development is the arrival in Lisbon of the new British ambassador, who turns out to be John Brook, the husband of Peregrina's former beloved from Petersfield. Helen visits Peregrina, who advises her to leave the husband Helen hates: "Deixas de ser ministra de Inglaterra, mas és a mulher digna, ainda que vivas como uma rameira, de amores com outras rameiras. Sê a mulher livre..." (128).

In the novel's final chapters, the action shifts mostly to the North, as (at Peregrina's insistence) Nuno and Peregrina travel together to Nuno's ancestral manor of Vila-Feia, in Douro. At the last moment, Rui refuses to join them, much to Nuno's chagrin. During the month they spend together at Vila-Feia, Nuno and Peregrina become lovers; the relationship continues after they return to Lisbon but is interrupted when Rui dies fighting on the side of Republican insurgents in the 5 October 1910 revolution (which overturned the Portuguese monarchy). Rui's death leaves Nuno overwhelmed by mourning and unable to join Peregrina, who has already left for Figueira da Foz, where she and Nuno were planning to spend the fall season. After a few weeks, Nuno writes to end their relationship. Enter Jacob, who informs Peregrina that Nuno has appeared in the vicinity of Figueira, demanding sex from him. He had submitted to Nuno on earlier occasions (at Peregrina's direction); however, he now takes the opportunity to avenge both for his own violation and Peregrina's abandonment by killing Nuno in the course of their encounter. Peregrina rushes to the beach where Nuno's body lies and remains by his side until the rising waves drag them both out to the sea. The novel closes with the reproduction of Peregrina's last work, "Elegia da morte," which she completed just before her suicide.

A Scrapbook of Queer Feeling

It remains something of a mystery why Vila-Moura's novel appears to have been so thoroughly marginalized soon after its publication and then largely forgotten for more than a century of its existence. As one of the reasons, I propose that an

intrinsic aspect of *Nova Safo*'s queerness is the text's inability and/or refusal to conform to established standards of narrative cohesion and stylistic quality, a fact that does make it at times genuinely difficult and unpleasurable to read.⁹ Entire stretches of the novel feel messy and amateurish in their design and execution, and it is all too easy to dismiss Vila-Moura's work as bad writing that does not merit canonical inclusion or serious critical interest. Similar accusations of unreadability have of course been traditionally leveled against the "notoriously challenging" decadent writing as a whole, whose "combination of sexuality, violence, and esoteric thought [...] renders it foreboding to even the most patient and receptive of contemporary readers" (Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky 3). However, beyond the explanatory power of this literary filiation, *Nova Safo*, which is commonly described as Portugal's only decadent novel, may also be regarded as a willfully inchoate and cluttered collection of references, artifacts, images, and drafts that are not meant to be combined into any discernible wholeness, whether aesthetic or ideological. It may thus be both advisable and instructive to interpret *Nova Safo* not only as a conventionally composed and publicly circulating work of literary fiction but also as a semiprivate and counterculturally oriented scrapbook of sorts. In this light, *Nova Safo* constitutes an idiosyncratic space of representation ruled by an antiquarian sensibility combined with an impulse to reveal or foreground otherwise proscribed "latent, unexpected meanings" by way of accumulation and juxtaposition, as has historically been the case with scrapbooks composed by queer and other marginalized subjects (Moynihan). Such a scrapbook lacks the formal purposefulness and artistic ambition of the modernist collage, and its (dis)articulation is not underwritten by any unifying ideology of aesthetic production; any structures of cohesion it may reveal upon inspection belong to the realm of affective and sensory epistemology, as ways of knowing one's feelings and feeling out shapes of elusively available knowledge.

It is true that reading *Nova Safo* with recourse to such a hermeneutic framework may seem to reflect what Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky denounce as the tendency toward "unreflective syncretism"

⁹ More broadly, this question needs to be addressed from a literary-historical perspective, considering the pervasive yet undervalued presence of "decadent" elements in Portugal's so-called First Modernism (which centered on the literary magazine *Orpheu*, published in 1915). For a preliminary attempt at such a discussion, see Klobucka 2015.

(3) and a “drive toward classification and taxonomy” (4) of decadent themes, images, and figures in much critical writing on this body of literature. However, the goal of my approach is to build on the recent turn in queer theory toward exploring nonteleological and antidisciplinary forms of knowledge production that take up “a kind of Benjaminian relation to knowing, a stroll down uncharted streets in the ‘wrong’ direction,” in opposition to “staying in well-lit territories” and “knowing exactly which way to go before you set out” (Halberstam 6). In relation to *Nova Safo*, and in contrast to paranoid theory’s quest for “knowledge in the form of exposure” (Sedgwick 138), a patient survey of the novel’s exuberantly excessive repository of queer feeling and representation may go some way toward giving the text a measure of the plenitude it so manifestly lacks when approached through more disciplined and demanding reading protocols.

To begin with, *Nova Safo* accommodates a large cast of sexually dissident characters, presented more or less explicitly as such. This begins in the novel’s first scene, in which the narrator witnesses the as-yet unnamed Maria Peregrina and Violet exchanging “olhares perversos” in an atmosphere of “a mais esquisita intimidade” (17). Next comes Luísa Huley, Peregrina’s English governess, followed by the ensemble of the protagonist’s schoolmates at Petersfield and, a few years later, the community of wealthy cosmopolitan expatriates in Greece, among whom Peregrina seeks out “aqueles que mais se lhe aproximavam em perversão e requintes” (92). On Peregrina’s return to Portugal, the novel’s readers are introduced to its main male character, Nuno de Vilar, and witness the beginning of his relationship with Rui Augusto. Interestingly (given the text’s frank depiction of both lesbian and gay erotic relationships thus far), Nuno and Rui’s coming together is represented through a sly device of narrative elision—sufficiently transparent in its coding to convey the message to motivated readers but at the same time safely cloaked in plausible deniability—when from the scene of Nuno inviting Rui to dinner the narration jumps directly to their partaking of breakfast together a few days later (111). The caution is understandable in view of the fact that the character of Rui seems to be modeled at least in part on poet Mário Beirão, who lived with Vila-Moura at Porto Manso at the time *Nova Safo* was published.¹⁰ A few chapters later, however, circumspection is thrown to the

¹⁰ Like Beirão, Rui Augusto is from Alentejo, a regional filiation that reverberates in significant ways in their art. Both were also artistically precocious, and a similar age and class differential is drawn between Nuno Vilar and Rui Augusto as that which existed between Vila-Moura and Beirão.

wind when the two men dialogue at length about their mutual feelings (as well as about Nuno's affair with Peregrina) in uncommonly direct and straightforward language: "Porque és tu tão esquivo aos meus afectos, depois da convivência que temos tido?" (145), asks Nuno, and further on asserts, "Vais deixar-me abraçar-te" (147). Despite Rui's resistance to Nuno's love and the tragic end their relationship meets, the erotic component of their friendship is consistently foregrounded in the narrative. The novel's ensemble of sexually dissident characters is completed by the figure of a Minho priest, José d'Andrada, who, after being suspended by the Archbishop of Braga for unorthodox sermonizing and excessive tolerance of sinners, joins Peregrina's hospitable household only to fall gravely ill with a "doença incurável," which he describes as "fatal derivação da minha vida.... o mal dos que passaram a vida a vibratilizar os nervos": "Como não havia de ser tolerante para os pecados alheios, se sabia por experiência o que era o inferno e a penitência de sofreá-los?" (138-39).

The affective logic that organizes the novel's casting appears therefore to reside, first and foremost, in the desire for abundance and diversity, in multiplying the numbers, social profiles, and personalities of queer characters to the point of normalizing the ubiquity of their presence. Although the majority of characters are drawn from the upper classes (Peregrina and Nuno, students at Petersfield), the cast includes also Peregrina's governess, a priest, and a working-class artist (Rui is the bastard son of an elderly landowner and his servant). Moreover, the narrative alludes to vast numbers of homosexuals who populate the public spaces of Lisbon, as Nuno expresses his jealousy of Rui's mingling in the streets with "esses homens esguios, alvacentos, de torso recurvo que o vício planta nas esquinas como postes de infâmia, electrizando, vendendo-se à nevrose dos que passam" (148). In addition to emphasizing the multiplicity of queer embodiment, however, another centrally relevant principle that organizes *Nova Safo's* character ensemble is autobiographic projection. Throughout the novel, both Nuno and Peregrina mirror the empirical persona of its author, who thereby may be said to belong to the company of the narrative's queer characters.¹¹ This

Beirão's letters to Teixeira Pascoais place him at Porto Manso (or in the company of Vila-Moura in other locations, such as Figueira da Foz, which also appears in the novel) for extended periods of time between 1912 and 1915, as well as in 1926 (Cameirão 68-82).

¹¹ Another framework for inscribing the authorial persona into the novel's texture is its narrative structure. If the intradiegetic narrator introduced at the beginning dissolves in the novel to the point where one cannot say how he is able to learn what happens to Peregrina (not to mention other

identification is particularly transparent with Nuno, whose ancestral home in Douro is named Vila-Feia, in a telling echo of Vila-Moura, and who on his initial appearance in the novel is described as “um rapaz de vinte e nove anos que se isolava propositadamente das confrarias literárias para viver e reflectir pelo livro impressões que eram o sentido íntimo de uma figura à parte” (102), a characterization similar to that conveyed in Alves’s essay on Vila-Moura.

In keeping with the scrapbooking method of revelation and reinforcement of dominant themes through juxtaposition and echoing, the toponyms Vila Moura and Vila-Feia are joined in the text by Vila-Verde, which is one of Peregrina’s last names, and Vila Alva, Rui’s hometown in Alentejo (111). The signifying potential released by this accumulation points in multiple directions. The most explicit of them is Vila-Feia’s characterization as a decadent site par excellence, extravagantly deformed in both its architecture and its natural environment, which consists of “uma flora monstruosa, invertendo o tempo das flores e dos frutos e afeiando as plantas de melhor raça [...] uma página de Patologia vegetal” (130). Vila-Feia, also referred to as “Vila maldita” (129), has been cursed by God since the times of D. Álvaro de Castro Leite de Vilar, one of the last Knights Templar, a “grande cavaleiro [...] que escureceu o brilho dos feitos mais ousados com actos de desenfreada sodomia” (129–30), and who contributed to the dissolution of the order by papal decree in 1312.¹² The manor’s bizarre design is also attributed to D. Álvaro, whose “temperamento, fora do natural, delinear a um castelo desproporcionado, alheio à arquitectura do século” (130). Vila-Feia’s monstrous aura—the exuberant description of which occupies several pages—is nonetheless pleasing to Nuno, described as the “último representante do Templário” (133), an affinity that leads the local population to gossip about him suspiciously: “Que o representante de D. Álvaro parecia seguir-lhe as pisadas;

characters) after June 1910, then the most plausible explanation for his extradiegetic omniscience in the second half of the novel is that he was merely a mask briefly worn by the implied author and then deliberately or carelessly discarded.

¹² Portugal’s first legal code, the *Ordenações afonsinas* (c. 1446), mentions the suppression of the Knights Templar in its discussion of penalties for sodomy and the history of God’s punishment for the offense. The next code, the *Ordenações manuelinas* (1512–14), introduced a penal provision that reverberates in the emphasis the descriptions of Vila-Feia and Nuno’s ancestry place on perversion as a legacy: “the convicted person’s children and descendants would bear the legal stigma of being *inhabiles* and *infames* in the same way as the children and grandchildren of those guilty of the crime of lese majesty” (Johnson and Dutra 5). The theme of multigenerational heredity is also prominently present in Botelho’s *O Barão de Lavos*.

que não era fácil fugir às leis de sangue; que na Vila-Feia tudo se deformava, os homens como as árvores [...].’ E discutiam as figuras que pernoitavam no velho casarão senhorial” (134).

The overdetermined queerness of Vila-Feia endows with a retroactive significance the aristocratic title Visconde de Vila-Moura chose for himself in 1900, given the longstanding association of “Moorishness” with sodomitic practices in Iberian history and in Europe’s image of the Iberian Peninsula (Hutcheson and Blackmore 1-2). It also encourages the projection of a similarly coded meaning on Peregrina’s surname (Vila-Verde), considering the importance the figure of Oscar Wilde plays in the novel and the notoriety of the green carnation as a symbol of Wilde’s dandyism and queerness.¹³ Finally, connotations accruing to the name of Rui Augusto’s hometown, Vila Alva, point in this context toward a contrastive identification that pitches Rui’s purity and political progressivism against Nuno’s aristocratic and monarchic decadence, an opposition that is literalized in the narrative when Rui refuses to join Nuno and Peregrina on their journey to Vila-Feia, “explicando a falta com o motivo de ter de seguir [...] para Vila Alva. Era-lhe impossível ir a Vila-Feia, informava” (136).

Anticipating my discussion of three prominent historical figures commemorated in Vila-Moura’s overflowing narrative scrapbook (Oscar Wilde, Renée Vivien, and João da Cruz e Sousa), it is worth noting that both they and *Nova Sapo*’s living protagonists perform in the novel against the background filled with a large collection of accessory narrative props and stage extras, which are also often invested with queer significance. At one point, for instance, Nuno makes a knowing reference to Marquês de Valada, the real-life model for Botelho’s *O Barão de Lavos* (Howes 25), and relates Valada’s proclivities to an example drawn from ancient history.¹⁴ The gallery of artworks exhibited by Rui Augusto includes a sculpture of Ganymede serving Jupiter (also in a possible

¹³ One finds another instance of punning play with coded signifiers in the name of Peregrina’s father, “D. António Álvares Muito Nobre Leite Moniz de Sá” (47), which irresistibly evokes the poet António Nobre and the totemic “torre de leite” of his self-description in “Lusitânia no Bairro Latino”: “Menino e moço, tive uma Torre de leite / Torre sem par!” (Nobre 181).

¹⁴ The passage, which was entirely expunged from the 1921 Brazilian edition of the novel (and consequently also from the 2017 Portuguese edition), reads as follows: “Que miseria! Ah bom Vallada! Estava servido se vivesse hoje, e no antigo mister de arrematar litteratiços de mamma. O Flavio Josepho refere-se discretamente ao escravo Callixto, o *forro* de Caio. Que libertos ou forros o pobre Vallada teria de usar nos seus vícios, se vivesse!” (*Nova Sapho* 144).

echo of Botelho's novel, which gives a prominent role to an engraving of Ganymede owned by the protagonist), in addition to other queer-coded figures. Ganymede reappears also in Peregrina's "Elegia da morte," where she recounts a dream of holding court at "uma refeição nova, a refeição de madrugada na Vila-Feia" (208) sponsored by an alliance of Christian and pagan divinities. The guests at the feast include several of the novel's characters: "Rui abraçado a Nuno, a afogá-lo no mar de luz do seu olhar veludento, verde de vício"; "Helen feita sereia vegetal, erguendo a cabeça airosa e loira de entre pétalas de açucena" (208). Also present are St. Sebastian ("o efebo-mártir") and Hermaphrodite, a giant anthropomorphic rock said to tower over Vila-Feia, "que vi espreguiçar-se, mover o peito, as coxas de grã e levantar-se, suprema, para vir também tomar parte na refeição" (208). As in the collective tableaux featuring the adolescent students at St. James College and the members and favored guests of Peregrina's Lisbon household, the protagonist's dream of the feast in Vila-Feia construes a resistant and aspirational ecosystem of queer communal togetherness that at least temporarily suspends its exposure to the persistent external threats of homophobic hostility and violence.

Nova Safo's Trans Intersections

Prominent among the logics that organize *Nova Safo's* scrapbook of queer representation is the recurrence of narrative and metafictional gestures of crossing and transposition, which destabilize both the definitional and confining power of national borders and the fixed boundaries of embodied subjectivity and identity. The novel demands to be read, therefore, as what Jessica Berman terms a "'trans' text, one that challenges prevailing assumptions about national belonging and scenes of reading [...] at the same time as it raises the question of gender and sexual identity as a constitutive dimension of those critical categories" ("Is the Trans" 218). Considering that most cases of transnational exchange occurring in Vila-Moura's novel are also instances of transgendered embodiment, the text aligns with Berman's reading of the two dimensions as intrinsically relatable insofar as it simultaneously challenges "the normative dimensions of regimes of nationality and disrupts the systems of embodied identity that undergird them" (218). Peregrina's identity stands as a synecdoche for *Nova Safo's* "trans" vocation, whether by way of the nativist/cosmopolitan

doubling of her self-identification as an artist (“Sou Shakespeare e Bandarra,” she claims in the excerpt from “Elegia da morte” that is also the novel’s epigraph) or due to the self-described importance in her lineage of “duas avós judias” (48). As the narrator puts it, “ela vivia, sobretudo, essas gotas de sangue [semita], que em revolta com os glóbulos de raça, a reflectiam numa casuística tão diversa da que inculcava a outra gente” (48). Beyond these points, the most elaborate forms of *Nova Safó*’s definitional disquiet coalesce around three cosmopolitan ghosts explicitly or implicitly evoked and memorialized in the novel, whose narrative profiles and intersectional import I will now briefly trace.

Nova Safó’s most overtly foregrounded signifier of its pervasive national and subjective transness is the figure of Oscar Wilde, inscribed in the novel as Peregrina’s correspondent and personal friend. Although she is only fourteen and still living in Minho when Wilde’s trials take place in the spring of 1895, she subsequently becomes an “acérrima defensora de Wilde,” publishing in England “artigos e opúsculos sobre o escabroso processo” (91). During his exile in France, she travels there to co-organize a party in Wilde’s honor with “camaradas de Paris” (87), an initiative that leads her to leave behind her life in London. After Robert Ross telegraphs her in Greece to summon her to Wilde’s deathbed, Peregrina joins a small group of friends who bury the writer at Bagneux cemetery. In that instance, she is described by the narrator as effectively taking on Wilde’s identity, as if performing his reincarnation: “Era ao longe uma figura estranha! Dir-se-ia representar ali a vida do Poeta—misto de génio, perversão, orgulho” (96).¹⁵ Last but not least, Wilde is featured prominently on two occasions in Peregrina’s testamentary and prophetic “Elegia da morte.” In the first passage, his writing is said to illustrate the superiority of queer love over the “apetite genésico” of “míopes e inferiores” whose souls “cabe[m] dentro dos órgãos que vos inculcam o sexo” (186). By contrast, she writes: “Nós amamos tudo e sempre.”¹⁶ O Amor é para nós a razão única da Vida. Por isso Wilde, o condenado, cantou ternamente o amor dos monstros e das flores; casou os homens com os habitantes imaginários dos bosques e do mar, e expiou na prisão

¹⁵ In the novel’s original edition, the end of this sentence reads “mixto de Dôr-genio, aventura, perversão e orgulho” (110).

¹⁶ In the 1912 edition: “Nós outros amamos” (236).

o delito de ter gostado tudo [*sic*], amando e cantando a sinfonia das linhas, a inteligência da Carne, a liberdade da alma!” (186).¹⁷

The second reference to Wilde in “Elegia” mentions his prisoner’s number at Reading Gaol as the signature he used in his writings from his cell, positioning him once again as an exemplary object of persecution by “uma sociedade inferior” (203). As a focal signifier in *Nova Safo*, Wilde stands both as an embodiment of the vast suffering caused by homophobia and a hopeful beacon of queer futurity: insulted together with her idol as a “filthy larva,” Peregrina retorts, in another metaphorical instantiation of embodied transness, that she is a “larva a evoluir. A crisálida que sonha asas” (203).

Besides Wilde, another leading European protagonist of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century queer visibility, creativity, and fatality is also both centrally present in *Nova Safo* the novel and reincarnated in “Nova Safo” herself. The text’s multiple mirroring and transposing effects reach a new level of complexity with the realization that its metafictional investments are in turn modeled on another, far more famous enterprise of Sapphic recovery carried out by Renée Vivien (born Pauline Mary Tarn) in the midst of the Parisian lesbian community that clustered around her and Natalie Clifford Barney in the first decade of the century. A wealthy, emancipated world traveler who worships Sappho, writes poetry and prose dedicated to fleshing out lesbian affect, and sets up a neo-Hellenic household in Greece (as Vivien and Barney had done in Mytilene), Vila-Moura’s protagonist not only alludes to Vivien: she is her fully appropriated Portuguese embodiment, an homage produced three years after Vivien’s premature death by a writer who was her exact contemporary (both had been born in 1877).¹⁸ His version of the well-worn nineteenth-century French

¹⁷ In the 1912 edition: “o amôr dos monstros, das flores e das sereias”; “amando e cantando o amor, a symphonia das linhas” (236). It is worth noting that during her sojourn in Greece, Peregrina writes a book of fairy tales entitled *O livro das crianças*, which appears to resemble Wilde’s *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891) (91-92). In fact, a reference to Wilde’s story “The Fisherman and His Soul,” from the latter volume, appears in the original edition of the novel (but disappears from the 1921 version). The book of children’s stories published by António Botto in 1931 under the same title (*O livro das crianças*) may also belong to this lineage.

¹⁸ Fernando Curopos identifies additional borrowings from Vivien’s biography in the story of Maria Peregrina: the name of her companion Violet echoes that of Violet Shillito, Vivien’s closest childhood friend; the “Templo de Amor” Peregrina builds in Greece may have been modeled on Barney’s “Temple de l’Amitié” in her Parisian home on rue Jacob; and the latter street name resonates in the name of Peregrina’s companion/servant Jacob (182-85). To this list one might add

formula in which Sappho figures as “the alter ego of the male decadent outsider” (DeJean 265) is thus simultaneously derivative and original, in that its second-degree appropriation of Sappho qua Vivien translates onto the Portuguese ground not the predominantly male-authored general vogue of the Lesbian poet but, specifically and unmistakably, the “incredible Sapphic outpouring of the years 1902–10” (DeJean 284) driven by the work of Vivien and Barney. Along with its foregrounding of female authorship and lesbian literary lineage, Vila-Moura’s novel simultaneously mimics the messy cultural politics of post-Baudelairian appropriation in Vivien’s and Barney’s writing. As Joan DeJean observes, Vivien and Barney “forged strange alliances, ultimately giving the decadents’ outsider lesbian, Baudelaire’s *souffre-douleur*, a home in a community for which they, like [Pierre] Louÿs, predicted a brilliant future, status as a real ‘new society’” (285).¹⁹ This transformative utopian energy is mirrored in Maria Peregrina’s prophetic dream of a motley queer community in her “Elegia da morte” as well as in her testament, which bequeaths the bulk of her fortune to the city of Coimbra for the purpose of building “uma grandiosa Escola de Arte Grega com a designação—Parténon do Ocidente” (160).

The fact that *Nova Safo*’s decadent narrative aesthetic is bound up so intimately with an insurgent (if also deeply melancholy) literary agency embodied in its larger-than-life female protagonist is among the most notable features of the novel, particularly considering the environment of exclusionary male homosociality that produced canonical Portuguese modernism. To be sure, a paranoid reading of the novel’s male-authored fiction of sexually and intellectually heterodox female agency might find ample inspiration in Alice Jardine’s critique of what she influentially described as “gynesis”: “the putting into discourse of ‘woman’ [...] as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is, historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking” (25). Likewise, Rita Felski has described the “imaginary identification with the feminine” as “a key stratagem in the literary avant-garde’s subversion of textual and sexual norms” (91), cautioning against the assumption

Helen, Peregrina’s beloved from Petersfield, whose name echoes that of Baroness H el ene van Zuylen, Barney’s principal rival for Vivien’s affections and co-author of several volumes with Vivien under their joint pseudonym of Paule Riversdale.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive survey of French fin-de-si ecle representations of lesbianism, see Albert.

that “this early modernist appropriation of the feminine was necessarily in sympathy with the aims of feminism” (92) and stressing that “to assume that a male identification with the feminine is necessarily subversive of patriarchal privilege may be to assume too much” (93). Postponing a full-fledged feminist critique of *Nova Sapho*’s gender politics and its relationship to other Portuguese modernist fictions of female-embodied artistic and sexual transgression to another opportunity, for the moment I would claim merely that Vila-Moura’s *Peregrina* has at her disposal comparatively ample resources to resist paranoid theory’s “trust in exposure” (Sedgwick 141), even as she demands a more detailed and probing reading as a male-authored heroic lesbian figure than what I am able to offer in this summary approach.

Perhaps the most notable case of the intersection between *Nova Safo*’s transnational ambition and the passion for bric-a-brac collecting Vila-Moura channeled into his literary endeavor is the novel’s Brazilian connection. *Peregrina*’s second major work, said to be her “obra-prima” (24) and the “expressão máxima dos seus talentos” (100), is linked explicitly to the model provided by Brazil’s late nineteenth-century “Black Poet,” João da Cruz e Sousa. *Peregrina*’s *Emparedada* is in fact a book in which “ela ampliara, segundo o seu caso, os desgostos de um poeta brasileiro—o Poeta Negro. Este lutara contra o preconceito de cor, sofrera todo o desprezo geralmente votado à sua casta e fizera deste desprezo um capítulo de *Evocações*, doloroso” (24).

Considered the first overt expression of Black consciousness in canonical Brazilian literature, Cruz e Sousa’s posthumously published prose poem “*Emparedado*” was described by his friend and editor Nestor Vitor as “um soluço” not only “de revolta pessoal, mas de toda uma raça proscrita pela Civilização inteira que desdenha quanto pretenda em tais homens ser manifestação de vida superior” (qtd. in Righi 81). In turn, *Nova Safo* draws an explicit and metaphorically precise parallel between the racism endured by Cruz e Sousa and the homophobia experienced by *Peregrina*: “Para toda a parte para que voltava o espírito encontrava paredes, escuras e espessas, tatuadas de obscenidades, alusivas a predilecções suas” (24). Vila-Moura’s gesture may thus be read as an (intentional or accidental) offspring of Cruz e Sousa’s own intertwining of racial and sexual abjection, which found expression in his 1897 commentary on Vitor’s short story “*Sapos*” and its sexually dissident protagonist Bruce, inscribed by Cruz e Sousa along with himself into a broader community

of subjects stigmatized by social convention (Braga-Pinto 233-5). As César Braga-Pinto concludes in his reading of Cruz e Sousa's interpretation of the story, "assim como reinterpreta o negro que carrega a marca de Cam como maldito-eleito, Cruz e Sousa lê, no dissidente sexual de Nestor Vitor, o estigma de condenado, que é também um sinal de eleição e superioridade" (235). It remains to be explored what sources Vila-Moura may have drawn on for his striking reinstatement of this analysis in the guise of Peregrina's appropriation of Cruz e Sousa, but it is worth observing in this context that the novel contains at least two other intriguing references to Brazil. On the narrator's arrival in Peregrina's manor in Lares, after a difficult journey along the bad roads of rural Minho, his hostess chides him affectionately for expecting those roads to be "similares em arranjo às grandes avenidas do Rio de Janeiro" (30); later on, Peregrina praises Nuno de Vilar's "último folhetim para o *Jornal do Rio*" (117). The narrator's apparent Brazilian background is never alluded to otherwise, and neither is Nuno's engagement in the culture of Luso-Brazilian literary exchanges, but these offhand references conspire with the importance assigned in the novel to the figure of Cruz e Sousa to trace another potentially significant direction in *Nova Safo*'s scrapbook-style meaning-making.²⁰

Nova Safo's homage to Cruz e Sousa, however episodic and undeveloped in the novel's overall design, is worth singling out, not least for the heuristic benefits it offers to the larger project of reassessing early twentieth-century Portuguese literary and cultural domains along the lines suggested by Berman's reframing of modernist transnationalism in politico-ethical terms, in order to trace "the extraordinary engagement with matters of public justice that infuses global literary modernism and the nodes of contact and interconnection that generate its commitments" (*Modernist Commitments* 11). Vila-Moura's unlikely intersectional engagement with racial justice, for all its tangentiality, can serve to highlight and interconnect other undervalued Portuguese modernist artifacts.

²⁰ Following Cruz e Sousa's early death in 1898, and motivated by what Braga-Pinto describes as "profundo desconsolo diante da perda do amigo," Nestor Vitor left Brazil for Paris, where he remained from 1901 to 1905 as a correspondent for the newspapers *O Paiz* and *Correio Paulistano* (Braga-Pinto 252). Given the importance that Parisian cultural references of the first decade of the twentieth century—most obviously, the covertly mourned figure of Renée Vivien—take on in *Nova Safo*, it is possible to speculate that Vila-Moura may have also come into contact with Vitor and his mourning for Cruz e Sousa at that time. And considering the novel's penchant for signifying play with the names of places and characters, one should note that Nuno de Vilar's initials echo those of Nestor Vitor.

These include the prospective publication in the never-released third issue of *Orpheu* of French poems by the Angolan Numa de Figueiredo, “o record do cosmopolitismo,” in the words of Mário de Sá-Carneiro writing to his co-editor, Fernando Pessoa (Sá-Carneiro 369); or the inaugural issue of *Europa* (1925)—the only modernist magazine in Portugal edited by a woman (Judith Teixeira). In the latter case, the magazine’s cosmopolitan ambition is signified by a colorful drawing of an African American jazz band performing in Paris. While these artifacts are perhaps most plausibly described as peripheral expressions of “cosmopolitan desire” (Siskind) for the racialized images of modernity emanating from Western Europe, one may also examine *Nova Safo*’s transracial investment in terms suggested by Leela Gandhi’s investigation, in her *Affective Communities*, of individuals and groups who, marginalized for reasons of their own within the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British society (as homosexuals, vegetarians, spiritualists, etc.), forged bonds of dissident cross-cultural collaboration with colonized subjects and communities of the empire. Although in his own cultural context Vila Moura can hardly be said to occupy a position comparable to that of Edward Carpenter—Gandhi’s exemplar of the alliance between anticolonialist resistance and the politics of homosexual emancipation—the attitude anchoring his evocation of Cruz e Sousa in *Nova Safo* was likewise rooted in the post-Darwinian realization of the symmetry between the construction of the homosexual “as a ‘civilizational’ aberration” (Gandhi 49) and the long-lasting occupation of the space of the uncivilized by subjects of European imperialism.²¹

Coda: Homosexuality and Homophobia in 1912 Portugal

Among the components of the judiciary reform undertaken after 1910 by the newly instituted Portuguese Republic was a law criminalizing and punishing with imprisonment the practice of “vices against nature” (vícios contra a natureza), which went into effect on 30 July 1912. António Fernando Cascais compares the republican decree to the definition of sexual crimes in the 1852 Penal Code, pointing out that the new law replaced “a terminologia meramente social e

²¹ As Gandhi notes, “not every nineteenth-century homosexual was alert to this symmetry, but for those who were, the critique of colonialism was at least available as an affective or political response to the constraints of their own condition” (49).

relacional (‘ultraje público ao pudor’ e ‘crimes contra a honestidade’)” with “uma terminologia que faz apelo a noções essencializadas (‘vício’ e ‘natureza’)” (98). This move served to furnish a legal and political framework that institutionalized the social, symbolic, and ritual discrimination of sexual dissidence, including, most prominently, same-sex relations (Cascais 98). Ideologically guided by positivist and hygienist principles of biopolitical regulation, the republican regime put into energetic practice “os preceitos e recomendações que desde o século XIX propunham em teoria os reformadores portugueses da *scientia sexualis* médica, psiquiátrica e criminológica” (Cascais 98). Published almost exactly at the same time as the new law, in August 1912, *Nova Safo* positions itself ambivalently vis-à-vis the evolving public perspectives on homosexuality epitomized by the decree, with its hospitable queer ecosystems being constantly and emphatically traversed by both hostile and fascinated reverberations of essentialized homophobia. Indeed, the word “vício,” which recurs in the narrative no fewer than twenty-seven times, exemplifies this ambivalence, appearing often in contexts of homophilic defiance or affirmation, as in the description in “Elegia da morte” of Rui’s loving gaze at Nuno as “verde de vício” (208).

The novel’s abundant deployment of a stigmatizing lexicon in reference to its queer characters and their relationships leads Fernando Curopos to characterize *Nova Safo* as “openly homophobic” (185); however, it may be read more productively as a complex, layered example of what Michel Foucault theorized as “reverse discourse,” whereby in response to being addressed by the discourses of medicine and jurisprudence, along with their literary counterparts, “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (101). It is therefore possible to interpret *Nova Safo* as an incompletely oppositional appropriation of pathologizing and policing discourses of nineteenth-century sexology and literary fictions such as *O Barão de Lavos*. In fact, the second subtitle of *Nova Safo*’s original version, “Romance de pathologia sensual” (which disappears from subsequent editions), clearly echoes the omnibus label of “patologia social” that Botelho applied to *O Barão de Lavos* and its companion novels. As in the first version of Pessoa’s “Antinous,” published in 1918, the novel’s homophobic vocabulary, liberally dispersed throughout the text, clashes with defiantly worded

discourse of antihomophobic resistance.²² This conflict is evidenced, for example, by the final paragraph in the account of the public reception of Maria Peregrina's *Nova Safo*:

Ah! Ela perdoava que não lhe sentissem a obra.²³ Mas o que lhe doía era o ódio que lhe votavam pelos vícios que amava além de tudo.

— E nós a tentamos obrigar o mundo a ver-nos com olhos diferentes daqueles por que se vê a si próprio—comentava! — Como se ele interpretasse a diferença que fazemos em nosso favor! Enfim, hei-de ver se, ao menos, posso salvar o orgulho [...] (99)²⁴

A diagnosis of homophobia as pain-producing hatred leads here to an equally clear-eyed identification of the political challenges inherent in struggling for equal rights while resisting conformity with the heteropatriarchal framework that places Peregrina's community outside the bounds of social norm.

The complex politics and disheveled aesthetics of *Nova Safo* produce an opportune epistemic environment in which to confront, in the Portuguese context, “the problem of reaching out to queer historical figures who may be turning their backs on us” (Love 25). It is possible, as with Love's account of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, that a reassessment of *Nova Safo*'s embrace of the frameworks of degeneration and perversion in terms made available by the notion of reverse discourse may still be “insufficient to exonerate the novel” (101) from the verdict of incompatibility with progressive ideological horizons of queer emancipation. Whether this is the case or not, one must nonetheless make room for Vila-Moura's novel in the kind of yet-to-be-written queer history of modern Portugal that is “less committed to finding heroic models from the past and more resigned to the contradictory and complicit narratives

²² It's important to recall, however, that Pessoa's revised version of “Antinous,” published in 1921, expunged from the poem all pejorative references to homosexuality, including several occurrences of the word “vice.” Vila-Moura's own revision of his text for the Brazilian edition does not appear to have had such a clear-cut direction. For a summary reading of Pessoa's process of revision, see Klobucka 2017.

²³ The 1912 edition contains an additional sentence: “Tinha tempo, esperaria, afirmava” (115).

²⁴ “vingar o orgulho” in the 1912 edition (115).

that, in the past as in the present, connect sexuality to politics” (Halberstam 148). Such a model of historical representation appears eminently compatible with the broader landscape of homosexuality and homophobia in Portuguese culture as viewed from the pivotal vantage point of the year 1912.

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