

Pessoa's Antinous

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Keywords

Antinous, English poetry, Decadent poetry, Modernism, Fernando Pessoa.

Abstract

Pessoa's *Antinous* follows a tradition of poems on mythological dying-god figures mourned by their divine lovers, transferring the tropes of that tradition to the Roman emperor Hadrian and his lover, who had been appropriated by fin-de-siècle literary homoeroticism.

Palavras-chave

Antinous, Poesia inglesa, Decadentismo, Modernismo, Fernando Pessoa.

Resumo

O *Antinous* (*Antínoo*) de Fernando Pessoa segue uma tradição de poemas sobre deuses mitológicos moribundos sendo lamentados por seus amantes divinos. Pessoa transfere os artifícios dessa tradição para duas personagens, o imperador romano Adriano e seu amante, o qual tinha sido apropriado pelo homoerotismo literário do fim do século XIX.

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I.

For the student of Classical reception, Pessoa's *Antinous* (1918), with its picture of the Roman emperor Hadrian's grief for his dead boyfriend, caps a roster of nineteenth-century English poems inspired by "dying god" figures, Greek mythological characters like Adonis, beloved by a powerful deity, lost objects of beauty.¹ Examples are Shelley's "Adonais," his elegy on Keats under the guise of an Adonis-figure; Keats's own "Endymion," particularly the Adonis section; Swinburne's take on the Tannhäuser legend, "Laus Veneris," with its heated eroticism and hopeless roster of the vampiric Venus' cast-off lovers. The "Epitaph on Adonis" of the ancient Greek poet Bion of Smyrna (late second century B.C.E.) lies in the background, as it does for those poems, too; more generally felt is the tradition of the "pastoral lament" from Theocritus' "Idyll 1" through the anonymous "Epitaph for Bion" (a principal influence on Shelley) to Milton's "Lycidas." The echoes I hear—both surface echoes and those in the underlying poetics—are perhaps products of my own filters (which, to be sure, screen out as much as they screen in), but I hope to show that that literary background is an apt one.

Antinous became a subject for homoerotic English literature in this period, as Waters documents for the later nineteenth century, focusing on one particular use of his image²:

The decadent Antinous, like the Mona Lisa, whom Pater eulogized in his influential *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), was revered as an enigma; writers avoided dispelling his mystery [...] with historical reconstruction. His silences, his subjection to the fantasies in which the emperor chose to involve him, were inscribed into the decadent sadomasochistic plot, redefined as tokens of power rather than of subjection.

(WATERS, 1995: 217)

Like mythological "dying gods," Antinous is beloved, beautiful, and lost. He is a paradigmatic dead lover, a supreme paragon of the quiescent figure in which David Halperin is inclined to see a kind of extreme of the very qualities that incite desire:

There's no lover like a dead lover [...]. What men value in sleeping, dying, or dead lovers is their turning aside from the subjects who desire them [...]. In turning away from us, the dead lover enacts the ruses of erotic desire itself, mimicking the characteristic unfindability

¹ I wish to thank Patricio Ferrari for the opportunity to speak and write on this poem. I use the text and line numbers as printed in the critical edition (PESSOA, 1993: 41-50). On Pessoa's English literary output in general see FERRARI and PIZARRO, 2015.

² On Antinous as a subject of "Uranian" and allied literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see also KOPELSON (1994:26-8), MADER (2005: 387-388).

of the erotic object, its simultaneous immanence in and transcendence of its material medium, its tendency to recede from the lover in his every attempt to possess it.

(HALPERIN, 2006: 8 and 17)

Pessoa's *Antinous* even before death—before the poem begins—was always turned away, enticingly remote even within the grasp of his royal lover, as at lines 79-81 (the lines that serve as the cue to Hadrian's necrophiliac kissing and fondling of the corpse): "Beautiful was my love, yet melancholy. | He had that art, that makes love captive wholly, | Of being slowly sad among lust's rages." (PESSOA, 1993: 43).

The conventional response to such figures was most famously enacted by the poet Tennyson, stopping in front of a bust of Antinous in the British Museum alongside the young Edmund Gosse, then a curator there, who quoted the poet in his memoir: "Ah, this is the inscrutable Bithynian!" There was a pause, and then he added, gazing into the eyes of the bust: "If we knew what he knew, we should understand the ancient world." (GOSSE, 1912: 134). It is telling that Tennyson expressed his desire in terms of knowledge, and that he expressed its object in terms of the sum of "the ancient world." Antinous, as Tennyson says, was a young man from Bithynia, a province of the linguistically and culturally Greek eastern half of the Roman empire, whose relationship with the notably philhellene emperor Hadrian could be made neatly to fit the paradigm of "Greek love" between an older man and an ephebe (see DOVER, 1989). He was probably not yet 20 when he died. On a state journey through the eastern empire with Hadrian and his entourage, he fell into (or jumped into, or was pushed into) the Nile—we are no closer to the precise facts than were the ancient sources at our disposal.³ Hadrian gave him divine honors and mystery rites, as well as a distinctive position in imperial iconography. He is best known to us from his extensively preserved cult portraiture, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found its way from the ancient Roman provinces to public and private collections in the cities of the emerging European empires, and which documents a striking adaptability to the various cultural discourses available—a "multiple and mutable imagery"⁴—despite the constancy of his unmistakable visage. He appears as a Classical Athenian athletic victor in contrapposto; as an Egyptian pharaoh with the accoutrements adopted by Ptolemaic and Roman rulers of Egypt (the persona melds ancient Egyptian and Roman royal power through a coalescence of Osiris—with whom persons drowned in the Nile were traditionally associated—with the

³ On Antinous generally see LAMBERT (1986); for more recent treatments, with references to earlier scholarship, see VOUT (2007: 52-135), JONES (2010: 74-83), RENBERG (2010). On the English reception of Antinous see also VOUT in INGELHEART (2015: 232-51).

⁴ Cf. Cadario's title: "molteplici e mutevoli immagini" (2012). On his portraiture generally see MEYER (1991), VOUT (cit. n. 3), SAPELLI RAGNI (2012).

monarch Hadrian himself); as various gods both Greek and Roman: Dionysus, Vertumnus, Attis, Apollo. The Greek Dionysus and Egyptian Osiris were identified since the time of Herodotus (2.42.2); both had to do with mystery rites—like those of Antinous—that promised a better life after death. The tantalizing distance of the beloved, exacerbated by his death, with the statues making him permanently a presence just out of reach, recalls Tennyson's response to the British Museum bust. Antinous' combination of assertive pecs and inward-turning visage makes him a model of the ephebe preserved; the transience of youth and beauty are made transcendent, and transcendent in many forms: an image of late antique divine syncretism, bringing the different cultures of the empire together in accordance with long-tested modes of assimilation.

In antiquity, as in modernity, he is easily analogized to mythological beloved, dying youths like Adonis, Hyacinthus, and Narcissus. For example, a now fragmentary poem composed a century and a half after his death says,

O Narcissus, I revere your reflected beauty;
I shed a tear for Hyacinthus, who [suffered] the cruel discus;
I pity your hunting of the wild beast, [Adonis.]
Yet the meadow of Antinous and his lovely [new flower
has no need to envy] the pool, the fatal discus, or [the hunt].⁵

In this mythopoeia the flower was evidently created by the moon goddess from the blood of a lion killed by Antinous during a royal hunt (which recalls the less successful hunts of Adonis and Attis); the concern of the Moon over it recalls her love for Endymion, everlastingly asleep. Central to Pessoa's reception of dying-god literature could be considered lines 32-33: "Antinous is dead, is dead forever, | Is dead forever and all loves lament," (1993: 41) with its close echo of Bion of Smyrna's *Epitaph on Adonis*: "I mourn Adonis: fair Adonis is dead; | fair Adonis is dead, the Loves mourn in reply."⁶ Pessoa continues by assimilating the grieving emperor and the recurrently grieving love goddess (34-37): "Venus herself, that was Adonis' lover, | Seeing him, that newly lived, now dead again, | Lends her old grief's renewal to be blent | With Hadrian's pain" (1993: 42).⁷ Antinous was introduced (2-3) with "The boy lay dead | On the low couch," (1993: 41) recalling lines that articulate Bion's narrative: "fair Adonis lies [dead]" (7) and "gorgeous Adonis lies on crimson-dyed sheets" (79)⁸—the latter phrase referring to the couch

⁵ P.Oxy. 4352 fr. 5.ii.3-7, edited and commented on by J. R. Rea in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* LXIII (1996: 1-17). LIVREA (1999) suggests an attribution to Soterichus of Oasis. For the myth of Antinous' flower see also PANCRATES in ATHENAEUS 15.677d-f.

⁶ αἰάζω τὸν Ἄδωνιν, "ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις." / "ᾠλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις," ἐπαιιάζουσιν Ἐρωτες. For text and commentary on Bion see REED (1997).

⁷ On the mythological analogies see SABINE (2007: 156-157 with n. 37).

⁸ κείται καλὸς Ἄδωνις and κέκλιται ἄβροδ Ἄδωνις.

he and Aphrodite used to share (71-72), like the “memoried bed” on which the naked Antinous lies in Pessoa’s poem (67).

The reader may miss any trace here of the “anthropological” reading of dying gods, the interpretation developed in the nineteenth century by scholars like Creuzer, Mannhardt, and Frazer (REED, 2000: 322 n. 16), culminating in Frazer’s *Golden Bough* and its elaboration of a common myth of a “dying and rising god,” symbolizing the fruitfulness of the crops and farmlands and the cycles of the seasons, “the spectacle of the great changes which annually pass over the face of the earth” (FRAZER, 1914: 3), used to allegorical effect in the evocations of those myths by such Modernist poets as Eliot in *The Wasteland* and Pound in *Canto 47*, with the seasons a metaphor for the ups and downs of human culture. Perhaps there is a hint of this meaning in the rain that begins Pessoa’s poem, which (lines 7-8) “fell like a sick affright | Of Nature at her work in killing him” (1993: 41): the pathetic fallacy (a trope endemic to pastoral lament and its descendants) recalls a conscious-stricken deity (though less like Venus over Adonis than Apollo over Hyacinthus); there is a displacement of Hadrian’s own feelings.

Rather, as Waters suggests by her epithet “decadent,” in tone and treatment of its subject Pessoa’s *Antinous* is Romantic or post-Romantic, Late Victorian, Aesthetic, fin-de-siècle, though it is dated 1915, first self-published in 1918, and reworked for the 1921 edition: squarely within the formative years of English Modernism.⁹ The poem eerily evokes the poetry of 1890s. Take the Antinous stanzas from Oscar Wilde’s “The Sphinx,” cited by Sena (PESSOA, 1974: 65) as anticipating Pessoa’s tone of “ardência esteticista” (the speaker addresses a tabletop Sphinx):

Sing to me of that odorous
 Green eve when crouching by the marge
 You heard from Adrian’s gilded barge
 The laughter of Antinous,

 And lapped the stream, and fed your drouth,
 And watched with hot and hungry stare
 The ivory body of that rare
 Young slave with his pomegranate mouth.

(WILDE, 1989: 542)¹⁰

The end of Pessoa’s poem, with its withdrawal of viewpoint onto the spent king, the haloed moon, and an unidentified swooning voice in the courtyard, leaves an impression of Wilde’s *Salomé*. Pessoa’s opening—

⁹ See WEIR (1996) as Decadence as transitional between Romanticism and Modernism.

¹⁰ First published in 1894.

The rain outside was cold in Hadrian's soul.

The boy lay dead
 On the low couch, on whose denuded whole,
 To Hadrian's eyes, whose sorrow was a dread,
 The shadowy light of Death's eclipse was shed.

(PESSOA, 1993: 41)

—is more restrained than the address to Venus in Harold Acton's 1890s-style adaptation of Bion's *Epitaph on Adonis*: "O Cypris violet-stoled, O wrapped in purple woof | Arise and beat your azure-veined breasts! | Small jewelled nipples, bleed!" (ACTON, 1925: 9). But the ensuing suggestive, but unmistakable, recollections of reciprocal homoerotic frenzy are in the Decadent spirit, and (*mutatis mutandis*) we're always hearing the same lush blend—characteristic of English imitators of Symbolisme, the poets of *The Yellow Book* published by John Lane (with whom, twenty years after that literary phenomenon, Pessoa was in touch about publishing *Antinous*¹¹)—of the language of Shelley's *Adonais*—or, better, Keats himself—distilled through Swinburne and fused, in Pessoa's hands (and not without leaving a suspicion of parodistic excess), with the Elizabethan extravagance and wordplay that features also in his *Epithalamium* and sonnets (e.g., *Antinous* line 20: "O tongue which, counter-tongued, made the blood bold!") (see RODITTI, 1962: 381). The poem impersonates poetry of the pre-war height of British imperialism and of its Elizabethan inception.

Tennyson's searching gaze into the British Museum Antinous' eyes has its fictional response across the Channel in Jean Lorrain's *Monsieur de Phocas* (1901, after serialization in 1899), whose titular hero finds a key instantiation (among many) of his obsession for a "chose bleue et verte," a "certaine transparence glauque" ["a blue and green something," "a certain glaucous translucency"], in the Louvre bust of Antinous: "Avec quelle mollesse et quelle chaleur à la fois savante et profonde ses longs yeux de mort se reposaient sur moi!" ["With what tenderness and what warmth both canny and profound his far-reaching eyes of death rested upon me!"]. This is presumably the Mondragone bust, whose eyeless sockets seem to the protagonist to require filling with emeralds. Du Plessis diagnoses Phocas's "eye-obsession" as the sign of a labile, distinctly turn-of-the-century eroticism (2002: 71). The eyes of Pessoa's Antinous are "half-diffidently bold" [l. 14], "now [...] too closed and now too looking" [l. 146]: he, too, is a teasingly elusive subject, a ready surface for projection of response to oneself, whether dead or alive.

Valuable historical studies of our poem's eroticism by Monteiro (2007) and Klobucka (2013) note that Pessoa's alterations between the 1918 and 1921 versions of the poem tend to reduce the negative evaluation of (homo)sexuality: "all his

¹¹ See *Fernando Pessoa: Correspondência 1905-1922*, edited by Parreira da Silva (PESSOA, 1999: 175).

vices' art is now with Death," for example, becomes "all his arts and toys are now with Death" (line 51) (1993: 42); "Love wanders through the memories of his vice" becomes "Love through the memories of his love doth roam" (line 165) (1993: 45). In those three years Pessoa seems to retreat—perhaps not so much from a negative stance toward homosexuality as from the late Romantic delight in "sin," which survives in such lines as 19 "O fingers skilled in things not to be told!" (barely changed from 1918's "[...] not to be named")—that abjection or recuperation summed up in Alfred Douglas's "I am the love that dare not speak its name," a Decadent valorization of shame, disease, malformation—that is, of *difference* under the various metaphors that difference receives from society.

II.

The first line heralds Pessoa's performance of late Romantic affectations: "The rain outside was cold in Hadrian's soul" —a customization of Verlaine's "il pleure dans mon coeur | comme il pleut sur la ville," ["It weeps in my heart | As it rains on the town,"] with its correspondence between inner and outer worlds.¹² Why the emphasis on rain here and elsewhere in the poem, which is necessarily set in Egypt? Every conscientious Classicist knows from Herodotus (2.22.3) that rain is quite foreign to Egypt, which for moisture depends rather on the Nile (Antinous' killer). This is more London, Paris, or Berlin. The poem perverts a certain idealization of the Mediterranean: Aldrich (1993) entertainingly documents how the region, whose warmth and light were held conducive to sensuality and freedom from social inhibitions as well as from heavy clothing, was central to the homoerotic fantasies of northern Europeans for two centuries. John Addington Symonds's poem "The Lotos-Garland of Antinous" (in *Many Moods*, London, 1878, pp. 120-134) rather emphasizes the torrid setting of the Bithynian's demise, "With many a fringed mile of sultry palm | Shimmering in noonday sunlight" —Waters (1995: 208) rightly compares to that poem's tableaux the work of contemporary painters, like Alma Tadema, equally adept in recovering ancient and inventing Oriental scenes in sybaritic detail. Similar is Hugh McCulloch, Jr.'s "Antinous" (*The Harvard Monthly* 11, 1890, p. 72): "[...] this land, where thirst and famine burn | Death's incense"; or the vision described in the anonymous pornographic novel *Teleny*: "I saw a barren land, the sun-lit sands of Egypt, wet by the sluggish Nile; where Adrian stood wailing, forlorn, disconsolate for he had lost for ever the lad he loved so well." (1893).¹³

¹² Editor's note: Pessoa's French poem "La pluie bat la fenêtre..." ["The rain beats against the window..."] dated 9 February 1914, echoes Verlaine's famous lines (see PESSOA, 2014: 97 & 331).

¹³ Quotation from INGLEHEART (2015: 149). On *Teleny*'s use of the Antinous story see INGLEHEART (2015: 149-51).

Pessoa's imagery participates conceptually in a northward *translatio imperii*. The erotic object Antinous as slave, as provincial, as Easterner coincides with European colonial concerns at this moment—even, or even especially, in 1915 and the following years. A node of Classicism and colonialism also concludes the stanza from lines 85-95, where “a memory of lust revives and takes” [l. 86] Hadrian's “senses by the hand,” [l. 87] and:

A creeping love-wise and invisible hand
At every body-entrance to his lust
Whispers caresses which flit off yet just
Remain enough to bleed his last nerve's strand,
O sweet and cruel Parthian fugitives!

(PESSOA, 1993: 43)

Again like Shelley's *Adonais*—with its personified dreams, loves, splendors, and echoes—personified whispered caresses, themselves barely existent, act upon the mourner¹⁴; but in this case they delude and taunt him, they are both sweet and cruel “Parthian fugitives,” like the cavalrymen of the Parthian Empire who, Roman poets frequently remind us, are “fierce in flight,” shooting arrows back at their adversaries even as they strategically retreat.¹⁵ The caresses imagined by Hadrian combine Cupid's notorious arrow-shots with those of the enemies of Rome. To some extent the trope is ornamental, but it is easily connected with Hadrian's own contendings with the Parthian Empire, Rome's great rival for control over the eastern coastlands of the Mediterranean (objects of European Orientalist desire since the nineteenth century)—some provinces of which Hadrian himself found it prudent to yield back to the Parthian sphere, after their direct control by Rome in the previous reign. Love and empire employ the same strategy against an “Other” who acts while in retreat.

The poem's second half, in fact, is about the emperor's therapeutic strategies after both memory and necrophilia fail him, as it moves (in yet another trope adopted from Bion) between narratorial exposition, including injunctions to the mourner, and Hadrian's own monologue, his unfolding determination of how to commemorate Antinous and preserve their love, his choice of how to let the dead boy go. At about the halfway mark (line 179) he declares that he will make an everlasting statue; at line 204 he falters, lamenting, “Yet oh that this were needed not” and that Antinous were still alive in his multifarious sensuousness: a rose, a garland, a flame. But he promptly resolves anew to find an enduring form for love, a turn the poem attributes to “the gods” [line 225]. “All that thou art now is thyself

¹⁴ A post-Decadent engagement with Shelley's *Adonais* is also evident in the war poetry of Pessoa's contemporary, Wilfred Owen; see REED 2006.

¹⁵ See e.g. VIRGIL, *Georgics* 3.31; HORACE, *Odes* 1.19.11, 2.13.17.

and I," he says in line 306, apparently struggling to adapt from Shelley a neo-Platonic sublimation (1993: 49):

Our dual presence has its unity
 In that perfection of body which my love,
 By loving it, became, and did from life
 Raise into godness, calm above the strife
 Of times, and changing passions far above.

(PESSOA, 1993: 49)

After all, he says at line 226, "Thy death has given me a higher lust— | A flesh-lust raging for eternity." (1993: 47). Hadrian's vision is of the future, posterity's memory of the two of them together (cf. 28-29 "He weeps and knows that every future age | Is looking on him out of the to-be") (1993: 41). To achieve this everlasting perfection in material, Hadrian focuses on the statues of Antinous that he intends to set up; the ancient portraiture becomes the poem's telos. "Yet thy true deathless statue I shall build," he meditated just above (289-293),

Will be no stone thing, but that same regret
 By which our love's eternity is willed.
 One side of that is thou, as gods see thee
 Now, and the other, here, thy memory.

(PESSOA, 1993: 48)

"There is a kind of reverse Pygmalion myth in operation here," as noted by Waters (1995: 211) (cf. 218). "I shall to marble carry this regret | That in my heart like a great star is set" [lines 315-316] (PESSOA, 1993: 49)—in this image of Hadrian's concretization of his feelings one might hear the "great star" that "early drooped in the western sky in the night" in Whitman's elegy on Lincoln, emblemizing grief by metonymy, along with lilacs and ever-returning spring—perhaps also the audacity of Tennyson's Ulysses: "to follow knowledge like a sinking star | unto the utmost bounds of human thought." Hadrian's "regret" does not sink like a star and go away; it sinks into his heart and potentially abides—and so reminds me, too, of Bion's *Epitaph on Adonis*, where the goddess hopes to suck Adonis' spirit into her, down to the liver, and keep his love there united with hers, in that Greek poem's maddest and most fervent refusal to sublimate (lines 45-50). In Pessoa's subtext is the new star, observed by Hadrian, that Antinous was said to have become and that (like statues and flowers) made him eternal.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cassius Dio 69.11.4. The star recurs in poetry on Antinous. A sonnet by Ernest Raynaud ends with an image of Hadrian making Antinous "un astre au ciel bleu," ["a star in the blue sky"] conceiving that he saw "tes yeux s'ouvrir dans les étoiles!" ["your eyes opening in the stars!"]. Reginald Shepherd, eternizing in a way not alien to Pessoa's Hadrian, imagines Antinous as "a star to wish upon two thousand years from you" [...] "the star I can't make out [...]" (SHEPHERD, 1996: 75-76).

Hadrian's turn to consolation and even hope—the correlative to Shelley's *Adonais* 361 "He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he"¹⁷—comes at line 236: "Love, love, my love! Thou art already a god," (PESSOA, 1993: 47) and fully embraces Platonic sublimation: "a sight, to me allowed | [...] | A vision of the real things beyond | Our life-imprisoned life, our sense-bound sense" [lines 238-243] (1993: 47). He seems to have found his way back from Decadent materialism to an earlier style of English Romanticism, to a "subtler sense" [line 251]—but the materiality of the statue complicates things, and a Romantic claim of the imagination over physical reality makes some concession to that reality [lines 277-280]:

Therefore when now thy memory I bid
Become a god where gods are, I but move
To death's high column's top the shape it took
And set it there for vision of all love.

(PESSOA, 1993: 48)

And so in the rest of his monologue Hadrian attempts a synthetic conception of the "true deathless statue" as "no stone thing, but that same regret | By which our love's eternity is willed" [lines 289-291] (1993: 48); marble will embody for all future ages, in posterity's responses to it, the dialectic of love and loss that now constitutes Antinous to him.

The poem's late Romantic tensions between material and immaterial forms of preservation—degrees of presence—are subtended by those between the one and the many. Antinous' posthumous portraiture, as we saw, was polymorphous, teeming with many divine and human shapes and costumes; so too Pessoa's Antinous in life, variously costumed to mimic the various Greco-Roman gods worshiped in marble or chryselephantine [lines 155-160]:

Now was he Venus, white out of the seas;
And now was he Apollo, young and golden;
Now as Jove sate he in mock judgement over
The presence at his feet of his slaved lover;
Now was he an acted rite, by one beholden,
In ever-repositioned mysteries.

(PESSOA, 1993: 45)

But "now he is something anyone can be," the poem says with fin-de-siècle disdain, in a "stark negation of the thing it is" [lines 161-162]. Hadrian oddly (given the archaeological record) speaks about one statue, and even makes it

¹⁷ Cf. MILTON, *Lycidas* 165 "Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more." The trope ultimately descends, through a long line of early modern pastoral laments, from the double lament in VIRGIL, *Eclogue* 5.

represent Antinous' divine status "calm above the strife | of times, and changing passions" [ll. 310-11, quoted above]. The emperor attempts a Shelleyan, Platonic misreading¹⁸ of Antinous' many personae—a strategy for controlling his own love and grief? It has its correlative in the (military) reduction of many peoples to one, and indeed Hadrian sometimes seems to be projecting his own imperial rule far into the future in the form of this statue he desiderates, willing a negation of the Roman empire's diffraction into its European and Ottoman heirs as he wills a reduction of Antinous' polymorphousness into unity (or into a duality that includes both of them). In antiquity finding the essence behind the many faces, the reality behind the many masks (in this case beauty and the love beauty engenders), is a late imperial theological mode, finally satisfied (it would seem) by monotheism; in literature I think of Isis in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, Book 11, who appears to Lucius in her Egyptian form—or rather universal form—to tell him who she really is despite the many names that she's been given and that she authoritatively recites to him. The "Orphic" hymns of (perhaps) Hadrian's own period are largely exuberant catalogues of different names and epithets of their divine addressees, finding a cumulative truth though multiplicity. Frazer, too, in his anthropology of dying and rising gods (which takes its cues from the syncretistic thought of late antiquity and has its matrix in the expansive explorations of the British empire) certainly wants to find the underlying essence behind many appearances. But again, Pessoa's poem offers no Frazerian certainties.

The poem's surrounding rain, "cold in Hadrian's soul," recurring at critical points in the narrative (lines 1, 7, 24, 48, 65, 171, and 342), stirring his mind in memory and desire, supposedly setting off some action on his part (including the idea for the statue at line 171), makes ambiguous his relation to the exterior world and ironizes this version of Romantic transcendence in a way that approaches Decadence as much as it does Modernism. Sabine, diagnosing the poem's "ecstatic dissolution of subjectivity achieved through sensuously promiscuous interaction with external phenomena" (2007: 150), connects its intersubjectivity and tensions between singleness and multiplicity to Pessoa's own protean persona. He is discussing in particular the encyclopedic string of recollected or attempted sensual acts at the bier in the poem's first half, a kaleidoscope of lust implicitly assimilating physical to intellectual possession. In its comprehensiveness it may vaguely recall scientific efforts like Krafft-Ebing's famous *Psychopathia Sexualis*, but in literature it is juster to compare the exhaustive inventory of pleasures available throughout

¹⁸ Cf. SHELLEY, "Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats": "The One remains, the many change and pass; | [...] | Life, like a dome of many-colour'd glass, | Stains the white radiance of Eternity, | Until Death tramples it to fragments." (LII, lines 460-464). Pessoa's Hadrian promises that "This picture of our love [...] | [...] will loom white out the past" (lines 199-200) (PESSOA, 1993: 46).

Venus' domain in Aubrey Beardsley's unfinished account of the Tannhäuser legend, *Under the Hill*,¹⁹ whose all-encompassing variety is Decadent in the style of Huysman's *A Rebours* or Lorrain's *Monsieur de Phocas*. Hadrian would seem to reverse the dialectic that is Havelock Ellis' structural definition of Decadence: "a further development of a classic style, a further specialisation, the homogeneous ... having become heterogeneous" (1915: 175): an antithetical recourse to the monistic white light of the Classical—or at least the Platonic—is not out of character for what we know of the historical emperor's tastes. But *Antinous* does not finally resolve the question of the one and the many, which is real and which is image. The prosopopoeia here, the play with the faces on the surface of things and probing of their independent existence, also continues in this poem—published under Pessoa's own name—a long tradition that Hadrian himself would have recognized.

¹⁹ First published in a bowdlerized version in *The Savoy* in January and April 1896; privately published in 1907 by Leonard Smithers as *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* (London).



Figs. 1 & 2. Statue of Antinous, reign of Hadrian (117-138 CE). Delphi Archaeological Museum. Photos by Carlos Pittella (18 December 2014).

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