

Camões's Queerness

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Abstract: This article reads a selection of Camões's sonnets in dialogue with queer theory but informed by philology. It suggests that there are still problems of interpretation in sonnets that are regularly anthologized and around which there is a seemingly critical consensus. By pointing to the limits of what we know when reading these poems, this article brings out in Camões's work its openness to diverse desires and its attunement to varied sexual practices and dispositions, which have been overlooked amid the highly conventional language of sixteenth-century poetry and critics' focus on the sonnets' deep intertextuality.

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“When it comes to gender and sexuality, there are no introductions ... there are only reintroductions,” Lauren Berlant once wrote (3). The same by now is true of Camões's poetry after centuries of commentary on his work. But Berlant's comment, pointing as it does to the provisional nature of any conclusions about desire and sexuality, is also apt for the varied and often elusive dimensions of love and desire in Camões's work. This essay returns to a set of very well-known sonnets and reintroduces them by drawing on queer theory, raising a set of methodological issues about what we know about Camões's poetry and, moreover, what can ever be known when it comes to his explorations of desire and sex.

One of the earliest sustained readings of Camões's poetry from a queer perspective came not in an academic journal but in a novel: Frederico Lourenço's *Pode um desejo imenso*. In that novel, a fictional professor draws out the homoeroticism of the classical intertexts in a range of his poems and speculates on the relationship between the poet and one of his principal dedicatees, D. António de Noronha (186–92). As Anna Klobucka notes in an incisive response to the book and the reactions it prompted when it was released, debate over whether Camões was actually gay or not loomed large in many reviews. Yet, Klobucka underlines, the novel itself

does not attempt to attribute any modern category of sexuality to the bard nor do the readings offered over the course of the novel necessarily depend on an ascription of gay identity to any of the historical figures involved. The book proposes a way of reading sixteenth-century literature that is based as much upon readerly response as authorial identity or intent.

I would add to Klobucka's analysis of these reader responses embedded in the story that much in the press's reactions to Lourenço's novel depended upon an assumption that sexuality is a binary between homo- and heterosexual and that those identities necessarily remain stable through a lifetime (or a writer's oeuvre). An either/or choice is projected onto the poems that would impose a consistent orientation on the poet and, by extension, the poems. Little is made of the fact that Camões's writing ranges over many genres and multiple schools of thought. He is a poet of diversity rather than a poet of singularity. Alongside a notion of fixed sexuality, then, ideas about authorship as a "principle of a certain unity of writing" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 204) and, concomitantly, scholarship as a quest for coherence (cf. Spearing 3) seem to underpin readings of Camões's oeuvre.

Existing work that has explored Camões from a queer angle has focused on the potentially homoerotic dynamics between the poet and his addressees, Camões's allusions to myths that contain same-sex desire, and the queerness of the young king, D. Sebastião, in references to him in *Os Lusíadas* (see Lourenço; Arruda Franco; Kuhl et al.; Castro). While this remains a productive avenue for rethinking Camões's exploration of desire and sexuality, this essay broadens the scope beyond implicit or explicit same-sex desire and looks to the sonnets, which have to date been almost entirely overlooked from a queer perspective. Specifically, I examine how queerness emerges in the ambiguity of Camões's sonnets; how these poems invite readers into a form of curiosity or desire about their erotic meanings; how they portray sexual practices and identities that resist conventional expectations of domestic monogamy; and finally, how their poetic form itself complicates linear conceptions of time and stable, clearly defined identities or desires. Over the course of this essay, I draw broadly and eclectically on approaches to early modern literature that have queered philology (Masten), rhetoric (Menon; Parker), and our understanding of poetic structure (Greenwell et al.), as well as on the work of scholars who have examined how sexual norms—including heterosexuality itself—are constructed, how diverse experiences of the

erotic disrupt normative ideals like domestic monogamy and linear temporality (Halberstam; Jagose; Sanchez; Traub).

In my understanding of Camões's queerness, then, I want to go beyond simply thinking about the orientation of the speaker in the poem to consider how his poetry formulates ideas about how desires change over time and how far his work encompasses a range of sexual practices. This implies consideration of the numerous ways in which sex might deviate from supposed "norms," including nonmarital, homosexual, polyamorous, nonprocreative, or commercial sex, as well as unusual roles played, spaces beyond the home, fetishes, toys or gear used (see Rubin 151). Early modern Portuguese literature is full of such different formulations of love and desire. Think, for instance, of the euphemistic representation of masturbation in Bernardim Ribeiro's *Menina e moça*, Gil Vicente's *alcoviteiras*, or Camões's *redondilha* "Coifa de Beirame," where Joane finds himself more interested in a headpiece than the body of his lover (much to her annoyance), to say nothing of more metaphorical explorations of how sexual relations, marriage, and intimacy might be understood in contractual, material, or economic terms throughout drama, prose, and verse of the time.

A first index of Camões's queerness is how often the gender of the speaker or beloved remains grammatically unmarked in his sonnets. In these instances, as Stephen Guy-Bray (22) has argued, it is no less rigorous to assume queerness until proven otherwise, than to presume all texts are a priori straight. The apparent straightness of one poem does not necessarily imply the straightness of another. My queer reading of Camões's sonnets is not so much concerned with the explicitly homoerotic but rather with moments of openness, indeterminacy, and opaqueness around desire. To put it differently, I am not interested in saying that a poem like "amor é um fogo que arde sem se ver" might be addressed to a man because the gender of the love object is not specified, but rather to hold onto and explore the fact that it is not explicitly addressed to a woman: the poem operates, in a simple grammatical way, outside of the gendered dyad of many of his other poems and others from the period. As I will show, Camões himself acknowledged that readers will, according to their experiences, do different things with his verses and that might mean filling in the blanks in varied and unpredictable ways. And we have evidence from the manuscript circulation of the poems that they did, in fact, respond to the indeterminacy of his poems in different ways. The sonnet "Alma minha gentil, que te partiste," for example, is conventionally thought to be

addressed to a woman, but in MS. 1080, held in the Biblioteca Geral da Universidade de Coimbra, the rubric identifies the person for whom the poet grieves as a man (see Camões, *Lírica completa* 147).

Within texts that explore sex and desire, there are always limits to what we can truly know. As Valerie Traub has argued, writing about sex in the early modern period, filled as it is with slang, euphemism, and puns, often lacks detail about exactly what actions characters perform. We cannot avoid, Traub says, a certain “cluelessness that seems to be part and parcel of the desire to sexually know” (222). Traub advocates therefore an approach that tackles the question of knowledge head-on: “An epistemological approach—asking what can be known as well as how it is known—recasts the dynamics among sex, representation, signification, and historiography as a problem of knowledge relations: constituted not only by social interchange but by implicit understandings of what counts as knowledge and what eludes or baffles as ignorance” (5). A case in point of the sorts of language that elude us would be the stock phrases deployed in the period to refer to sodomy (itself an indeterminate term): the designations “pecado nefando” or “amor nefando” in Portuguese, just as in other languages, “simultaneously gesture toward and occlude whatever forms of sex actually occurred” (Traub 191).

A more extended example from Camões’s work that showcases the limits of what we as readers can know is the poem “Quem disser que a barca pende” (*Obras* 90), a text laden with innuendo as the speaker tries to encourage a woman to “climb aboard his boat.” Whether voiced as a man or a parodied ventriloquism of what a man might say, the poem’s speaker seems anxious; he worries about being able to perform or even to persuade anyone to enter into a sexual liaison with him. Helder Macedo (“Quem disser” 47–49) has explored the euphemisms in the poem’s extended metaphor, but his provisional decoding of these circumlocutions remains quite unspecific. He does not stipulate, for instance, what it is that might actually “pende.” The listing ship seems likely to refer to a wonky member, but a body could be off-kilter in other kinds of ways. What does this tell us about normative attitudes to bodies in the period and how discourses around sexuality and disability may intersect? What is the speaker getting at when he says his boat is “de carreira”? Is this comparison to a long-range ship on the Lisbon-India route about stamina (it can cross oceans between continents) or experience (it has spent a long time at sea)? When he says his boat is “boa de leme,” what does steering well imply? What angles or maneuvers does the poet think are good (and what might the woman who

climbs on board think of this)? Does “veleira” suggest that swiftness is sexually satisfying? Which bits of sex need to be swift? What about taking it slow? And so, while one can imagine plausible interpretative possibilities, questions remain. The poem also poses the problem of knowledge in a different way too: in staging a scene of solicitation and the correction of apparent misinformation about the speaker’s physical attributes and prowess (we are told those who say his “barca pende” are lying), the poem hints at the forms of sociability and communication that surround sex. Rumors spread that influence the possibilities open to particular individuals and police what kinds of acts are permissible or desirable. Thus the question of knowledge is integral to the poem not just in the euphemisms deployed, but in how the poem sets up the imaginary scene between the speaker and the lady addressed. The lady knows something about the speaker through gossip—or as the speaker would have it, through a bunch of lies—before experience could put those rumors to the test.

In other poems, Camões more directly discusses the issue of what can or cannot be known about love and desire. As he puts it in the final lines of his sonnet “Busque amor novas artes, novo engenho” (*Obras* 168), love puts in his soul “Um não sei quê, que nasce não sei onde, / Vem não sei como e dói não sei porquê.” Love, in other words, and to quote Richard Scholar (vii), who has examined the fortunes of the expression *je ne sais quoi* in the early modern period, is a kind of “first-person encounter ... with a certain something as difficult to explain as its effects are intense, and which can be expressed only by being expressed differently.” It is something unknowable but about which poetry has made myriad attempts to know or, at least, to acknowledge not knowing.

In the case of the poems discussed in what follows, there has been a long-standing critical consensus about what they mean, largely understood through their engagement with the philosophies of love and tropes of love poetry that circulated in the sixteenth century. Yet, when one looks closely, and philologically, there remain dark spots, puzzling turns of phrase, points of opacity: I want to describe those points of opacity here, both as a methodological point—what do we really know about what these poems are talking about?—and to show that often the intrigue of the poem, as in the final lines of “Busque amor,” depends upon playful ambiguity or, indeed, ostentatious withholding of information.

My readings here thus dwell on problems of what can be known about sex in Camões’s poems and draw out the nonnormative dimensions of these verses. My

approach is broadly historical and philological, in that I wonder about the contextual meaning of words and how they might have resonated in the period (see Masten's *Queer Philologies*), but I also demonstrate the ways in which ideas in Camões's verse might resonate in contemporary contexts. I try to be honest about the limits of what we know rather than feigning the "smug and tweedy mastery of an Oxbridge professor" as Melissa Sanchez (*Shakespeare and Queer* 98) has caricatured. Her satirical portrait of the knowing professor is not wholly unjustified, but it is amusing to note that Frederico Lourenço has the character of his novel, Nuno Galvão, discuss his ideas for a queer reading of Camões's poems with a fictional Oxford professor, Christian Reed. I now follow in his footsteps as someone who explores Camões's verse, its intertexts and historical meaning, but also allows the poems to speak to the present, just as memorably as poetry from the past speaks to Nuno Galvão's situation in Lourenço's story.

Casos tão diversos

Camões's lyric poetry was never structured into the kind of narrative sequence that is typically associated with Petrarch and was widely adapted in the sixteenth century, including by Camões's contemporary, António Ferreira (see Earle). Despite this, since the first printing of his *Rhythmas* in 1595, editors have often chosen one sonnet to open their anthologies: "Enquanto quis Fortuna que tivesse." The address to the reader and the poem's metatextual remarks about the "casos" gathered in a "breve livro" have made this sonnet into a sort of epistle to the reader and an ideal introduction to Camões's verse:

Enquanto quis Fortuna que tivesse
Esperança de algum contentamento,
O gosto de um suave pensamento
Me fez que seus efeitos escrevesse.

Porém, temendo Amor que aviso desse
Minha escritura a algum juízo isento,
Escureceu-me o engenho co'o tormento,
Para que seus enganos não disesse.

Ó vós que Amor obriga a ser sujeitos
A diversas vontades! Quando lerdas
Num breve livro casos tão diversos,

Verdades puras são e não defeitos;
E sabeis que, segundo o amor tiverdes,
Tereis o entendimento de meus versos. (*Obras* 167)

This is a sonnet about writing and reading, what can be expressed about love by a poet and what can be known or understood by readers. The tercets are regularly cited as a remarkable reflection on what a given individual brings to their reading of Camões's poetry (Macedo, *Camões* 14), but the quatrains are no less interesting when it comes to love poetry's play on its own epistemological limits. Fortune and Love often appear as Camões's arch-antagonists, whose emotional torture consists in cycles of giving and then taking away. Here, the poet's torment turns into a tease for the reader. The speaker wants to put their thoughts down on paper when there is the prospect of some "contentamento," but Cupid ("Amor") prevents that from happening as that would give his game away. As the "juízos isentos" alluded to here, we, too, have the prospect of learning something about love dangled before us, then ripped away. We are not told much about Cupid's "enganos" because the poet is too tortured to think clearly and thus to express them clearly to us.

So much remains underspecified: what is the "suave pensamento" and what kind of "gosto" does it provoke? In Bento Pereira's *Thesouro* (fol. 57^r), one of the earliest Portuguese lexicons, "gosto" covers *voluptas* and *delectatem* and so a wide gamut of pleasurable possibilities, including the sexual. Sweetness in many ancient and early modern contexts could relate to the sexual too (see Swann 186–87 and Masten 69–82). The poet's "suave pensamento" might consist in mooning over the loveliness of the beloved in a platonic way or the pleasure of this thought could have more carnal contours. My point here is not so much that we can spell out the fantasies in the speaker's mind—we cannot—rather, I want to suggest how far the poem plays with what the reader cannot know but might like to. Although Foucault (*History* 159) was writing about a different context (and I do not intend to apply without nuance all the complex arguments of his *History of Sexuality* here), the conceit in this sonnet nonetheless resonates with his suggestion that we examine all the "ruses that were employed for centuries to make us love sex, to make the

knowledge of it desirable and everything said about it precious.” This poem constitutes one such ruse: it is structured around the promise of revelation in the first stanza, which is then withheld in the second.

Thankfully, if we take this sonnet as a proemial poem, the reader has the prospect of other poems in the book with which to satisfy that thirst for more details and that is exactly what the poet promises in the tercets. As generations of critics have suggested, the final two lines of the poem bring the reader in: you will, Camões says, understand my verses according to your own experience of love. The implication of these lines is that to read Camões queerly, in the sense of bringing queer experiences to Camões’s poetry as a reader, is thus to do no other than take him at his word. The poem is not prescriptive about “o amor que tiverdes”; any reader’s experience will color their “entendimento” of his “versos.” To try to limit these readings to the (hetero)normative out of any sense of “what Camões might have meant” would be to marshal a limited idea of history to conservative ends. Such a move closes down meaning without any obvious textual evidence to legitimate it. We should leave the *volta* in this poem as open as it was written.

Beyond Camões’s acknowledgment that meaning-making is a shared endeavor, how Camões qualifies and describes love in this sonnet emphasizes plurality and hints at transgression. The adjective “diversas/os” appears twice in the first tercet: lovers are forced to be subject to love’s diverse “vontades” and his book of poems is filled with “casos tão diversos.” Precisely against any single configuration of love, the poem sets up Camões’s oeuvre as being full of variety, both of “vontades” and of “casos,” that is, both desires and concrete circumstances. This is a nod toward the importance of variety in vernacular collections of lyric poetry: books of verse often include the adjective “vário/a” in their titles because variety was seen to be particularly pleasurable in such books and a sign of the writer’s skill (see García Aguilar 262). The conventional dimension of this language, however, does not entirely remove the intrigue of these lines. Especially suggestive for a reading of this poem that wants to bring out its openness to a broad range of erotic practices or relations is Camões’s worry that that these “diversos casos” might be read as “defeitos.” Bento Pereira’s *Thesouro* (fol. 35^v) glosses “defeito” as “Vitium, ii. Menda, e. Deliquiū, ii.” In other words, there is a worry here about the love described being considered as wayward, a vice or blemish. An obvious literary parallel is Petrarch’s own characterization of his earlier romantic life as “giovenil errore,” but Camões rejects any morally condemnatory label here

and does not seek distance from his “casos diversos” by locating them in his youth, as Petrarch suggests in his first poem of the *Canzoniere*.¹ Camões’s redescription (*paradiastole*) of the “defeitos” as “verdades puras” is interesting as the noun plus adjective rephrasing brings out the problem of morality and the problem of truth, that is, both aspects of the meaning of the word “defeito” in Pereira’s lexicon. Purity is certainly not a word often (re)claimed by queer theorists—they are often more interested in the impure, as purity comes with notions of chastity and order (see Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer* 44)—but here the adjective performs some reparative work on experiences that might otherwise be castigated. It expands the possibilities of what might be categorized as “pure” and by extension acceptable, legitimate. As a prefatory poem, this sonnet preemptively rehabilitates the transgressive and invites readers to bring their own experiences, whatever they may be, into dialogue with Camões’s work.

Não como sóia

The “diversas vontades” of “Enquanto quis Fortuna que tivesse” finds an echo in another well-known sonnet, one that reflects upon time’s never-ending capacity to bring change:

Mudam-se os tempos, mudam-se as vontades,
Muda-se o ser, muda-se a confiança:
Todo o mundo é composto de mudança,
Tomando sempre novas qualidades.

Continuamente vemos novidades,
Diferentes em tudo da esperança:
Do mal ficam as mágoas na lembrança,
E do bem (se algum houve) as saudades.

O tempo cobre o chão de verde manto,
Que já coberto foi de neve fria,
E em mim converte em choro o doce canto.

¹ Elsewhere in Petrarch’s RVF it is clear that the palinode signaled in the opening poem is incomplete.

E afora este mudar-se cada dia,
Outra mudança faz de mor espanto,
Que não se muda já como soía. (*Obras* 212)

The central idea of the poem—the mutability of the world—is a well-worn trope and finds expression in many texts of the early modern period as well as in ancient and medieval philosophy (see, for instance, Faria e Sousa’s selection of similar poems by Jorge de Montemayor and others in his edition of Camões’s *Rimas*, 118–19). A particularly strong intertextual resonance here, and one not to my knowledge noted by editors, however, is Ovid’s account of Pythagoras’s theory of the elements that appears in book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*. In Jorge de Bustamante’s (fol. clxxxxvi^r) prose Castilian translation of a section described in the margins as being about “Muda[n]ça / en todas / las cosas,” he puts Pythagoras’s theory as follows: “Los eleme[n]tos nunca esta[n] en una figura siempre se muda[n] y renova[n]: ninguna cosa peresce antes de nuevo se torna[n] a renovar y paresce q[ue] nasce[n] otra vez. Ninguna cosa puede luengame[n]te durar en su ser.” Although the poem builds on preexisting ideas about “mudança” as an integral part of the world, the poem is not simply a rote rehashing of old ideas. The intricate construction of the poem and the juxtaposing of different scales on which change occurs intensify the troubling qualities of such perpetual shifting and changing. The opening clause “Mudam-se os tempos” conveys a sense of gradual longer-term changes across years, decades, or centuries, but the turn in the next clauses to “vontades,” “ser,” and “confiança” moves us inward: these changes happen to individuals, their bodies, their thoughts. Our physiques, desires, expectations, outlooks—just some of the ideas that seem to be covered by the trio of “vontades,” “ser,” and “confiança”—never stop changing; they are bound in the poem to reflexive present tense verbs that signal constant transformation. Pythagoras, as Ovid describes his thought, sees this mutability as a fact about the world. Camões, by contrast, is most interested in the affective impact that this shifting world has upon the individual. The poem emphasizes what it is like to experience this universe of change. And it is not pleasant. Living through and amid such mutability brings sorrow (“mágoas”), longing (“saudades”), and even horror/surprise (“espanto”).

The problem is both memory of what has been and our expectations for the future: in lines 5–6 the “novidades” are striking because they are “diferentes em

tudo da esperança” and then the unpredictable “mudança” of the final stanza causes “mor espanto” because it is not just a case of change happening each day but always occurring in unpredictable ways. The poem then posits the speaker as a seeker of continuity or, failing that, a seeker of at least *patterns* of change. They fail, though, to find any stability, any constant in their life or the world around them.

This flux pervades every dimension of the poem. Within the neat rectangles of the sonnet, its careful composition, Camões accentuates the changeability of the world through rhetorical figures. As scholars such as Parker (“Preposterous Events” 188, 209) and Menon (39) have highlighted, rhetorical figures such as metonymy and repetition have a queer dimension to them by how they scramble linearity and sequence or bring ideas, objects, or beings into surprising connection through comparison. Here, Camões’s queer rhetorical figures are hysteron proteron and polyptoton: one figure puts things out of their logical order and the other highlights a restless mutability.

In the first tercet, the poem presents us with an image of the changing seasons, but rather than slotting into a neat or optimistic cycle, where winter inevitably thaws and the spring breaks through, meaning and syntax work against each other, suggesting how disturbingly quick and unpredictable these changes might be. While we are told that spring comes after winter, syntactically spring comes first and we end the second line back in the cold snow. In a similar reversal, we are told in the next lines that the poet’s song turns to tears, but, in another instance of hysteron proteron, the tears arrive first as though they well up before the sweet song has even begun. What seems predictably cyclical begins to feel a little more disorderly. Indeed, this was often thought to be the effect of rhetorical devices, such as hyperbaton and hysteron proteron. As Puttenham put it in *The Art of English Poesy*, hysteron proteron, by putting the horse before the cart, was a figure of the “preposterous,” a “manner of disordered speech” (253; also see Parker “Hysteron Proteron”). Its double use by Camões certainly underlines the confusing and conflicting actions of time, foreshadowing under the surface the poem’s final flourish: one cannot even find comfort in predictable change, as “não se muda já como soía.” To intensify the point, change itself changes in the final stanza: the rhetorical figure now is polyptoton, the turning of a word into “many sundry shapes” (Puttenham 288). The very word denoting change (“mudar”) appears in different conjugations and as a noun (“mudança”). Just as we were beginning to

get comfortable with the idea of change (perhaps itself suggested by the measured regularity of the isocolon and anaphora of the opening lines), it morphologically morphs into new shapes and sounds.

Camões's exploration of change and the speaker's inability to predict it shares something of queer theory's own preoccupations with time, making him something of a queer theorist *avant la lettre*. Queer temporality designates "a mode of inhabiting time that is attentive to the recursive eddies and back-to-the-future loops that often pass undetected or uncherished beneath the official narrations of the linear sequence that is taken to structure normative life" (Jagose 158). The sonnet posits life as an unpredictable sequence of changes that fail to adhere to any kind of pattern that the speaker can discern, the poem's composition emphasizing at every level the essential instability and movement of the world and those who dwell in it. As a view of life based on unexpected "novidades" and of changes to "ser[es]," "vontades," and "confianças," the poem's viewpoint does not straightforwardly align with "heteronormative temporality" and its milestones—birth, marriage, procreation, death, inheritance—and attendant expectations of how a "normal" life should be lived (Halberstam 1–5). If queerness refers to that which troubles identities, that which is unstable, there is certainly a queer potential in a poem that sums itself up in the line "todo o mundo é composto de mudança." This connects back to the "diversos casos" of "Enquanto quis Fortuna que tivesse," where the emphasis is placed too on variety and diversity of love (and the poet's lovers) rather than on the stable monogamy of heteronormativity. Both poems deploy the word "vontades" to discuss desires; the former uses adjectives to denote the plurality of those desires, whereas here it is the verb "mudar-se" that indicates unpredictability. Indeed, the very idea of will ("vontade") itself raised problems of agency. As Kathryn Schwarz has put it: "for the early modern period, will is a dense and volatile theoretical concept. As the faculty that realizes abstract designs, will exemplifies the doubled and divided nature of agency: it functions both as a useful tool and as an independent, potentially renegade force" (2). We must remember, though, that "Mudam-se os tempos, mudam-se as vontades" presents us with the negative affects that such change in the world brings about: the poem by no means gratefully accepts the disturbing mutability of the world. It is no manifesto for a joyful queer life of unpredetermined possibilities but nonetheless reads as a striking acknowledgment of how hard it is to anticipate the chaotic meandering of life's path. As a love poem, this sonnet promises none of the

stability of the sonnet sequences of Camões's contemporaries where a narrative frame and the use of pseudonyms create a sense of a single passion (or a limited number of them) that endure(s) over a stretch of time and across a string of poems. Instead, this sonnet describes life as a disorderly unfolding of ever-new eventualities.

Tão contrário a si

The openness of the previous two sonnets also appears in what is perhaps Camões's most famous exploration of the nature of love: "Amor é **um** fogo que arde sem se ver." Yet again, though, it is a poem that leaves the gender of the beloved unspecified as the poem concerns itself with love as an idea and an experience and speaks of "corações humanos" in general:

Amor é um fogo que arde sem se ver;
É ferida que dói e não se sente;
É um contentamento descontente;
É dor que desatina sem doer;

É um não querer mais que bem querer;
É solitário andar por entre a gente;
É nunca contentar-se de contente;
É cuidar que se ganha em se perder;

É querer estar preso por vontade;
É servir a quem vence, o vencedor;
É ter com quem nos mata lealdade.

Mas como causar pode seu favor
Nos corações humanos amizade,
Se tão contrário a si é o mesmo Amor? (*Obras* 169)

At first glance, this sonnet appears almost wholly conventional with its well-worn images and familiar paradoxes. Indeed, Rita Marnoto (40–41) has shown persuasively how the poem picks up a specific set of contradictions that Petrarch lists in his *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. As much as the poem feels broadly

familiar to those acquainted with sixteenth-century verse and appears to have a specific intertext from which its ideas are taken, the cumulative effect of the poem goes beyond a mere inventory of stale tropes. Each line, in saying what love is, offers a definition. But with each subsequent “é,” the poem seems to overwrite itself, suggesting the inadequacy of the previous definition(s), the need to add more layers to our understanding of love. As we move through eleven different attempts to say what love *is*, it becomes hard to say whether we are getting closer to or farther away from understanding it. The stakes also seem to change. From metaphorical nouns, we move to feelings, then we move to verbs, ending with a sort of death. The tension heightens; the risks, the danger increase.

Rita Marnoto, following a long line of critics including Jorge de Sena and Manuel de Faria e Sousa, suggests that the poem “apresenta o estado de enamoramento como equilíbrio entre opostos” (37). There is certainly a meeting of conflicting ideas in these lines, but reading them as a balanced form of dialectic does not account for the affective intensity of the poem. The sonnet operates on an embodied level as well as a conceptual one. For instance, the final four entries in Camões’s list could, I think, refer as much to sexual practices or dispositions as conceptual paradoxes. While describing love as a form of captivity was a commonplace (and used in very metaphorical ways, such as when the lady’s blonde hair becomes a cage), being taken “preso por vontade” might also refer to sexual acts of submission. After all, Camões himself compares love to slavery in “Aquela cativa,” albeit very problematically. Conquering and killing, which appear in the final two lines of the first tercet, have long-standing sexually euphemistic meanings (Arias Freixado 398). Conquering often is related to penetration and in this sense the line “é servir a quem vence, o vencedor” could be read as shifting the focus away from the pleasure of the penetrator to the recipient (note that “a quem vence” is not gender-marked here). One could also read the earlier line “é cuidar que se ganha em se perder” in the same vein: orgasm is both a loss and a gain. A precedent for such a reading would be a *cantiga de escárnio e maldizer* by João Baveca where being attacked—that is, being penetrated—is presented as a means of winning (“e havedes pois vós a vencer”; Arias Freixado 200–202). I do not mean to say here that these lines definitely mean this or that—as Traub has suggested, much remains unclear in such sexual circumlocutions—but I think there is enough in these lines that suggests that they might be about sexual attitudes and roles as much as about metaphorical conceits.

The turn in this sonnet is particularly interesting and particularly queer. The final lines ponder how something that is so internally conflicted and paradoxical can cause two people to come together. Like the best sonnets, it makes one think differently about the proposition set up in the lines that have preceded them. It's a satisfying rhetorical flourish, but one that does not really offer a resolution. As contemporary poet Carl Phillips has said of the sonnet form: "When it's well done, the sonnet feels as if all the doors are still open at the end, as if the sex could still go anywhere. The encounter hasn't been resolved, which is exciting or terrifying, depending on how you feel" (Greenwell et al.). There is philologically too, however, something queer in Camões's conclusion to this poem. Camões describes amorous relations in terms of "amizade" rather than another word to denote affection. This is significant because in the period the highest forms of friendship were imagined to be those between men (Guy-Bray 23–24). Bringing "amor" and "amizade" together—indeed, making "amizade" the result of Amor/Cupid's paradoxical effects—seems to make this poem and its set of underspecified paradoxes especially resonant across experiences beyond the traditional heterosexual pair.

The vocabularies of desire and the formal weaving together of ideas in Camões's sonnets present a vision of "vontades" and "amor" that remains open to readerly experiences, operates beyond rigid grammatical gendering of subject or object, emphasizes mutability, explores a range of different pleasures (including submission), and alludes to (albeit through challenging euphemisms) much about bodies, sex, and desire. I have focused primarily on a selection of sonnets, not least because I share Ritchie Hoffman's view that the formal turns and breaks of the sonnet have a particularly queer energy (Greenwell et al.), but also because they highlight how far a queer approach that moves beyond the identification of same-sex intimacy or attraction can be germane for our understanding of Camões's work. These explorations might be guided by contemporary concerns, but ultimately, as they have been here, these investigations are historically grounded; the aim is not simply to impose queerness from without, but to respond to the ways in which texts of the early modern period might already be excitingly queer.

It is important to undertake this work because of how central Camões remains within Portuguese culture and how popular portrayals depict him consistently as a

lothario: Camões addressing the Tagus nymphs in Bordalo Pinheiro's 1894 painting; the poet trying to seduce Leonor on her way to collect water in Leitão de Barros's 1946 biopic; or, more recently, the suffering lover in André Carrilho's illustrations for an anthology of Camões's poems. Such images overlook how the indeterminacy of his sonnets challenges stable categories of sexuality and desire and present us with a simplified, normative vision of the poet. Offering a queer reading of Camões's poetry allows us to appreciate his poetry anew, but also, as has been argued in the case of Shakespeare, to demonstrate "queerness at the heart of heteronormative culture" (Freccero 21; see also Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer* 14–15). In this sense, applying queer theory to Camões's work offers a fresh response to periodic calls to remove his poetry from the high school syllabus in Portugal (see, for instance, Fonte and the reply by Nabais). Rather than falling back on narratives of Camões's inherent greatness or dismissing educators' legitimate concerns regarding the poet's difficulty and entanglement with empire, to give two frequent issues cited in newspaper articles, a queer reading allows us to challenge assumptions that the past is simply a "bastion of white heteropatriarchy" (Sanchez, "Woke Renaissance" 139). It offers a way of renewing interest in Camões's work and highlighting the pleasure and power of attentive close reading coupled with historical awareness, of recognizing poetic skill as well as the broader implications of a canonical writer's work. This approach, in the end, demonstrates how early modern texts can offer productive ways of critically examining—and disrupting—supposedly transhistorical norms and suggests how these historically distant texts can resonate differently with successive generations of readers.

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