https://doi.org/10.34629/rcdmt.vol.1.n.2.pp114-162

Nothing From Nothing

Nada de nada

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Abstract

This paper discusses the theory and inspiration behind producing, directing and editing a film adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* entitled *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025). The goal is to highlight the aesthetic value of nothing by exposing nothing's miraculous ability and power to create itself out of itself, and to inspire autonomous creativity in others.

Keywords: *King Lear* – The aesthetics of nothing – Shakespeare's tenth muse – Sebastianism – Cordelia's double

Resumo

Neste artigo, discutem-se a teoria e a inspiração subjacentes à produção, realização e montagem de numa adaptação cinematográfica do *Rei Lear* de Shakespeare intitulada *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025). O objetivo é realçar o valor estético do nada, expondo a capacidade e o poder milagroso do nada para se criar a si próprio a partir de si próprio e para inspirar a criatividade autónoma nos outros.

Palavras-chave: *King Lear* – Estética do nada – A décima musa de Shakespeare – Sebastianismo – O Duplo de Cordélia

Submissão: 31 de julho de 2024

Aceitação: 13 de dezembro de 2024

Nothing From Nothing

At the heart of artistic creation is an unexpected radical freedom shared by the creator and spectator that is rarely talked about. I am referring to the kind of freedom that involves the removal of all forms of personhood and property, the relinquishing of separation, and the willful acceptance of division, multiplicity and infinite expansion. This is the kind of freedom I will discuss in the following paper by exploring the aesthetic value of nothing, in particular, its miraculous ability and power to create itself out of itself and to inspire autonomous creativity in others. In summary, it is my aim to show how nothing´s miraculous self-creating potential, what I shall refer to as Shakespeare's Tenth Muse or Will to Nothing, turns loss to find, death to life, and none to many.

For Shakespeare, the "Tenth Muse" or "Will to Nothing" involves the aesthetic erotic conjunction of will and nothing, *will* being *one* ("Think all but *one*, and me in that *one Will*")[1] (Sonnet 135), and suggesting the male phallus — and *nothing* or zero, alluding to its female counterpart.

> Ophelia. I think nothing, my lord.
> Hamlet. That's a fair thought to lie between maidens´ legs. (*Hamlet* 3.2)

The will to nothing is a means of transcending time through poetry. In a manner of speaking, the poet willfully becomes nothing and, as a result, ignites his own immortality.

It isn´t until the publication of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* in 1609, that we first hear of Shakespeare´s "Tenth Muse":

> Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth
> Than those old nine which rhymers invocate;
> And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
> Eternal numbers to outlive long date. (Sonnet 38)

[1] I have italicized certain key words throughout this essay for emphasis. Quotations from Shakespeare in this essay are from the following source: Shakespeare, William. 2020. *Arden Shakespeare Third Series, Complete Works*. 1st ed. Bloomsbury Publishing.

It is far from obvious that Shakespeare means any sort of combination of "will" and "nothing" by his invocation of the "Tenth Muse" in this sonnet. At first glance, he appears to be doing no more than paraphrasing one of Michael Drayton's sonnets, where Drayton addresses his mistress as a tenth muse.[2] What we can say for certain is that when Shakespeare invokes his "Tenth Muse" he is advocating for all poets, on account of the fact that for Shakespeare, the Tenth Muse not only represents his aesthetic philosophy, but an aesthetic philosophy that immortalizes poetry itself.

It is critical to establish a definitive correspondence between will and one before we connect the number ten with will and nothing. Moreover, it will be helpful to recognize that Shakespeare´s use of the word Will suggests the poet´s own name ("Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will", Sonnet 135) and desire. The most conclusive evidence for this correspondence between *one* and *will* is to be found in the *Sonnets* themselves.

In Sonnet 136, the name Will is again associated with one. The meaning of the line: "Among a number one is reckoned none", is that one will undoubtably come to nothing if one refuses to multiply. The irony of this statement is that Shakespeare is also suggesting that the perpetual multiplication of *one* can only be brought about through nothing – in short, that *nothing* represents the feminine principle which gives birth to multiplicity through its union with will or one.

> *Will*, *will* fulfil the treasure of thy love,
> Ay, fill it *full with wills*, and my *will one.*
> In things of great receipt with ease we prove
> Among a number *one is reckoned none*:
> Then in the number let me pass untold, (Sonnet 136)

[2] In his collection of sonnets entitled *Idea*, first published as *Ideas Mirrour* (1594), Drayton writes:

> To this our world, to learning, and to heaven,
> Three nines there are, to every one a nine;
> One number of the earth, the other both divine;
> One woman now makes three odd numbers even.
> Nine orders first of angels be in heaven;
> Nine muses do with learning still frequent :
> These with the gods are ever resident.
> Nine worthy women to the world were given.
> My worthy one to these nine worthies addeth;
> And my fair Muse, one Muse unto the nine.
> And my good angel, in my soul divine ! —
> With one more order these nine orders gladdeth.
> My Muse, my worthy, and my angel then
> Makes every one of these three nines a ten. (Sonnet 18)

Not only is “one … reckoned none” but “my will [is] one”. To be clear, Shakespeare needs to assume nothingness to eternalize his oneness.

Shakespeare’s Tenth Muse

The first specific reference to the number ten in the *Sonnets* appears in Sonnet 6:

> Or ten times happier, be it ten for one;
> Ten times thy self were happier than thou art,
> If ten of thine ten times refigured thee:

Here “ten” emphasizes the idea of self-expansion. In a similar context, in Sonnet 37, Shakespeare writes: “then ten times happy me”. One way to look at what is going on in both of these sonnets is that the poet is trading in his one for ten (that is, he is adding a 0 to his 1), a nothing to his will. Sonnet 6 provides one of the strongest arguments in favor of increase, to “be distilled”, to “breed another thee”. In this sonnet, when Shakespeare writes: “Be not self-willed”, it is almost as if he were saying to himself: ‘Get out of thyself Will, only the very lack of yourself is what can restore you: to love yourself best is to disperse yourself farthest!’ Most assuredly, the poet is ten times happier because he believes in the value of perpetual increase. As the saying goes: the more the merrier! The poet is not only seeking new parts to play, but new readers to be read by. Simultaneously, he is offering his aesthetic philosophy to his readers in a way that can help them overcome their own self-willed obsession. I say he is offering his aesthetic philosophy, but more importantly, he is offering his poetry and drama, which while containing his poetic philosophy, allows readers the chance to experience expansion in real time by taking on different personas through the silent act of reading.

In the tenth sonnet published under Shakespeare’s name in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), conspicuous for being comprised of 12 lines rather than 14, we find the following verses:

> I weep for thee, and yet no cause I have;
> For why thou left’st me *nothing* in thy *will*.
> And yet thou left’st me more than I did crave,
> For why I craved *nothing* of thee still:

In these lines, Shakespeare not only plays on the sense in which the word *will* refers to one’s right to an inheritance, but also on his own name – William. His beloved, we are to

imagine, left him *nothing*, as if nothing were something he craved or desired, or willed (for what it is not). In other words, his beloved left him the poetic principle of *nothing* insofar as it originates the poet's willful parturition, expansion, and growth as a poet and dramatist.

One might easily overlook a subtle textual reference to the "Tenth Muse" as the "will to nothing" in Sonnet 10 from *Shakespeare's Sonnets*:

> Grant, if thou *wilt*, thou *art beloved of many*,
> But that thou *none lov'st* is most evident:

The idea here is not that one wills many, but rather, that one wills or loves none or nothing in order to love and be loved by many. In short, that the goal for the poet is to both lack any and be many.

In respect to the number 10 itself, there can be little doubt concerning its central role in Shakespeare's poetic vision, evidenced by the total number of collected sonnets in the 1609 quarto publication of *Shakespeare's Sonnets – 154 (1+5+4=10)*, his invocation to the "Tenth Muse" in Sonnet 38, his reference to a "Muse" of one sort or another in ten of his collected sonnets,[3] the ten consecutive lines beginning "And…" in Sonnet 66 (the first being "And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity"), his reference to *will* and *nothing* in the tenth poem of *The Passionate Pilgrim,* and finally, his references to the word "ten" in Sonnet 6 and Sonnet 37, both of which forcibly associate 10 with the idea of perpetual increase.

More About Nothing in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609)

In *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, the poet shows us how the concept of nothing overcomes time by creating the possibility for its future expansion. In order to see things this way we must understand that by nothing Shakespeare more often means the opposite of what we normally imagine nothing to mean. For example, when Shakespeare writes "And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defense" (Sonnet 12), he is suggesting that the poetic proliferation of nothing itself has this potential to overcome time.

[3] Besides the reference to the "tenth Muse" in Sonnet 38, the word "muse" appears in Sonnet 21 ("So is it not with me as with that Muse") Sonnet 32 ("My friend´s Muse"), Sonnet 78 ("So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse", Sonnet 79 ("my sick Muse"), Sonnet 82 ("I grant thou wert not married to my Muse"), Sonnet 85 ("My tongue-tied Muse"), Sonnet 100 ("Return, forgetful Muse,") Sonnet 101 ("O truant Muse") Sonnet 103 ("Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth,").

In Sonnet 20, where Shakespeare includes the line "By adding one thing to my purpose nothing", he reinforces the importance of nothing and its interchangeability with oneness. The poet's battle against time involves the discovery of the relationship between oneness and multiplicity through *nothing*; that is, how the love of the *one* for the *many* and the *many* for the *one* may be viewed as the motivation for *nothing's* self-begetting desire.

Again, in Sonnet 60, nothing stands out as the very thing to undo time:

> And nothing stands but for (time's) scythe to mow:
> And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand
> Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

While Shakespeare often refers to the hand of time in the *Sonnets*, on other occasions he refers to the hand of the artist, such as when he writes: "Those lips that Love's own hand did make" (Sonnet 145).

Nothing's boundless capability, the paradoxical positive charge it contains within itself, is mysteriously put into question in Sonnet 66 where Shakespeare begins ten consecutive lines with the word *and*. Each verse reveals the opposite of its original expectation, for example "purest faith unhappily forsworn" and "gilded honour shamefully misplaced". The third line begins: "And needy *nothing* trimm'd in jollity", implying that the opposite of what we expected about "nothing" is now the case. Nothing is no longer needy but trimmed, joyful, fruitful, to be made use of through art. Above all, nothing is not what it seems.

Other sonnets where Shakespeare empowers nothing with positive force include Sonnet 108 where the poet identifies the "sweet boy" or fair youth with nothing: "Nothing, sweet boy; but yet, like prayers divine", and most triumphantly in Sonnet 109: "For nothing this wide world I call", and Sonnet 123: "No, time …Thy pyramids / To me are nothing novel, nothing strange". In Sonnet 130 Shakespeare writes: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun", and in Sonnet 131 suggesting a stark parallel between authorial blackness and nothingness: "In nothing art thou black".

Shakespeare's nothing is precisely that which makes room for multiplicity and presence. It is similar to the Pythagorean need for a void to produce number, a nothing which allows for the motion of will. As paradoxical as it may seem, the will to nothing is the will to multiply from within nothing itself.

Shakespeare's Sonnets (1609) are about overcoming time through poetry and love; in short, they are a collaborative project carried out by the author and his readers with the intent to save humanity from the narcissistic dungeon of fruitless self-love. In this essay it will become evident not only how *Shakespeare's Sonnets* encapsulate his poetic philosophy of the "Tenth Muse", but also how they open up the wider aesthetic concerns of his plays and poems, in particular, the way in which tragic heroes such as King Lear willfully become nothing to teach us of the inner working of poetic immortality.

Fool. "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" (*King Lear* 1.4)

Today, along with Lear´s Fool, I ask: what is the use value of nothing? The question appears to invite inexhaustible reflection. At the core of my incentive to explore this idea is an unwavering conviction that the aesthetic value of nothing is intimately related to the aesthetic value of blackness, invisibility, absence and silence, and that their fusion is where art begins to take shape.

According to scientists, the universe was created out of nothing. Is it heretical to think that nothing came from nothing? Could the nothing out of which all things are said to have evolved, emanated from itself? My ongoing interest in this subject led me to a thesis dissertation focused entirely on the will to nothing in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as well as to the creation of two films: *The Seafarer by Fernando Pessoa* (2022), and *Nothing From Nothing* (2024-2025). I have provided stills from both films. Most of them appear at the end of the essay though some are set throughout. The first film contains the complete text of my translation of Fernando Pessoa's *O Marinheiro* (1915, 2022). The later project presents Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1608), short excerpts from his sonnets, narrative poems and plays, excerpts from John Dryden´s *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal* (1689), Fernando Pessoa´s *Mensagem* (1934), and my translation of *Orpheu Literary Quarterly Volumes 1 & 2* (1915, 2022). On the whole, my adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* contains the majority of Shakespeare's play as it was published in 1608. The dramatized excerpts highlight the doubling of nothing, aesthetic silence, blackness, and absence.

Silence Takes Shape

Figure 1. *The Seafarer by Fernando Pessoa* (2023), film still. «O silêncio começa a tomar corpo, começa a ser cousa…» «Silence begins to take shape, begins to be something…» Featuring (from left to right) Mariana Meneses as First Sister, Dullier Correia as Second Sister and Maria Cabral as Third Sister.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear,* in response to Lear's urgent request for each of his daughters to speak and express her undying love for him, the King's youngest daughter Cordelia speaks the following words to herself: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (1.1), "my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1). When forced to speak, Cordelia responds by saying "nothing". Lear famously responds: "Nothing will come of nothing" (1.1), meaning that as long as she refuses to flatter him with words, she will receive nothing from him in return: nothing for nothing. The exchange value of nothing is nothing.

Later in Act 1, in response to his Fool´s inquiry into the use value of nothing, Lear rephrases his initial statement, seemingly retaining its sentiment. He says "nothing can be made of nothing". The two statements are slightly different. The first "nothing will come of nothing" mentions "will", as if what comes out of nothing is both will and nothing, while his second statement, "Nothing can be made of nothing" (1.4), emphasizes the miraculous potential for nothing to give birth, the importance of its duplicity, and the poet´s desire to share this discovery with his reader.

Figure 2. *Nothing From Nothing* (*2024/2025*), film still. *"Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?"* (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1.4). Featuring (from left to right) João Silva Jordão as The Fool, Jonathan Weightman as King Lear, Mick Greer as Kent.

In my adaptation of *King Lear*, I go out of my way to emphasize these ideas, this duplicity of meaning, or doubling of nothing. I accomplish this by focusing on characters´ shadows, by

Figure 3. *Nothing From Nothing* (*2024/2025*), film still. Featuring (from left to right) Maria Neves as Regan, Beatrize Barbosa as Goneril, Dullier Correia as Cordelia's Double.

including supplementary texts, and by creating a double of the character of Cordelia. Moreover, I show how aesthetic nothing is connected to its double by synchronizing it with aesthetic blackness, silence, absence and invisibility.

Nada Fica de Nada

The significance of nothing as an existential dilemma is dramatically evoked in the final scene of Shakespeare´s *Macbeth*, where Macbeth laments that life "is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (Macbeth 5.5). Sometimes overlooked in this scene is the absurd value Macbeth attributes to nothing. It is as if he is saying that it signifies the meaning of man´s existence.

The Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) recalls Shakespeare's legacy of nothing throughout his work. In one of his poems written under the heteronym of Ricardo Reis, Pessoa paraphrases the well-known phrases spoken by Macbeth and Lear together as follows: "Nada fica de nada. Nada somos…. Somos contos contando contos, nada."[4](1988, 19) Upon a first reading, the nothing (nada) in all three texts sound like rhetorical flourish, as if nothing is simply meant to emphasize life's non-meaning. On closer view, to say that "nothing comes from nothing" or that life is an audible tale "signifying nothing" suggests that nothing *is* meaning, even the core meaning and foundation of life itself.

In *The Mad Fiddler*, an unpublished narrative poem written between 1910 and 1917, Pessoa suggests the connection between hands and nothing, as well as the previously mentioned idea of inheriting nothing. Both themes echo ideas introduced in Shakespeare´s plays and poems. Pessoa writes:

> Landscape intermediate
> Between dreams and land.

[4] Nada fica de nada. Nada somos.
Um pouco ao sol e ao ar nos atrasamos
Da irrespirável treva que nos pese
Da humilde terra imposta,
Cadáveres adiados que procriam.

Leis feitas, estátuas vistas, odes findas —
Tudo tem cova sua. Se nós, carnes
A que um íntimo sol dá sangue, temos
Poente, por que não elas?
Somos contos contando contos, nada.

The wind slept, calm-fanned.
The waters were weedy at
Where we plunged our hand.
We let the hand wander
In the water unseen…
There we lost the spirit
Of our still being we.
We were fairy-free,
Having to inherit
Nothing from to be….
(2000c, 160)

The word "hand" repeated twice in this passage is illuminating: the hand's access to nothing. The hand as the self-reflective subject of art reaching into nothing to create art. Also, nothingness as pure transcendency, at the threshold of authorial invisibility: "in the water unseen". The idea here is that poetry begins with a blank canvas. In other words, the creative act begins with the artist's hands in communion with nothing and silence. The lines referring to inheriting nothing stands out:

Having to inherit
Nothing from to be….

The contours of nothing and silence are real and vital, not abstract. They begin with the hands of the poet.

The Empire of Dreams

The most secure way of invoking nothing is through dreaming. In *The Seafarer*, Pessoa seems to propose the idea that dreaming is not only the antidote to death, rather than its mysterious double, but that we ought to realize the dream as the reality of our creative mission.

Figure 4. *Nothing From Nothing (2024/2025)*, film still. “I now feel impossible hands passing through my hair. Hands through the hair… It is the gesture with which to speak about mermaids… Only a moment ago, when I thought of nothing, I was thinking about my past…” (Fernando Pessoa, *The Seafarer*). Featuring Dullier Correia as Cordelia’s Double.

Pessoa´s emphasis on dreams returns us to the Book of Daniel, in which the subject of dreams and translating from nothing is brought to the forefront. Since the disappearance of King Don Sebastian in 1578 at the famous Battle of Alcácer Quibir, messianic thinkers and poets have imagined this text as a prophecy linked to Portugal´s future destiny. According to Father António Vieira in his *History of the Future* (1718), Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as interpreted by the biblical prophet Daniel highlights Portugal´s role as the harbinger of the Fifth Empire. The dream involves a stone, hewn (from a mountain) without human hands, that smashes a statue made of gold, silver, copper, and a mixture of clay and iron symbolizing four succeeding Empires. The stone destroys the statue, only to become a great mountain filling the earth.

The importance of hands in this prophecy is understated. The text explicitly states that the stone replacing the Empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (represented by gold, silver, bronze, and iron mixed with clay), would be created without human hands. While it’s not hard to fathom a stone not made with human hands, an Empire not made with human hands is different. For Fernando Pessoa, the stone appears to represent the dream itself, or to be more clear, the willful act of dreaming:

> Second. — Year after year, day after day, the sailor erected his new homeland in a continuous

dream… Every day he added a dream stone to this impossible building…

…Only the dream is eternal and beautiful… Why are we still speaking?…

First. — I don't know… (*looking at the coffin, in a lowered voice*) Why do people die?

Second. — Perhaps because there is not enough dreaming…

First. — It's possible… Wouldn't it then be worthwhile to close ourselves in the dream and forget life, so that death would forget us?…

Second. — No, my sister, nothing is worth the trouble…(2022, 33-36)

For Pessoa, the idea that Portugal represents the Fifth Empire has to do with Portugal's allegorical role as a nation of independent dreamers fixated on nothing and the fecundity of nothing from nothing. *The Seafarer* projects this allegory.

The historical figure in Portugal´s history to substantiate this claim is King Don Sebastian. The myth created around Sebastian is the myth of nothing (from nothing).[5]

In Fernando Pessoa´s *Mensagem* (1934), Pessoa presents his own version of Father António Vieira´s *History of the Future* (1718). For Pessoa, Portugal´s legacy and myth are rooted in the inheritance of loss and nothing.

O mito é o nada que é tudo.

Myth is the nothing that is everything.[6] (Pessoa, 2008, 295)

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[5] Most recently, this idea is illustrated in Manoel de Oliveira's film *Non, ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* (1990) where a fallen Portuguese soldier awakens from the battlefield to proclaim the following words from Padre António Vieira's *Sermão da terceira quarta-feira da Quaresma* (1670), § 1:

Terrível palavra é um NON! Terrível palavra é um NON! Não tem direito, nem avesso, por qualquer lado que a tomeis, sempre soa e diz o mesmo. Lede-o do princípio para o fim, ou do fim para o princípio, sempre é NON! Quando a vara de Moisés se converteu naquela serpente tão feroz, que fugia dela por que o não mordesse, logo perdeu a figura, a ferocidade e a peçonha. O NON não é assim! Por qualquer parte que o tomeis, sempre é serpente, sempre morde, sempre fere, sempre leva o veneno consigo. Mata a esperança, que é o último remédio que deixou a natureza a todos os males. Não há corretivo que o modere, nem arte que o abrande, nem lisonja que o adoce. Por mais que confeiteis um NON, sempre amarga, por mais que o doureis, sempre é de ferro!

At the end of these words, the soldier dramatically kills himself and falls onto a flag with a red cross. While it is not my intention to analyze this film, in the context of the current study, where we are talking about the aesthetic concept of nothing from nothing and its relationship with the will to nothing in Shakespeare, Dryden and Pessoa, it speaks to the subject at hand. In brief, when imagined from both sides, the word "NON" suggests nothing itself as a beginning and end. In other words, it suggests the will to nothing as an end in itself, a purpose to which the kind of aesthetic Sebastianism we find in Dryden and Pessoa would become vehicles.

[6] In the same poem, Pessoa writes:

E a fecundá-la decorre.
Em baixo, a vida, metade
De nada, morre.

Spreading and encircling it.
Life down below,
half of nothing, perishes. (2008, 295)

The nothing bequeathed through myth towards the expansion of life (at this stage of Portugal´s history), is described as half of nothing.

In a section entitled “SECOND / VIRIATO” (“SEGUNDO / VIRIATO”), Pessoa writes:

E é já o ir a haver o dia
Na antemanhã, confuso nada
And even then
In the predawn, confused nothing (2020b, 52-53)

Referring to predawn Portugal as “confused nothing” speaks to Portugal´s evolving awareness of its mission to turn confused nothing into enlightened nothing. Along the way, nothing remains misunderstood and divided:

Não fui alguém…
O todo, ou o seu nada. (Pessoa, 2020b, 74)

Then, in the section entitled “FIFTH / D. SEBASTIAN, KING OF PORTUGAL” (QUINTA / D. SEBASTIÃO, REI DE PORTUGAL”) we find a familiar reference to Don Sebastian’s madness, gift and legacy:

Sem a loucura que é o homem
Mais que a besta sadia,
Cadáver adiado que procria?

Without madness what is man
Except some fecund brute,
Corpse kept back to procreate? (Pessoa, 2020b, 77)

The poem paraphrases something Pessoa wrote in 1923 to defend Raul Leal: “Madmen are heroes, madmen are saints, madmen are geniuses, without whom humanity is just another kind of animal, corpses kept back to procreate.” (2020b, 175). The idea that Pessoa seems to be suggesting is that Sebastian too will procreate through his mysterious disappearance (which is like a corpse held back). Notably, the same expression was used by Ricardo Reis (one of Pessoa´s heteronyms) when he wrote “Nothing is left of nothing. We are nothing (…) Corpses kept back to procreate.” – (2020b, 175).

Prophesizing Sebastian´s heralding of the Fifth Empire through his death,[7] Pessoa continues:

[7] In SECOND / THE FIFTH EMPIRE (SEGUNDO / O QUINTO IMPÉRIO).

…Nada na alma lhe diz
Mais que a lição da raiz
Ter por vida a sepultura.
His soul tells him nothing more
Than the lesson of the tuber –
To live out his life in a sepulture. (2020b, 132)

And hence:

Quem vem viver a verdade
Que morreu D. Sebastião?

Who in this truth will find peace…
In knowing King Sebastian died? (2020b, 133)

The Fifth Empire and death of King Don Sebastian are keys to the life of dreams. Most importantly, they are symbols of the possibility of new life through loss.

No imenso espaço seu de meditar,
Constelado de forma e de visão,
Surge, prenúncio claro do luar,
El-Rei D. Sebastião.
Mas não, não é luar: é luz do etéreo.
É um dia, e, no céu amplo de desejo,
A madrugada irreal
do Quinto Império Doira as margens do Tejo.
...
Ah, quando quererás voltando,
Fazer minha esperança amor?
Da névoa e da saudade quando?
Quando, meu Sonho e meu Senhor?
In that vast space where he'd meditate,
Clustered with form and with vision,
Raising, like a rinsed overture of moonlight:
The King, Dom Sebastian.
Or not moonlight: glow of the higher air.
It's the day; sky-full of desire,
Unreal dawn - the Fifth Empire –
Gilds the banks of the Tagus with fire.

…
When will you want, in returning,
To make my hope love?
When, out of mist and the longing?
When, my Dream and my Lord? (2020b, 148, 149)[8]

The fog surrounding Don Sebastian suggests the obscurity of the nothing he bequeaths as his legacy. For this reason, I´ve created an opening to my film and several transitional clips featuring a vision of thick mysterious fog hovering over the medieval Moorish Castle in Sintra.

Figure 5. *Nothing From Nothing* (*2024/2025*) film still.

The Counterpart of Art

Allow me to say a few words about John Dryden´s *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal* (1689), not only because I've included excerpts from this play in my film, but because Dryden's vision allows us to see what Shakespeare was doing more clearly.

Dwelling on the willful blindness and madness of King Lear and Don Sebastian, the will to give all of oneself away – for nothing, for all eternity, has helped me to understand the radical significance of the double nothing motif.

[8] Section "Segundo ANTÓNIO VIEIRA"

In Dryden´s *Don Sebastian,* Sebastian not only represents a King who goes into hiding on account of discovering his double, but also, a King who represents the immortality of authorship on account of its readership, suggesting this same dynamic between the ultimate creator and redeemer of humanity and His subjects. Most importantly, it portrays a King who goes into hiding willfully, that is, who miraculously survives forever on account of his willful hiddenness.

Undeniably, there are relevant parallels to be drawn between Don Sebastian´s willful disappearance and Shakespeare´s poetics of parting into nothing, and it would not be going too far to speculate that Dryden´s Sebastianism is rooted in his interpretation of Shakespeare's poetics.

Indeed, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, preoccupied as they are with procreation, could have been written for the young Don Sebastian himself. Like Adonis, the historical Don Sebastian refused to give himself up to romantic love or to the necessity to procreate. Dryden's *Don Sebastian* may be viewed as a kind of paraphrasing of Shakespeare's *Sonnets,* intended to address Shakespeare's poetics of nothing, blackness, and the idea of an authorial counterpart. Certainly, they help us identify Shakespeare's muse in the sonnets along aesthetic lines.

Based on the legend that Don Sebastian survived the historical Battle of Alcazar (1578), alternatively known as the Battle of Three Kings, Dryden´s play imagines Don Sebastian awaiting punishment in a Moroccan prison where a renegade Portuguese nobleman named Dorax is ordered to execute him. In prison, Sebastian falls in love with an African Princess named Almeyda. They secretly elope before discovering that their union is incestuous. In the end, Sebastian's execution is stayed and the loving couple willfully part ways upon realizing their incestuous relationship.

Let us keep in mind that while on the one hand, parting can mean dying, it can also mean deliberate fragmentation or dispersion with the aim of ultimate redemption, reunion or rebirth. To part willfully with what appears to be one's core personhood, can only be classified as an act of insanity. And yet, at least on a purely aesthetic level, there is a definitive logic behind such an act. We find this analogy drawn out in *King Lear* where Lear deliberately wills his own nothing. If we think about this subject a little deeper we realize that every tragic hero in Shakespeare wills his own nothing. In more general terms, the will to nothing is another way of talking about the tragic flaw that precipitates a tragic hero's downfall. The manner in which

Lear reacts to his youngest daughter´s refusal to praise him not only puts Shakespeare's aesthetic code into full view but also shows us the redemptive side to this negation – which is to say, its doubling. As mentioned earlier, Lear responds to Cordelia by saying: "nothing will come from nothing"! and later, to the Fool, that "nothing can be made of nothing", addressing the very question of the value of nothing with more nothing!

In Dryden´s *Don Sebastian*, Sebastian and his double, his counterpart, simultaneously evoke Shakespeare's preoccupation with nothing, parting, and the idea of nothing from nothing.

The idea that Sebastian´s hidden kingship can be connected to the immortality of poetry is first suggested in Dryden's play when the Renegade Dorax, after recognizing Sebastian and Almeyda´s incestuous marriage, and discovering Sebastian contemplating taking his own life, exclaims, without malice:

> Dorax.
> Yes ; you must do more ; you must be damned ;
> You must be damned to all eternity ;
> And sure self-murder is the readiest way. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 175)

In the ordinary world of nature governed by time, living beings procreate in their own likeness; in art, on the other hand, it is by willing their own nothing that things grow. In *Don Sebastian*, the misunderstood idea of nothing´s generational capacity by ordinary Christians is contrasted with its use by poets, when the character Mustapha remarks:

> These Christians are mere bunglers;
> they procreate nothing but out of their own wives,
> and these have all the looks of eldest sons. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 95)

In the way an author creates through nothing, becomes nothing, dips his hand into nothing, seeks authorial blackness, absence, silence – the secrets of negative theology become the fruits of negative capability. As the captured Portuguese prisoners of war await their sentence, they´re asked to draw a colored ball from an urn to determine who will live and who will die.

> Muley-Moluch. Into an urn, three only black be there,
> The rest. All white, are safe. (Dryden *apud* Seton 1877, 97)

The prisoners´ identities remain unknown to all but the renegade Dorax. Sebastian draws a black ball.

> Dorax. O he has drawn a black; and smiles upon´t,
> As who should say, my faith and soul are white,
> Though my lot swarthy… (Dryden *apud* Seton 1877, 98)

In this passage, Dorax paraphrases the *Song of Songs* 1:5 ("I am black but beautiful") as Shakespeare himself does repeatedly throughout his plays and sonnets.[9]

Imprisoned along with Sebastian is a high-ranking officer of the Portuguese army named Don Antonia, who, still referring to the black ball chosen by Sebastian, continues the conceit:

> Don Antonia. There´s hopes in rubbing
> To wash this Ethiop white. (Dryden *apud* Seton 1877, 98)

Meanwhile, Sebastian's Moorish captors observe his reaction to his black fate with astonishment.

> Muley-Moluch. He looks secure upon death, superior greatness…
> I saw him, as he terms himself, a sun
> Struggling in dark eclipse, and shooting day
> On either side of the black orb that veiled him… (Dryden apud Seton 1877, 99)

The dark eclipse is both the hidden king and the hidden author. Recalling Shakespeare's Sonnet 131 where he writes: "In nothing art thou black" the poet, shrouding himself in aesthetic blackness becomes nothing. Authorial blackness is unmistakably aligned with authorial nothingness in both poets. For Sebastian, as paradoxically as it sounds, his will and desire is to bequeath the inheritance of loss and nothing, to his country and people — more importantly, to bequeath the idea that nothing comes from nothing, that nothing and silence, blackness and banishment, loss and imprisonment, are the beginnings of creation and freedom, and hence the leadup to a future rebirth, vision and art.

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[9] The "black but beautiful" conceit appears most explicitly in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, *Loves Labors Lost, The Merchant of Venice, Antony and Cleopatra,* and in *King Henry VI Part 1.* In the *Song of Songs* the speaker declares "I am black but beautiful, O yea daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon" (*King James Bible*).

In a revealing conversation with Sebastian about his black half-sister Almeyda whom he unknowingly falls in love with while awaiting execution, the renegade Dorax accuses Sebastian of an unexpected crime.

> Dorax. And therefore 'twas to gall thee that I named him.
> That thing, that nothing, but a cringe and smile,
> That woman, but more daubed; or if a man,
> Corrupted to a woman: thy man mistress. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 172)

What is going on here? Who is Sebastian´s man-mistress, his authorial counterpart? The passage recalls Shakespeare's sonnet 20:

> A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
> Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;
> A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
> With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;
> An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
> Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
> A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
> Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
> And for a woman wert thou first created,
> Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
> And by addition me of thee defeated
> By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
> But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
> Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

Without a doubt, Shakespeare´s "master-mistress" refers to his aesthetic-erotic "Tenth Muse" as the will to nothing. The evidence for this is in the line "By adding *one* thing to my purpose *nothing*". What needs to be kept in mind when doing this kind of math is that for Shakespeare one refers to will.[10] For both poets these ideas are being played out in their work very purposefully with the intention of bringing attention to the value of nothing.

Let us return for a moment to Dryden´s Preface to his play where he writes:

[10] As mentioned earlier, Shakespeare very clearly associates will with one, for example in Sonnets 135 and 136 where Shakespeare writes: "Think all but one, and me in that one Will" (135) and "Ay, fill it full of wills, and my will one" (136). Nothing or none, meanwhile, is everywhere associated with it´s female counterpart.

> This is not a Play that was huddled up in hast; and to shew it was not, I will own, that beside the general Moral of it, which is given in the four last lines, there is also another Moral, couch'd under every one of the principal Parts and Characters, which a judicious Critick will observe, though I point not to it in this Preface. And there may be also some secret Beauties in the decorum of parts, and uniformity of design, which my puny judges will not easily find out…
> (Dryden, Preface. *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal* …)

The "fatal mystery" Dryden alludes to as "another Moral, couch'd under every one of the principal Parts" and the hard to detect "secret Beauties in the decorum of parts", are directly connected to Shakespeare's poetics of parting as the will to nothing. Shakespeare´s poetics of parting can be understood as "love´s loving parts" (Sonnet 31) in the sense that it involves doubling and the paradoxical aesthetic-erotic relationship that goes into artistic creation.

In a speech from the final scene of the play, the prophet-like Don Alvarez, an elder Portuguese statesmen known to Sebastian through his late father, mentions both the King and a Phoenix, recalling Shakespeare's fatally conjoined Phoenix and Turtle.[11]

> Don Alvarez.
> Show me that king, and I'll believe the phoenix;
> But knock at your own breast, and ask your soul
> If those fair fatal eyes edged not your sword
> More than your father's charge, and all your vows?
> If so, and so your silence grants it is.
> Know, king, your father had, like you, a soul…
> Take heed, and *double not* your father's crimes,
> To his adultery do not add your incest.
> Know, she's the product of unlawful love,
> And 'tis your carnal sister you would wed. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 185)

After having heard Almeyda´s immense consternation and disbelief at the unexpected revelation of her incestuous marriage, Don Alvarez responds "*Double not* your father´s crimes", intimating the doubling of nothing, which, while seemingly ending badly, is, as we have seen in Shakespeare, the very catalyst and father to art itself! Sebastian´s response to Alvarez´s "Double not your father´s crimes!", demonstrates his unwavering trust in nothing and the doubling of nothing, by repeating it and crediting it:

[11] "The Phoenix and the Turtle" (1601).

Sebastion. No; all may still be forged and of a piece.
No; I can credit nothing thou canst say. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 186)

The moment of truth takes place when the soothsaying Don Alverez reveals the fatal mystery to all:

Don Alvarez. Mark me now.
While I disclose that fatal mystery.
Those rings, when you were born and thought another's,
Your parents, glowing yet in sinful love.
Bid me bespeak: *a curious artist wrought them*,
With joints so close, as not to be perceived;
Yet are they both *each other's counterpart*.
…But if they join, you must *for ever part*. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 188)

In this speech, not only is Don Sebastian´s counterpart revealed, but also, the very idea that to join with one´s counterpart requires perpetual parting**.** Suddenly, from an aesthetic standpoint, parting becomes imperative, willful, involving both life everlasting, and a double death.

Sebastion. Speak'st thou of love, of fortune, or of death.
Or double death? for we must part, Almeyda. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 193)

For her part, Almeyda explains the significance of parting like this:

Sure when we part…
(Though you proposed it first), however distant.
We shall be ever thinking of each other;…
I will not Speak, but think a thousand, thousand;
And be thou silent too, my last Sebastian:
So let us part in the dumb pomp of grief. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 196)

In this final mentioning of the word "part" in the play, the focus is on silence. Silence as an aesthetic idea, as the act of reading. The immortal part is the reader´s part. Sebastian´s counterparts are his subjects. It is significant that they "are few" and that they, too, will partake of Sebastian´s exile.

Dorax. Your subjects, conscious of your life, are few;
But all desirous to partake your exile.

> And to do office to your sacred person.
> The rest, who think you dead, shall be dismissed
> Under safe convoy, till they reach your fleet. (Dryden *apud* Seton, 1877, 195)

On one level, the poet´s exile may be described as the artistic creations he leaves behind after his death. In this sense, Sebastian's subjects are the poet´s future readers, and in a broader sense, may be referred to as the subjects of art itself – insofar as there is a counterpart of art which allows it to live by overcoming time. These subjects partake of the King´s exile and immortality.

Messianic ideas have to do with death and rebirth, the future coming or returning of a messiah, or the disintegration, fragmentation, union and reunion of the one – and it should be noted, that all such ideas, as they verge of cosmogony and myths of origins, can be applied to aesthetics. Sebastianism is not different in this regard, as the hidden king may be thought of as forever returning to his people the way an author forever returns to his reader.

The hidden king is the hidden author, the king who draws a black lot marking his death, is the author shrouding himself in aesthetic blackness.

The counterpart of art is the opposite of what it means to part.

The opposite of parting, of dying, of disappearing — is uniting, living, reappearing.

The opposite of bondage and blindness is freedom and insight.

The role of art is to serve the counter-part insofar as it makes appear what's hidden, present what´s absent, and thus, to create the possibility of freedom through art by willfully affirming, inheriting and bequeathing the self-generating power of nothing.

In Sonnet 8, not unlike his arguments throughout the first 17 "procreation sonnets", Shakespeare insists that the one to whom his *Sonnets* are addressed ought to divide himself up into parts and that to refuse parturition is suicide, a fruitlessness referred to as "prove(ing) none".

Love itself requires division! Not only must one multiply, but in order to multiply, one must become nothing.

Figure 6. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

Later in Sonnet 136, Shakespeare writes "Among a number *one* is reckoned *none*", the ostensible meaning of which is that one will undoubtably come to nothing if one does not multiply. The irony of this statement is that Shakespeare is also suggesting that the multiplication of one must be brought about through nothing; in short, that nothing represents the feminine principle which gives birth to infinite expansion through its union with will or one.

Self-love is portrayed throughout the *Sonnets* as narcissistic folly. A similar theme is accentuated in Shakespeare's narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* (1593) where the goddess of love spends her time trying to convince Adonis to give in to her advances. Recall for example, Venus' lines:

> If springing things be any jot diminish'd,
> They wither in their prime, prove nothing worth:
> (417-418)

Later, at the climax of the poem, death and immortality meet. In effect, Venus doubles Adonis.

All of Shakespeare's poetry is concerned with love. Often it begins with this paradox of self-love and presents a solution through active creation and destruction. The writer of the *Sonnets* is clearly pivoting to address his reader in the same way that Venus addresses Adonis in Shakespeare's poem, and, like Adonis, the reader too will eventually be doubled, calling attention to the duplicitous identity of lover and beloved, author and reader.

The world expects us to share ourselves. According to Shakespeare's logic, this is not only something the world desires, but our own best course of action. In short, the best kind of self-love bears fruit. The answer to the charge of narcissism is poetic fragmentation of the self: "To live a second life on second head" (Sonnet 68).

In his *Sonnets*, Shakespeare boldly initiates the metaphysics of authorial multiplicity, urging his reader to do the same: in short, to multiply *ad infinitum*. Despite his entreaties, still green with tender youth, the person Shakespeare appears to be writing to resists transformation, ignores the passage of time, lacking urgency or will, remaining one and undivided.

In direct connection to this theme, we must consider Shakespeare's adaptation of the classical myth of Adonis. Shakespeare represents Adonis as a shepherd boy who refuses to share himself, who refuses Love. Venus' entreaties to Adonis recall the first 17 procreation sonnets in which Shakespeare pleads with his reader to resist this same narcissistic enchantment. In *Venus and Adonis*, Adonis claims that he doesn't know himself: "Before I know myself seek not to know me" (525). He's not interested in increase. His desire is to remain undivided. Adonis represents the aesthetic idea of indivisible oneness. And yet, despite his will to oneness, Adonis, in fearless pursuit of the wild boar, wills his own demise, his own nothing:

> 'I know not love,' quoth he, 'nor will not know it,
> Unless it be a boar, and then I chase it.
> 'Tis much to borrow, and I will not owe it.
> My love to love, is love but to disgrace it,
> For I have heard it is a life in death,
> That laughs and weeps, and all but with a breath. (409-414)

Adonis finds new life in death. Venus, meanwhile, like the poet in the *Sonnets*, tirelessly advocates surrender to love and willed division as the only choice:

> Ten kisses short as one, one long as twenty…

Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left?
Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected:
Steal thine own freedom, and complain on theft.
Narcissus so himself himself forsook (158-162)

Adonis rejects everything about Venus' desire for multiplicity:

I hate not love, but your device in love,
That lends embracements unto every stranger.
You do it for increase? O strange excuse,
When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse. (789-792)

From the point of view of the poet or artist, to become multiple one must desire union with nothing. The self-negating love of nothing expresses the authorial desire for the infinite multiplicity of possible identifications, the triumph of not being oneself.

The Love of the One for the Many and the Many for the One

The philosophical problem of the *one* and the *many* that has occupied philosophers since Parmenides is relevant to our discussion of the metaphysical foundations of authorship: most specifically, in respect to the role of love, self-love, and the love of the other, as processes of (authorial) creation. In other words, the problem of the *one* and the *many* is not only a philosophical problem but an aesthetic one. Nowhere is this clearer than in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, where the poet is concerned with creating living offspring as opposed to remaining single. When Plato first took up the discussion of the *one* and the *many* in his *Parmenides*, it led to paradoxical conclusions, such as that if the *one* were said to exist at all, it must be recognized to be both older and younger than itself at the same time. Coming to Parmenides' defence, Zeno of Elea proposed the thesis that so long as the *one* can be infinitely divided, it cannot be divided at all. Both hypotheses are valid and insightful. For Shakespeare, the paradox of the one and the many is overcome through nothing, which is to say: by fusing multiplicity and unity simultaneously, projecting a vision of the one through the many and the many through the one. The simultaneous love of the one for the many and the many for the one describes the artistic act, as well as the act of reading. In both cases, the author and reader become nothing in order to become multiple.

The context of Plato's argument in his *Parmenides* is a situation in which Parmenides wants to challenge the notion of an origin from nothing. The Pythagorean philosophers had

erected their world view on this premise. According to Francis Cornford in his monumental *Plato and Parmenides* (1939) "Parmenides challenges and rejects every step in the Pythagorean process of cosmogony. His sphere of Being is not the outcome of any process: 'it never was nor will be, but is now all at once'" (Cornford, 1939, 51). Parmenides posits his idea of an immovable One as a "bare unity which excludes all plurality and is not a whole of parts. The consequences deduced are purely negative: nothing whatever can be truly asserted of such a One" (Cornford, 1939, 107). "What *is* cannot become, what is *one* cannot be many" (Cornford, 1939, 52) since "If things are many they will be infinite in number" (Cornford, 1939, 57). Noticeably, the corollary to the premise that the *one* is *many* is already alluded to in this first of Parmenides' Hypothesis, which is to say, it is impossible. With respect to this first Hypothesis, the One in which there is no extension "cannot be, or become, older or younger than, or of the same age as, itself or another, or be in time at all" (Plato *apud* Cornford, 1939, 127).

In his second Hypothesis, Parmenides discusses the possibility of a One "which, besides having unity, has being, and is a whole of parts" (Cornford, 1939, 107). Only when extension and time are admitted do these extraordinary qualities follow. For Shakespeare, it is rather the absurdity of the first hypothesis that becomes a reality. In short, the One exists and is both younger and older than itself simultaneously.

Love´s Loving Parts

In Sonnet 23 we find a reference to the playing of theatrical parts by an "unperfect actor" put "beside his part":

> As an unperfect actor on the stage,
> Who with his fear is put beside his part,
> Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
> Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;
> So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
> The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
> And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
> O'ercharged with burthen of mine own love's might.
> O let my books be then the eloquence
> And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
> Who plead for love and look for recompense,

More than that tongue that more hath more expressed:
O, learn to read what silent love hath writ!
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

The impossibility of playing one's own part shows how the kind of authorial self-love the poet has in mind implies the infinite multiplication of authorial parts. Meanwhile, "To hear with eyes" is how the poet´s love is compensated and reciprocated through the act of silent reading.

But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind:
So will I pray that thou mayst have thy Will,
If thou turn back, and my loud crying still. (Sonnet 143)

Again, in Sonnet 143, the "mother's part" is the reader's part, which gives birth to the author's mysterious ability to multiply through his readership *ad infinitum*. Shakespeare's emphasis on "thy Will" shows how he understands the reader´s role as the counter-part to his own, which is to say, how the reader, in a manner of speaking, becomes the author. In Sonnet 84, again, the author´s part is made whole through his counter-part, the one to whom his fame is entrusted:

But he that writes of you, if he can tell
That you are you, so dignifies his story.
Let him but copy what in you is writ,
Not making worse what nature made so clear,
And such a counterpart shall fame his wit,
Making his style admired everywhere.

The soul of the poet lies in the heart of his reader: "That is my home of love; if I have ranged… For nothing this wide universe I call" (Sonnet 109).

In "The Phoenix and the Turtle" (1601) we once again discover the unfolding mystery of Shakespeare's "Tenth Muse" and the meaning of willful parting. The poem describes the ritual death and rebirth of two birds. In effect, the birds become one by becoming none:

So they loved, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none:

Number there in love was slain. (25-28)
…
Reason in itself confounded,
Saw division grow together,
To themselves yet either neither,
Simple were so well compounded,
That it cried, 'How true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none,
If what parts can so remain.' (41-49)

The last line "If what parts can so remain" suggests a lack of distinction between the two individual birds ("a concordant one"). Like the poet's "better part" who "doth hence remain", the parts that so remain, are the poet´s present and future readers. Thus, the birds symbolize the author's and reader's joint enterprise to overcome time through the perpetual immolation of their loving embrace. In short, when author and reader become one, the text survives and expands.

The phrase "love's loving parts" which appears in Sonnet 31 suggests the masculine and feminine private parts, more specifically, the private parts of poetry — *will* (1) and *nothing* (0).[12] We might go so far as to say that Will (identified with the male private parts) sets out willingly to impregnate Nothing (the female private parts). Their dialogue and conjunction may be classified as "loving thought".

For bending all my loving thoughts on thee,
The injuries that to myself I do,
Doing thee vantage, double-vantage me.

[12] Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
Which I by lacking have supposed dead;
And there reigns Love, and all *Love's loving parts*,
And all those friends which I thought buried.
How many a holy and obsequious tear
Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye,
As interest of the dead, which now appear
But things removed that hidden in thee lie!
Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
Who all their parts of me to thee did give,
That due of many now is thine alone:
Their images I loved, I view in thee,
And thou (all they) hast all the all of me.

Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
That, for thy right, myself will bear all wrong. (Sonnet 88)

The erotic-aesthetic union of will and nothing is not only related to the poet´s narcissistic obsession, but most importantly with the subject of his poetry itself, his muse. Curiously, his muse is also his double. To be clear, Shakespeare´s Tenth Muse has to do with procreation, and hence with the recreation of nothing from nothing. As noted earlier, there are several indications that Shakespeare has these ends in view in his *Sonnets* where not only is the word "Muse" brought up 10 times, but the idea of ten itself is emphasised on many levels with respect to the idea of expansion.

In *A Midsummer Night´s Dream*, a passage where Helena recalls her friend Hermia, brings to mind "The Phoenix and the Turtle":

Helena. For parting us, — O, is it all forgot?
All schooldays' friendship, childhood innocence?
We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,
Had been incorporate. So we grow together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition; (3.2)

Helena´s speech alludes to the poetics of authorial parting. Not only is there a reference to "a double" but also to the double part played by the reader/author pair who in "seeming parted" are in fact perfectly united to one another in the act of reading.[13]

Dryden´s *Don Sebastian*, specifically his character of Don Sebastian, is very much akin to Shakespeare's aesthetics of the Tenth Muse as the will to nothing, especially in connection to the idea of parting. We found this idea of parting dramatically illustrated in *King Lear*, where Lear deliberately gives away all of his "propinquity and care" to his daughters, leaving himself with nothing. In short, he wills his own nothing. Notably, it is the way he reacts to his youngest

[13] A little further on Hermia picks up her friend's conceit:
Hermia. Methinks I see these things with parted eye,
When every thing seems double. (4.1)

daughter´s refusal to praise him ("nothing will come from nothing") which causes the ensuing scandal.

Read in this light, Lear´s quest is not merely to hear his daughters speak of their inflated love for him, but the author´s quest to multiply himself *ad infinitum*. It is a willful aesthetic act aimed at negative self-realization, what we might call the poet´s tragic vision. Most specifically, it highlights the connection between aesthetic nothing, aesthetic silence, aesthetic absence, aesthetic blackness and aesthetic love. "Cordelia. [aside] What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent." (1.1)

Figure 7. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Cordelia´s Double (Dullier Correia).

To draw out this association in my film *Nothing From Nothing*, Cordelia´s Double recites multiple excerpts on these themes from Shakespeare, Pessoa and Dryden. Moreover, she calls attentions to the indistinguishability between one and will. She appears both in scenes back-to-back with First Cordelia as well as on her own between scenes, in the midst of scenes, and at the beginning of the play.

Nothing From Nothing

Before Lear asks his daughters to proclaim their love for him, he boldly announces: "We have this hour a constant *will* to publish our daughter's dowers…" (1.1). The reference to publishing his *will* puts King Lear´s authorial identity into view at the beginning of the first scene and connects it with both oneness and kingship. His self-destructive impulse is blatant,

willful and premeditated. Lear's "*will* to nothing" is the consumption of Shakespeare´s "Tenth Muse" conceit announced in Sonnet 38 with which I begin the film. Lear´s authorial will to nothing not only gives birth to the play and its multiplicity of parts, but also highlights the ultimate aim of poetry — infinite expansion. To be clear, Lear´s willful descent into nothing initiates the idea of the immortalization of poetry through infinite expansion.

Let us take a closer look at the Fool´s question about the value of nothing. It begins with a speech spoken by the Fool in which he shows off his wit and wisdom:

> Fool. Mark it, nuncle:
> Have more than thou showest,
> Speak less than thou knowest,
> Lend less than thou owest,
> Ride more than thou goest,
> Learn more than thou trowest,
> Set less than thou throwest;
> Leave thy drink and thy whore,
> And keep in-a-door,
> And thou shalt have more
> Than two tens to a score.
> Earl of Kent. This is nothing, fool.
> Fool. Then 'tis like the breath of an unfeed lawyer –
> you gave me nothing for't.
> Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?
> Lear. Why, no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing.
> Fool. [to Kent] Prithee tell him, so much the rent of his land
> comes to. He will not believe a fool. (1.4)

Ostensibly, Kent's response to the Fool's speech ("This is nothing Fool"), can be taken to mean merely that what the Fool is offering is unoriginal and irreverent. In fact, it´s what the fool does with Kent's response that bears fruit. In short, he takes Kent's "This is nothing" and doubles it, by replying: "Then 'tis like the breath of an unfeed lawyer – you gave me nothing for't." The insignificant nothing that the Fool offers in the form of his moral sermon is substantiated by the repetition of nothing he receives in exchange for it. The lesson is simply this: nothing breeds nothing. When the Fool asks Lear if he has found a use for nothing, it is to see if he has in fact learned this lesson. In response, Lear states unequivocally: "Nothing can

be made out of nothing". Conclusively, he´s learned his lesson. Aesthetic nothing begins by giving oneself away. While for the poet this means something mysteriously positive, for the King, who still believes he possesses some earthy power and identity, it leads to madness.

A significant excerpt from the Fool´s parley with Lear about nothing includes the following reference to the letter "O":

> Fool. Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for
> her frowning. Now *thou art an O without a figure*. I am better
> than thou art now: I am a fool, *thou art nothing*.
> [To Goneril] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue.
> So your face bids me, though *you say nothing*. Mum, mum! (1.4)

The idea accentuated by the Fool in this speech is that nothing can very well be recognized by its inward absence and circular exterior. Clearly, he is also associating nothing with the zero in the number 10. Moreover, it seems to provoke the act of doubling. Despite the Fool declaring that he will "hold his tongue" in response to Goneril´s silence, he concludes his speech with the words "mum" repeated twice, to emphasize nothing´s duplicity.

In a similar way as Odysseus deceives the Cyclops by claiming to be Nobody in Homer´s *Odyssey*, Edgar escapes misfortune in *King Lear* by affirming himself to be nothing:

> Edgar. 'Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!'
> That's something yet! Edgar *I nothing am.* (2.3)

In my adaptation of *King Lear*, this line, like many others where nothing is emphasised and repeated, is spoken by Cordelia's Double. Acting the part that he is not, is the key to Edgar´s survival. It further gives him the ability to guide his blind father and the old maddened King. As we have seen, the will to nothing is the key to negative capability. It describes the beginning of infinite expansion. In the final scene of *Richard II,* at the end of a long soliloquy, the imprisoned King Richard, foreseeing his upcoming death, makes the following admission:

> Thus play I in one person many people,
> And none contented: sometimes am I king;
> Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
> And so I am: then crushing penury
> Persuades me I was better when a king;
> Then am I king'd again: and by and by

Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am *nothing*: but whate'er I be,
Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
With being nothing. (5.5)

Here, again, Shakespeare shows us how in willing his own nothing, Richard wills himself into multiplicity. In effect, Richard personifies Shakespeare's authorial will. The strategy of the imprisoned King is not about overcoming nothing, but rather, simply willing nothing, being content with being nothing, embracing authorial invisibility. To will nothing is to willingly exist both as many and not any.

The Quality of Nothing

To return to *King Lear*, in a scene planned in advance, with the intention to sow the seeds of doubt in his father´s mind and ultimately to trick his brother Edgar out of his inheritance, Gloucester's bastard son Edmund creates a situation which calls attention to the double meaning of nothing by awkwardly hiding a forged letter in his pocket.

Gloucester. What paper were you reading?
Edmund. *Nothing, my lord.*
Earl of Gloucester. No? What needed then that terrible
dispatch of it into your pocket? *The quality of nothing*
hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see. Come, *if*
it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles. (1.2)

Figure 8. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right), Edmund played by Bruno Almeida, Gloucester played by Adrian Lestrange.

In this exchange, the idea that nothing comes from nothing is initiated by Edmund's subterfuge, which is to say, by his duplicitous language. When asked what he is reading, Edmund answers truthfully. In fact, he is trying to impose the idea that his nothing is something important, something that cannot and should not be forgotten about or taken for granted. Edmund himself has been treated, as nothing by his own father. In the first scene of the play, with Edmund beside him, his father remarks to Kent: "He has been out nine years and will away again". In effect, he is treated as if his absence were his ultimate essence and value.

By fusing extracts from Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1608), *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609), John Dryden´s *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal* (1689), Fernando Pessoa´s *Mensagem* (1934), and passages from *Orpheu Literary Quarterly Volumes 1 & 2* my film emphasises the connection between Shakespeare´s Tenth Muse as the Will to Nothing, and the fate of Don Sebastian, King of Portugal, while creating a theoretical foundation for my ongoing artistic practice, and the groundwork for a future project on Sebastian himself.

Figure 9. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring Cordelia played by Sara Marreiros and Cordelia's Double played by Dullier Correia.

The way I´ve tried to fuse these ideas together in my film is threefold. First, I´ve included an extra character in the script, Cordelia´s Double. She not only appears in several scenes alongside the first Cordelia in Act 1, but also reads several of Shakespeare's sonnets, excerpts from Dryden´s *Don Sebastian*, selections from the poetry of Fernando Pessoa and other poets from my translation of the *Orpheu Literary Quarterly*, and repeats certain lines from King Lear, accentuating the theme of nothing.

Secondly, I´ve highlighted the theme of duplicity, presence and absence, and nothing from nothing, by presenting characters alongside their shadows. This dramatic emphasis on shadows is not something the audience will be able to ignore.

Thirdly, I´ve left an exceptionally large amount of space for silence, using sound effects infrequently and with purpose.

Figure 10. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right) Maria Neves as Regan. Dullier Correia as Cordelia´s Double, Jonathan Weightman as King Lear, and João Silva Jordão as The Fool.

Figure 11. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right) David Bernardino as Cornwall, Maria Neves as Regan, Beatriz Barbosa as Goneril, Adrian Lestrange as Gloucester.

Figure. 12. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right) Bartholomew Ryan as King of France, Sara Marreiros as Cordelia, Jonathan Weightman as King Lear.

Finally, I´ve added transitions and music to the film to increase its focus and intensity, including a castle shrouded in fog, a full moon surrounded by darkness, processions of characters casting intense shadows on the walls as they walk, led by the trumpet playing Fool, and an invented alphabet capturing silhouettes of the characters featured in the play. I´ve prepared the film in such a way that it can be experienced as a live installation of 10 unequal-in-length projected videos, as well as a full-length feature film. For this installation, only one video (containing the entire film) will be fully audible to the public, subtitles will be added to the others, and earphones provided. *The Seafarer by Fernando Pessoa* (51 minutes) will be available on a second screen with subtitles and headphone sets. A third screen will feature Cordelia´s Double and the Fool (alone and in the contexts of their scenes with Lear (90 minutes). A fourth screen will feature King Lear, his interactions and speeches (120 minutes). On the fifth screen Kent and Oswald, on the sixth screen the two sisters Goneril and Regan, and the speeches of Cornwall and Albany. On the seventh screen Edgar and Edmund and Gloucester. On the eighth screen: processions, transitions, trumpet calls, assemblages of the invented alphabet; on the tenth screen Cordelia and Lear, the King of France and Burgundy.

With ten projections looping at different intervals over the course of the live event, the juxtaposition of scenes will constantly vary, accentuating the uniqueness of the experience.

Figure 13. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. “Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.” (Shakespeare, *King Lear*,1.1) Featuring (from left to right) Jonathan Weightman as King Lear, Barbosa as Goneril, Maria Neves as Regan, and Sara Marreiros as Cordelia.

Figure 14. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025) film still. “Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?” (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1.4) Featuring (from left to right) João Silva Jordão as the Fool, Jonathan Weightman as King Lear and Mick Greer as Kent.

Figure 15. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring Beatriz Barbosa as Goneril, and Maria Neves as Regan.

Figure 16. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring João Silva Jordão as *The Fool.*

Figure 17. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right) Jonathan Weightman as King Lear, João Silva Jordão as The Fool, João Simoes as Edgar, Adrian Lestrange as Gloucester, Mick Greer as Kent.

Figure 18. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring João Silva Jordão as The Fool and Jonathan Weightman as King Lear.

Figure 19. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right) Mick Greer as Kent, Adrian Lestrange as Gloucester, Bruno Almeida as Edmund.

Figure 20. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring (from left to right) Bruno Almeida as Edmund and David Bernardino as Cornwall.

Figure 21. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring Bruno Almeida as Edmund.

Figure 22. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring Featuring (from left to right) Jonathan Weightman as King Lear, and Sara Marreiros as Cordelia.

Figure 23. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

Figure 24. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

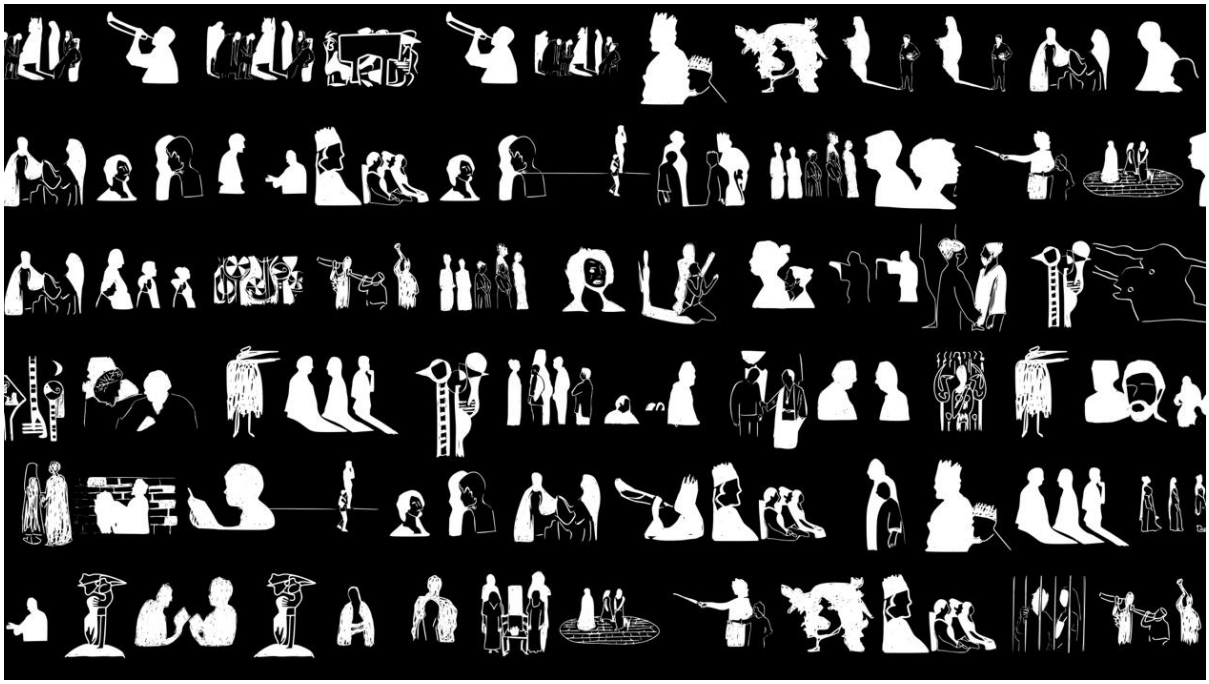

Figure 25. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

Figure 26. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

Figure 27. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still. Featuring Adrian Lestrange as Gloucester.

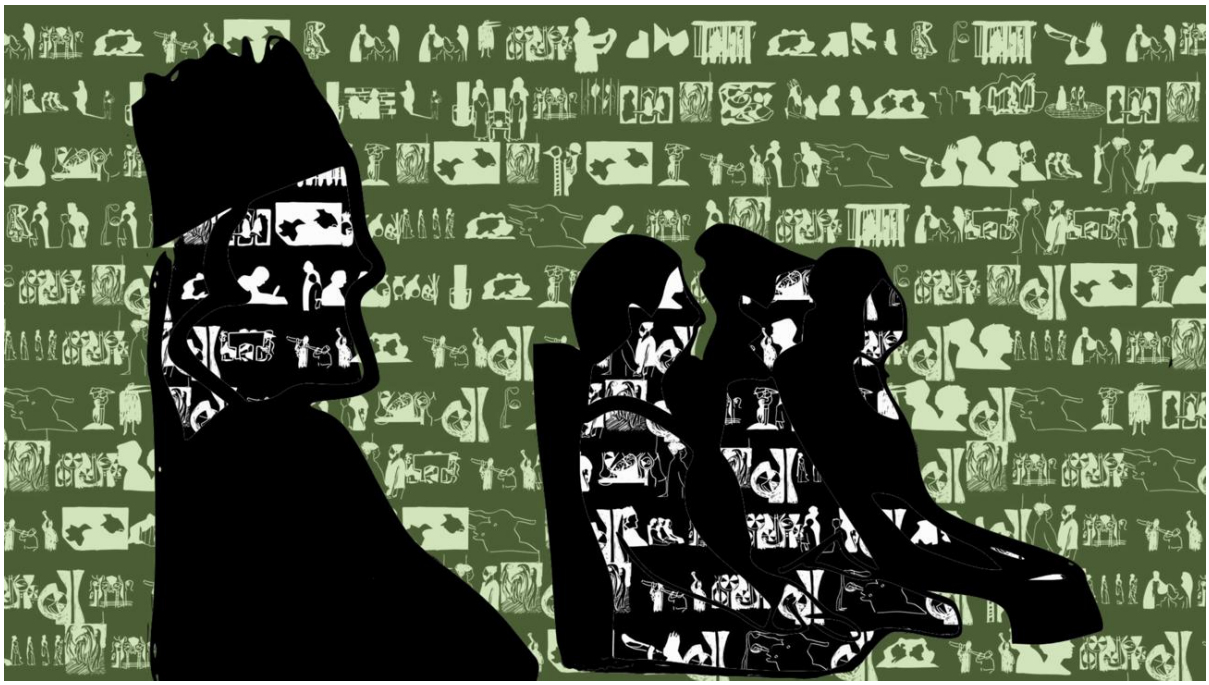

Figure 28. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

Figure 29. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

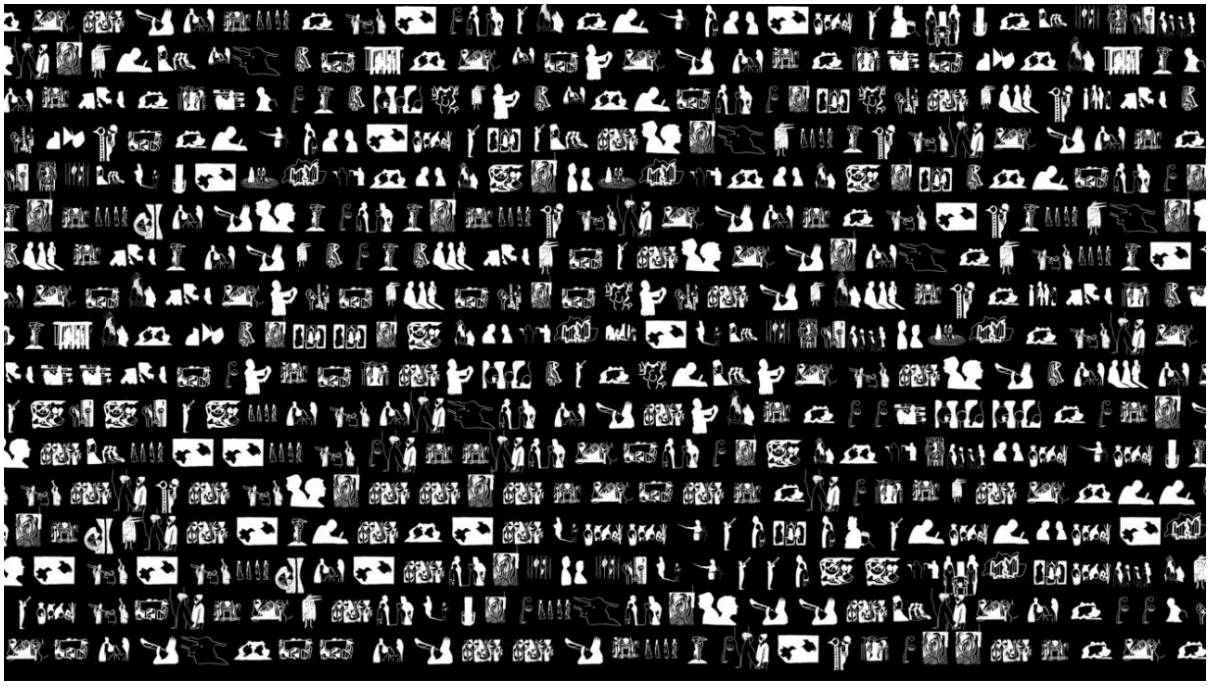

Figure 30. *Nothing From Nothing* (2024/2025), film still.

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