

Essays on Paula Rego

Smile When You Think about Hell



MARIA MANUEL LISBOA

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ESSAYS ON PAULA REGO

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Maria Manuel Lisboa



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In memory of Chris Dobson,
distinguished scientist, knight of the
realm and much-loved friend. He was
the man whom, as Head of House of my
college, St. John's College, Cambridge,
a malign fate forced me, a card-carrying
feminist, to address as 'Master'.
Sometimes.

To my two grandmothers: Belmira
Gabão and Adelina Lisboa. And to my
two lovely mothers-in-law: Winifred
Brick and Anne Woolf (Mrs. OGRE). A
grandmother is a mother twofold and a
good mother-in-law is a gift that keeps
on giving.

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Life has thrown at me my fair share of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but in my Sea of troubles they have always been there: the lovely friends and relatives who have taken up arms on my behalf, kept me safe and made the difference in the choice between to be or not to be.

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This volume gathers together both my published and unpublished work on Paula Rego. The bulk of it, 'A Map of Memory', is composed of *Paula Rego's Map of Memory: National and Sexual Politics*, my monograph previously published by Ashgate but now out of print. A shorter version of chapter 5, 'Brave New Worlds: The Birthing of Nations in *First Mass in Brazil*' was published previously in Portuguese in Brazil as 'Admirável Mundo Novo? A Primeira Missa no Brasil de Paula Rego' in João César de Castro Rocha (ed.), *Nenhum Brasil existe: pequena enciclopédia* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks Editora, 2003), pp. 73–91. Chapter 7, 'Paula and the Madonna: Who's That Girl?' was first published in Ann Davies, Parvathi Kumaraswami and Claire Williams (eds.), *Making Waves*

Anniversary Volume: Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 185–201. Chapter 6, 'I Am Coming to Your Kingdom, Prince Horrendous: Scary Stories for Baby, Perfect Stranger and Me' is an entirely new essay. I am grateful to the original publishers and editors of the essays published previously for permission to reproduce modified, extended and translated versions of the works.

Images are numbered following the principle of giving chapter number and image number separated by a full stop. Thus the fourth image in chapter 1 is 1.4. For these purposes the Prologue is noted as chapter 0 and the Epilogue as chapter 8.

All translations from Portuguese literary works, including poetry, critical texts and interviews are my own.

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A Note on Images

The bulk of the images in *Essays on Paula Rego: Smile When You Think about Hell* are reproduced in the book, and referred to in the normal way as figures (fig.). However, there are a small number of images that could not be reproduced in the text, but which can be found online. In order that the reader has access to these images in some form, we have provided links to their location online and we refer to these linked images as e-figures (e-fig.). For clarity of reference, the e-figures are numbered separately in the text and listed separately at the end of the book.

In projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women [artists] are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan M. Gubar

'No sight so sad as that of a naughty child', he began, 'especially a naughty little girl. Do you know where the wicked go after death?' 'They go to hell', was my ready and orthodox answer. 'And what is hell? Can you tell me that?' 'A pit full of fire'. 'And should you like to fall into that pit, and to be burning there for ever?' 'No, sir'. 'What must you do to avoid it?' I deliberated a moment: my answer, when it did come was objectionable: 'I must keep in good health and not die'.

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

She looked mournful as she always did though she smiled when she talked about hell. Everyone went to hell, she told me, you had to belong to her sect to be saved and even then — just as well not to be too sure.

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Ella (writes home) — Dear all. Having a wonderful time. Yesterday we learned how to die.

Polly Teale, *After Mrs. Rochester*

Prologue: A Patriot for Me

Patriotism is not enough.

Edith Cavell

Is there another plot?

Virginia Woolf

Always historicize!

Frederic Jameson

*It dawned on me that here were people who had spent their lives re-connecting
pictures to the worlds from which they came.*

R. B. Kitaj

Pre-Figuring the Motherland

This is a book about love. It is about ‘doing harm to those one loves.’¹ Under patriarchy it is probably true that gender power and privilege come with a price tag, namely the possibility that a significant proportion of men must be married to women who do not love them. ‘Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want’ (Austen, 1985, 163). In *Pride and Prejudice*, the much-quoted words of Charlotte Lucas give accurate expression to a wider situation with implications for supposed true-love matches not only in the novel — Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, Jane and Mr. Bingley — but far beyond its boundaries. If women

1 Paula Rego, quoted in McEwen (1997, 138).

depend upon their men for social significance, status, visibility and even subsistence, it follows that, on the part of the woman, the imperatives of need (to be financially kept) and want (love, desire) become at best impossible to disentangle, while at worst the latter acts as a thin euphemism for the former. Angela Carter put it pithily, if brutally: 'the marriage bed is a particularly delusive refuge from the world because all wives of necessity fuck by contract' (Carter, 1987, 9). Contracts of employment, on the whole, do not specify the requirement of loving one's boss. And what happens, furthermore, when even the simulacrum of love breaks down, and the subaltern rebels? The turning of the worm is another definition of revolution, and it is partly the subject of the essays that follow. This is a book about love. It is also about reversals in love, with all the multiplicity of meanings that such an expression entails.

In the words of one of her exegetes, Paula Rego enters the Great Tradition of art by the back door, and once there lays down repeated visual statements concerning a binary world whose territorial lines are demarcated by the battle of the sexes (Rosengarten, 1999a, 6). In this pictorial universe, whose referent is realpolitik patriarchy, sexual politics set the agenda. The Catholic philosopher Jean Guitton stated, with some recklessness, that 'the soul of woman is not concerned with history' (Guitton, 1951, 221): 'the truth is that woman is more near to the human than man, so easily estranged from what is human. [...] One of the missions of woman, after that of generation, is to reconcile man to man and to disappear. She does not herself perform those deeds which transform history, but she is the hidden foundation for them' (Guitton, 1951, 228). This view, belied by the intensity with which Roman Catholicism has deemed it necessary to deny the female historical role from Eve onwards, neglects also a vast world of experience that historiography has only recently begun to uncover. If a woman's home is her castle, in one form or another 'history has intruded upon the household and disrupted its traditional order' (Armstrong, 1996, 157), but the reverse also applies. The family as cornerstone of the social fabric has itself the power to change from homely to that *unheimlich* (unhomely, uncanny) in which Freud detected the potential for psychic — and arguably political — anarchy (Freud, 1919, 335–76). Working from the standpoint of the 'counterhistorian' — which, as will be argued, is the

position reproduced in a visual medium by Paula Rego — Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt write as follows:

To mainstream historians, gender relations had appeared too stable and universal for historical analysis. [...] The feminist historian denied its naturalness by subjecting it to historical analysis [...] to show that gender relations, despite the endurance of male domination, only appear to stand outside of the historical processes. [...] Feminist counterhistorians raised a metahistorical question: What was it that made phenomena ‘historical,’ and why did so much ‘culture’ fail to qualify? (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000, 59)

In the work of Paula Rego, as her observers have often remarked, and as the well-known feminist aphorism would have it, the personal always becomes political: ‘public and private are not separate but interjective’ (Lowder Newton, 1989, 156). More unusually, however, as will be argued over the course of these essays, the political is translated back into the immediately accessible vocabulary of the personal: history is paraphrased in images drawn from domestic life, and national politics find expression through the familiar lexicon of interpersonal relations. The thoroughfare between the personal and the political, therefore, becomes a two-way system, in the context of which one term is easily exchanged for the other and back again. In an otherwise unflattering review of Rego’s *The Sin of Father Amaro* series of 1998, discussed in chapter 3, Tom Lubbock defines Rego’s ‘basic plot’ as ‘an ambivalent one of female survival, cunning, secrets, resistance and revenge, all qualified by a deep emotional investment in subjection and victimhood.’ He went on to write that the narratives that lie behind her pictures ‘are always woman-centred, but I’ve never understood why she’s called a feminist artist. Men may appear in her pictures as passive toys, but there is always an offstage context of invincible male power. Liberation and equality aren’t her business at all.’ (Lubbock, 1998).

Much has been written about the tension, in Paula Rego’s life and work, between external conformity and internal revolt, about the struggle between outward good manners and an inward drive towards an iconoclasm that sometimes borders on the profane (McEwen, 1997, 17, 36). Germaine Greer discerns this struggle in what she terms the ‘effort to present a violent and subversive personal vision in acceptable decorative terms’ (Greer, 1988, 29), and Paula Rego herself,

in conversation with John McEwen, talks about hiding in 'childish guises — or female guises. Little girl, pretty girl, attractive woman,' and the concomitant 'flight into story telling,' or painting 'to fight injustice' (McEwen, 1997, 17). Typically, however, her description of concealment behind infantile masks, whether in life or in art, presents itself as a deliberately transparent smokescreen, designed to let us know that is precisely what it is. She knows that we know she is lying, since seldom in the aesthetic recording of childhood, for example, has any artist in the visual or written arts so repeatedly depicted infancy as uniformly and utterly lacking in innocence, in any shape or form. It has been suggested that her work of the late eighties and beyond is more akin to the early work she did as a student at the Slade School of Art in London in the early fifties than anything she did in between (McEwen, 1997, 52). If so, this return to what might be termed her artistic infancy, her aesthetic beginnings, is surely, in a roundabout way, also the return to the savage, post-lapsarian childhood: namely that phase that Freud accurately described as the very opposite of innocent, rather as immoral, anarchic and incestuous (Freud, 1905, 1916–1917): a place from which Rego tells a series of ugly truths.

According to one of her interviewers, Paula Rego works with the constant awareness that 'our trajectory on Earth is always and irremediably violent' (Marques Gastão, 2001, 59). Paula Rego herself has talked about the preponderance in her work of secrets, lies, hypocrisy, deceit, intrigue and survival, and states unnervingly that 'these things happen all the time' (Kent, 1998, 14): 'I am interested in reproducing violence. [...] I refer to violence in pictures, in photography, not direct violence against people. But when you do violence within a painting, you are not sorry. In painting everything is allowed!' (Rego, quoted in Macedo, 1999, 12). For Agustina Bessa-Luís, in Rego's images usually 'there is a white flag in someone's hand, but bloodbaths are more engrossing' (Rego and Bessa-Luís, 2001, 106). The woman who as a child told her cousin stories so horrific that she herself was too scared to finish them, the painter who has stated that she paints 'to give terror a face' (McEwen, 1997, 40, 72), the artist who in a recent interview claimed that her greatest fear to this day is the dark (Paula Rego, 1997), may paint to exorcise fear, but she also paints with a perverse desire to frighten her viewers. Alberto Lacerda sees Rego as absolutely 'honest in

displaying her innermost world for what it is, good or bad,' laying 'her subconscious bare, [...] naked' (quoted in McEwen, 1997, 76), and Greer argues she 'breathes the dangerous air of the region where [...] painting refuses to grow up and become discreet, self-knowing, genital and self-pleasuring' (Greer, 1988, 29). I would argue that the honesty, the recklessness, the refusal all tend towards the same objective: namely, the destabilization of a series of received expectations and assumptions, whether moral, psychological, political or national.

These expectations and assumptions hinge on definitions of childishness, innocence and purity that she denounces as illusory. She exposes guilt at the heart of surface respectability, and in Marina Warner's words, counts herself 'among the commonplace and the disregarded, by the side of the beast, not the beauty' (Warner, 1994, 8). In doing so, however, she also problematizes straightforward binaries of good and evil, weakness and strength, victimization and oppression. In Victor Willing's words, 'all the time, in Paula's pictorial dramas things are going wrong [but] the accumulating disasters add up to a somehow survival' (Willing, 1983a, 272). For another critic, in the same vein, she startles us by forcing upon us the moment when 'in a compelling domestic world [...] the banal suddenly slips into the peculiar, and our vile bodies become oddly liberating' (Morton, 2001, 107).

Victor Willing also remarked upon the importance of the theme of domination in Rego's work: parental domination of children, state control over individuals, personalities in the thrall of passion, conscience grappled by guilt (Willing, 1997, 34). The outcome is usually violent, and the drive towards this violence is frequently gender- and family-based. This understanding of gender aggression as the propelling force in Rego's pictures offers me a point of entry into a body of work that also clearly gestures towards a political arena far beyond interpersonal psycho-dynamics or sexual politics.

Paula Rego has been, on-and-off, resident in Great Britain since the age of 17,² but in her own understanding she has always been viscerally Portuguese in theme and pictorial feel; nonetheless, the national

2 Rego often represents Britain as well as Portugal in shows worldwide, and she has sometimes been included under the umbrella of the London School. The latter, curiously, also counts among its numbers Raymond Mason (resident in Paris), Bill Jacklin (resident in New York), Frank Auerbach and Lucien Freud (born in Berlin) and R. B. Kitaj (born in the USA).

histories and political controversies of both her country of birth and her adopted country of residence often provide the narratives that inform her work. Rego herself has stated that ‘my paintings have never been about anything else’ (Pinharanda, 1999, 3); ‘I am Portuguese. I live in London, I like living in London, but I am Portuguese’ (Rodrigues da Silva, 1998, 11). But is that really so? ‘Up to a point, Lord Copper.’ Up to a point, Dame Paula.³

Be that as it may, it is clearly beyond dispute that her works have become more visually striking and more literary in the last three decades. But it is also true, however, that although they speak at multiple and diverse levels to audiences outside a Portuguese context, an understanding of certain recurring Portuguese national themes is necessary for any critical interpretation of Rego’s art: without it, any appreciation will be limited. And in considering the vital component of national influence, it is also essential to understand the polemical edge to her work, and the revisionism it imposes upon certain historical and political ‘sacred cows’ of Portugal, past and present. Having said that, it is self-evident that certain salient Portuguese characteristics (gender imbalance, misogyny, imperial history, racism) are not the preserve of Portugal alone, but define other parts of the world too, including Great Britain. In these respects, the world, or at least most of it, is Portuguese: not so much *ich bin ein Berliner* as *somos todos portugueses*.

The Things that Define Us

In pictures such as the early works of the 1960s (figs. 1.1–1.2) the untitled *Girl and Dog* series of the 1980s (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), the family paintings from the same period (figs. 2.1; 2.3–2.5; 2.8–2.11; 2.13; 2.14), *The Sin of Father Amaro* pastels of 1997–98 (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27) and the untitled series on abortion of 1998–1999 (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49), reflections upon the political past and present of Rego’s land of birth in two of its key historical moments are ongoing, beyond the immediate themes of sexuality and gender antagonism. One such moment is the period of the maritime

3 Rego was made a DBE (Dame of the British Empire) in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List in 2010.

discoveries and empire-building in the sixteenth century, and the other, the forty-year dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar's *Estado Novo* (New State) in the twentieth. The latter is now very much consigned to memory in Portugal as an unfortunate political lapse that has been fully overcome. The former is still the linchpin of a nostalgia for days of lost greatness. In her work post-1974 (following the establishment of democracy in Portugal), as we shall see, Paula Rego contests the belief that dictatorship (or at least the oppressive mindset to which it gave rise) and the associated officialdom of Roman Catholicism as the state religion (linked to the state by Concordat) are no longer factors in Portuguese national life. She also, albeit less explicitly, works on the basis of a deep-rooted scepticism that the period of the maritime and imperial adventure of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries constituted the nation's heyday — a supposition which, to this day, overwhelmingly rules historical thinking in Portugal.⁴

In 1950, at the height of Salazar's dictatorship and not long before Rego left Portugal for Britain, the great Portuguese poet Miguel Torga, who a decade previously, in 1939, had been imprisoned by the political regime for sedition, wrote the following poem, entitled 'Motherland':

I knew the definition in my childhood.
 But time erased
 The lines which on the map of memory
 The teacher's cane had engraved.

Now
 I know only how to love
 A stretch of land
 Embroidered with waves. (Torga, 1992)⁵

In a move familiar to those acquainted with his writing, Torga succeeds in wrong-footing the imposition of a national identity prescribed by diktat (the teacher's cane), transforming it instead into a more diffuse and thus anarchic concept, demarcated by fluid (here literally watery) boundaries of love, devoid of jingoistic allegiance. The juxtaposition of authority (despotic teachers, patriotic preachings, nationalist declarations) against

4 See for example her emphasis on her preoccupation with *Salazarismo* and its effects on the country in an interview with Ana Gabriela Macedo (1999, 12–13).

5 All translations from Portuguese texts are my own. Details of the original text are provided in the bibliography.

a stance that rejects them, operates through a discourse which, almost as a by-the-way, also alters the priorities of that nation-speak. The sea, which has defined Portuguese national identity for the past six centuries, in Torga becomes at best pleasant, but not necessary (and elsewhere in his work, at worst, a national liability): it is the peripheral decorative trimming stitched, on second thoughts, upon a land that itself is given teluric primacy. Similar and associated sleights of hand are identified, in the reading that follows, as the hallmarks of Paula Rego's work of a lifetime, whereby she contests the rankings of identity and authority within issues of nationhood, gender and family, and thus radically rewrites national memory. 'The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without the help of an inventory' (Gramsci, 1971, 324).

Rego keeps history at the centre of her work, whilst simultaneously effecting that two-way translation outlined earlier, whereby the remote historical process (the political) becomes available through the transformative medium of day-to-day human relations (the personal) and vice-versa. Thus, to name but two examples, the revenge exacted upon autocratic rules of government finds articulation through the image of the unmanned, attacked and invisible father that institutionally represents the former in *The Policeman's Daughter* (1987, fig. 2.13). Meanwhile, church intervention in sexual behaviour finds expression through the private drama of school-girl abortions in the 1998–1999 pastels (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49).

The rendering of political imperatives in familiar because familial shape becomes all the easier in light of the very propensity on the part of the latter to draw, for their own propaganda purposes, upon metaphors of family life as the means of delivering to the nation a workable image of itself and its rulers. For almost six decades, and from her earliest work, Paula Rego has drawn thematically upon the dictatorship of Salazar, and what has been described as its 'chauvinistic rhetoric' (Rosengarten, 1997, 44). Paintings of the 1960s such as *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland* (fig. 1.1), *When We Had a House in the Country* (fig. 1.2) and *Iberian Dawn* (e-fig. 3), albeit in the more cryptic style of her earlier abstract and cut-and-paste works, offer — not least through their titles — a harsh critique of the regime then at the height of its powers.

The term 'chauvinistic rhetoric' neatly encapsulates one of the aspects of a regime whose self-defining discourse held out as its political touchstone the perpetuation of gender inequality. Rego's work requires at least a sketchy understanding of the complex political and ideological palette into which she has been dipping her brush for over fifty years. Its key components include politics (fascism), religion (Roman Catholicism) and gender (patriarchy). The readings that follow will contend that as far as this artist is concerned, and as demonstrated by themed series such as *The Sin of Father Amaro* (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27) and the untitled abortion pastels (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49), the toppling of the *Estado Novo* regime in 1974 does not appear to have laid political ghosts to rest. In what follows I shall concern myself primarily, although not exclusively, with images from the 1980s onwards, and with themes that address themselves to national events in Portugal in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The backdrop of History in Rego's work, however, as suggested earlier, also refers us occasionally to Portugal's imperial history in the sixteenth century.

I shall now offer a brief overview of the key historical events that to some extent continue to shape this artist's understanding of her country of birth.

The Portuguese overseas empire was built up in the wake of the nation's maritime discoveries from the fifteenth century onwards, and extended as far as Japan to the east, Brazil to the west and large chunks of Eastern and Western Africa to the south. It was lost in three waves. By the end of the seventeenth century, most of the territories in the East Indies and South Asia had been lost to other European powers. Brazil declared independence in 1822, and the African colonies finally gained independence in 1975 in the aftermath of the collapse of the *Estado Novo* regime in 1974. The economic policy that brought Salazar to power in the early 1930s and underwrote his political longevity had been based on the creation of national financial revenue from the resources of the nation's colonies in Africa, namely Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe. The *Estado Novo* dictatorship lasted from 1933 to 1974, for most of that period under the rule of Salazar himself, who only relinquished power for reasons of health in 1968, two years before his death. Salazar had come to power initially as Minister

of Finance in 1928, with a brief to restore the Portuguese economy. It had become severely compromised during the preceding century due to political agitation at home and territorial losses abroad. Salazar accepted the position on condition of being granted absolute control over other ministries and over general governmental income and expenditure, and in 1933 became President of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister), with full dictatorial powers. He proceeded to put in place the full machinery of dictatorship, including a single-party political structure, punitive persecution of ideological and political dissidence, a massive apparatus of censorship over the press as well as all other printed and cultural matter (literature, art and music), and a state police. He also went on to remodel the nation according to well-defined lines. These encompassed his vision of a motherland dedicated to the tenets of family life, religion, and obedient citizenship.

As a young man, Salazar had studied for the priesthood and went as far as taking minor orders before leaving the seminary to study Law and Economics at the University of Coimbra. His earliest public manifestations involved the self-confessed dream of one day becoming the Prime Minister of an absolutist monarch. By the time he entered political life in earnest, these views had been somewhat revised in light of the reality of a deposed monarchy and an extant republic. His overarching plan for the nation involved a declared anti-democratic intent based on a pyramidal power structure: state authority, duly underwritten although not in any sense controlled by the Catholic Church, was to oversee all areas of national life. To this effect the regime signed a Concordat with the Vatican in 1940. The habit of official or quasi-official alliances between the church and the state in Portugal, in any case, had dated from much further back than the 1940 or even the 1847 Concordats with the Vatican. From the moment that Henry the Navigator dreamed of a maritime escape from the restrictions of Iberian land confinement in the early fifteenth century, a dream impelled at least as much by imperial warmongering and mercantile greed as by humanist curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, the Catholic Church in Portugal, albeit with some unease, jumped on the sea-bound bandwagon. The advantages and disadvantages (the advantages of new worlds to convert, the disadvantages of the damage that expanding scientific knowledge and ensuing scepticism might do to clerical authority) were weighed up by

the Catholic Church and they tilted in favour of exploration. Since at least the Renaissance, therefore, the church in Portugal has variously sought and gained the support first of absolutist monarchs-by-divine-right and, later, autocratic systems of government including, for almost half of the twentieth century, the dictatorship of Salazar's *Estado Novo* regime.

Whether with the aim of Inquisitorial persecution of Jews and heretics at home; the evangelical proselytizing of the heathens abroad from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries; the smoking-out of liberalism and republicanism in the nineteenth century; or the suppression of socialism and atheism in the twentieth, the Catholic Church in Portugal has always found willing bed-fellows in the authoritarian extremes of governmental rule. The role of Roman Catholicism in the life of the nation has informed Paula Rego's work from its earliest manifestations, and, as we shall see, remains a recurring preoccupation to date.

Salazar's all-embracing blueprint for the nation set down hierarchical structures topped by God, the Prime Minister and the (male) citizen, husband and father as bailiffs of national stability. Under the *Estado Novo*, the citizen was deemed to owe obedience to the state and to the church, and the family was seen as the very fabric of society, being itself envisioned as a rigid structure demarcated by its own power configurations: the husband and father was designated the head of the family (*chefe de família*⁶) and as such was authorized, both on a legal and quasi-legal basis, to exact obedience from his subaltern female relatives and children.⁷ The metaphor of the family, as the kernel of obedient participation in this superstructure, obtained both in its concrete specifications and at a metaphorical level. It involved a redefinition of Portuguese colonial policy in Africa. And to this effect, the Salazar regime promoted a narrative that cast Portugal as the motherland and the African colonies as its (happily) obedient children.

The strength of Salazar's economic policies, which succeeded in restoring Portugal's balance of payments and in strengthening his political power base, involved a re-definition of Portuguese colonial

6 For details as to the quasi-official status of this title, see for example Darlene J. Sadlier (1989, 123) and A. H. de Oliveira Marques (1991, 151).

7 See Darlene J. Sadlier, *The Question of How: Women Writers and New Portuguese Literature* (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1989).

policy in Africa. To this purpose the tightening of the legislature through a new constitution, which included a series of Colonial Acts, went hand in hand with a vast propaganda effort that valorised the family as the linchpin of national life. Through the efforts of a well-oiled propaganda machine, Portugal duly emerged, as already indicated, as the self-styled mother of its obedient overseas offspring, after 1951 no longer to be known as colonies but instead as 'overseas provinces' (Newitt, 1995, 437). In this context it may be relevant to note that Salazar's image, as constructed by António Ferro, his Secretary of State for Propaganda from 1933 onwards, prioritized his mission as saviour of the nation and restorer of its lost imperial glories. The nature of Ferro's propaganda tapped into popular myth, and particularly referenced an open wound in the nation's history. Portugal's large empire, spanning four continents (Europe, Africa, South America and Asia) had begun to disintegrate even within the time-span of its expansion in the sixteenth century. This unravelling was encapsulated by one particular event, which itself came to enshrine the nation's nostalgia for past achievements and endures to the present. In 1578, the young king, Don Sebastião, undertook a military campaign to attempt to recover and consolidate Portuguese holdings in then-agriculturally-rich North Africa. The campaign ended in military disaster at Alcácer Quibir (Ksar-el-Kebir), in what is now Morocco, and the king himself died in battle, although his body was not found. Don Sebastião was unmarried and the heir to the throne was Cardinal Don Henrique, an elderly uncle who as a cardinal of the church could not himself marry and beget an heir. Cardinal Don Henrique died two years after Alcácer Quibir, and more than four hundred years after independence from Spain, the historical nightmare of the Portuguese became a reality: next in line to the throne by bloodline was Philip II of Spain. So, in 1580, the country fell again under the dominion of its neighbour, the avoidance of which had defined the nation's political life since independence from it in 1143. The period of Spanish rule lasted for sixty years, and came to be widely regarded as the darkest period in the nation's history. Partly for this reason, the absence of Don Sebastião's body, unrecovered from the battleground, gave rise to the most potent legend in the nation's imagination to this day: namely that the monarch, whose cognomen came to be '*o Desejado*' ('The Desired One') had not in fact died. Rather, he would return on a misty morning, riding out of the

sea to save the country from foreign occupation and restore it to former glory. *Sebastianismo*, as the phenomenon came to be known, endures as the metaphor for national nostalgia and imperial longing in important aspects of the nation's cultural life. It characterized the longing for a lost golden age, and was driven by a quasi-messianic hope for its restoration. As such, it continued to be a lasting marker of Portuguese national identity, enduring well beyond any feasibility of a Sebastianic return. Its manifestation in the present is the nation's continuing and unreflecting celebration of the age of empire. The philosopher António Sérgio ponders to damning effect some of the possible roots for the persistence of *Sebastianismo* in the Portuguese psyche:

The hypothesis advanced here is as follows: Portuguese messianism (of which *Sebastianismo* is a phase) has its roots not in national psychology [...] but in social conditions akin to those of Jews, reinforced by Jewish messianism [...] and which can be understood as an awareness of edenic Fall. The longing for a Messiah, a Desired leader, a Redeemer is common to all races; but the social and mental situation the Jews and the Portuguese exacerbated in these two peoples a tendency common to all [...] the special conditions of Jews in Portugal tending naturally to reinforce the longing for a Messiah. The catastrophe of Álcacer Quibir and the disappearance of the king [...] added to the fact that national circumstances are unsatisfactory regarding patriotic pride, account for the persistence of the old dream [of a Sebastianic return] in the soul of a people unready for initiative and self-government. (Sérgio, 1976, 249)

António Ferro exploited this Sebastianic longing by presenting Salazar to the nation as Don Sebastião #2, its saviour and restorer of economic and imperial (now colonial) fortunes. He did this first in his capacity as one of very few journalists who, over a period of many years, succeeded in persuading Salazar to be interviewed. Then, as the Head of the National Secretariat of Propaganda from 1933, he promoted an image of the elusive leader as a monastic figure: a celibate and unmarried man like Don Sebastião himself, wedded to his job and to his country, ever labouring to bedeck his bride in suitably glorious trappings. Let us hear Ferro's description of Salazar's first eruption onto national political life, in a John-the-Baptist-style text entitled 'First Appearance':

This is the 6th of June 1926, and we are at Amadora. The atmosphere is electric with the joy of recent victory. Never before was this aerodrome so packed, so throbbing with hope. There is a coming and going of soldiers,

officers, fraternizing civilians staring at the trees, the houses, the very earth they are walking on, just as though their Portugal reborn was all fresh to them. There is a blazing sky, a merciless sun. Our spring is a thing to be reckoned with, and as there was once a 'Napoleon Winter' and a 'General Winter,' so we can now have our 'Brigadier Spring.' [...] Salazar was temporary Minister for a mere matter of days, but just long enough to have left a faint trail of hope. In all the alternations of the situation, in the swift ups-and-downs of those first months of the dictatorship, one would hear from time to time the cry: 'If only Salazar would come — if only they would fetch him!' But there was no answer. There was only the silence, the romantic silence of Coimbra, which gives the outline of the city when one sees it from the carriage window of a train something of the air of a picture in a frame. One would have said that already the image of Dr. Oliveira Salazar had become almost a dream, just a memory like the 'Desired One.' And then it happened. A wave of revolution still on-going brought him again to the Terreiro do Paço, to the Ministry of Finance. (Ferro, 1939, 111–13, italics added)

The epiphanic lexicon of Ferro's hagiographic text both implicitly and explicitly evokes Sebastianic longing channelled through the figure of the nation's leader, as expressed for example in Fernando Pessoa's poem of the same period on the theme of the disappeared king:⁸

What voice is it that floats on the waves
 But is not the sea's?
 It's a voice that speaks to us
 But if heard, it grows silent
 Due to being heard.
 And only when, half-asleep,
 Unbeknownst to us we listen
 To its message of hope
 To which, like a sleepy child
 Asleep we smile,
 They are the islands of good fortune.
 Lands out of time,
 Where the King lies awaiting.
 But as we waken,
 The voice fades and all is sea.⁹

8 Fernando Pessoa's volume of poetry of 1934, *Mensagem* (Message) was lauded and acclaimed by the *Estado Novo* regime, regardless of Pessoa's outspoken statements against Salazar himself and against his project of a renewed empire. The regime lionized *Mensagem*, published one year before Pessoa died, as one of its key propaganda texts.

9 Pessoa, 1979, italics added.

Ferro's propaganda, in particular his presentation of Salazar's supposedly ascetic lifestyle, was extraordinarily successful, both at home and abroad (e-fig. 1).¹⁰ In the long term, however, Salazar's economic policy in the twentieth century uncannily repeated the single greatest mistake of Portuguese imperial policy from the fifteenth through to the nineteenth centuries, by placing all of the nation's eggs into the colonial basket. The impact of the loss of territories in the East Indies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and of Brazil in the nineteenth, had already left the nation in the grip of a financial deficit almost impossible to redress, and with a severely imperilled economy that Salazar had been brought to power to restore. It is curious, therefore, that while successfully fulfilling this brief in the short-term, he did so by means of measures that proved to be myopic in the medium and long term.

The colonies that had underpinned the regime's economic success and therefore its political viability paradoxically turned out to be also the principal factor in its downfall. One of the key causes of the eventual unpopularity of the regime, from 1961 onwards, was the conflagration of a war of independence in Angola, followed shortly afterwards by similar insurgencies in Guinea-Bissau (1963) and Mozambique (1964). From 1961 onwards, therefore, colonial interests could only be sustained at the price of a costly and bloody war on three fronts. Up to fifty per cent of the nation's annual revenue was channelled into military activity in Africa, and many lives were lost. The African colonies ceased to be a source of income; young men's lives were lost in massive numbers and the ensuing resentment in Portugal contributed significantly to the downfall of the regime on 25 April 1974, four years after Salazar's death and six years after he relinquished power on health grounds. One year after the restoration of Portugal to democracy, the colonies gained independence. The loss of what had been, for half a century, one of the nation's very few sources of revenue entailed economic as well as demographic consequences. To this day, they have confined Portugal near to the bottom of the economic league of European Union nations.

10 e-fig. 1 Salazar may have been unmarried and supposedly celibate but that did not diminish his well-known charm, which he famously directed at women, not least Queen Elizabeth II. 'Salazar and Queen Elizabeth II in 1957'. Posted by M. Durruti, 'Salazar: elected the "Greatest Portuguese of all time"', *Durruti's Flames*, 26 March 2007 (scroll down the page, fifth image from the top), <http://durrutilog.blogspot.com/2007/03/salazar-elected-greatest-portuguese-of.html>

Let us return now to the family metaphors drawn upon by the propaganda of the *Estado Novo* regime. João Medina describes the modus operandi of the family ideology as encapsulated in a series of seven paintings entitled *Salazar's Lesson*, created for display in every classroom of every school throughout the nation and its colonies (Medina, 1999, 209–28).¹¹ The painter, Jaime Martins Barata, was one of the regime's apparatchiks. He was responsible for much of the fascist-flavoured art that was popular under the regime and was printed on book covers, posters, postage stamps and murals. One picture in this series in particular, entitled *God, Motherland, Family: a Trilogy of National Education* (e-fig. 2),¹² allegorized the *Salazarista* global vision outlined above: a nation — and empire — of obedient women and happy peasants, monitored by an invisible God, whose earthly delegates were the Prime Minister himself and his deputy within the cellular infrastructure of the family, namely the husband and father.

Salazar himself outlined the trinity of God, Nation and Family in all its unassailability:

We don't argue about God and virtue; we don't argue about the Motherland and its history; we don't argue about authority and its prestige; we don't argue about the family and its morality; we don't argue about the glory of work and about the duty to work (Salazar quoted in Medina, 1999, 215).¹³

11 The seven images in the series titled *Salazar's Lesson* might have been a reference to the seven lessons (or dolours) of the Virgin Mary, discussed in chapter 2. The sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the seven dolours of the Virgin (Feasts of the Seven) had as their object 'the spiritual martyrdom of the Mother of God and her compassion with the sufferings of her Divine Son.' The seven dolours were sorrow at the prophecy of Simeon, at the flight into Egypt, at having lost the Holy Child in Jerusalem, at meeting Jesus on his way to Calvary, at standing at the foot of the Cross, at Jesus being taken from the cross, at the burial of Jesus (*The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1912, 151). Mary's abnegation and selflessness, if it this indeed the intended reverberation behind *Salazar's Lesson*, might seek to convey a double meaning: the leader's selfless devotion to the nation, and its citizen's obligation to accept with forbearance whatever might be required of them.

12 e-fig. 2 Jaime Martins Barata, *God, Motherland, Family: A Trilogy of National Education* (1938). Lithograph, 78 cm x 112 cm. © Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, all rights reserved. Posted by José António Bandeirinha, 'All Quiet on the Western Front', *arch daily*, 22 October 2014, <https://www.archdaily.com.br/br/755754/all-quiet-on-the-western-front-jose-antonio-bandeirinha/54457bbae58ecea2d500000d>

13 All translations from Portuguese material provided in this volume, both prose and poetry, are my own.

As preached to the nation's children, 'in the Family, the head is the Father; at School, the head is the Teacher; in the nation, the head is the Government' (Primary School Year 4 Reading Book, 108, 1961). The following texts come from reading books issued in the 1960s and early 1970s by the Ministry of National Education, as obligatory reading practice for children at various levels of primary education. The title of the first reading lesson in Year 3 of primary school was 'The Motherland':

Son, do you know what is the Motherland?

The Motherland is the place where we were born, the place where our parents and many generations of Portuguese people like us were born.

All the sacred territory which [...] so many heroes defended with their blood or expanded at the sacrifice of their lives, all that is our Motherland. It is the land in which those heroes lived and now rest, side by side with saints and wise men, writers and artists of genius. The Nation is the mother of us all — those who have departed, those of us who still live and those who will follow us. [...]

The Motherland is the blessed soil of all Portugal, with its islands in the Atlantic (the Azores and Madeira, Cape Verde, S. Tomé and Príncipe...) and our lands on both coasts of Africa, India, Macau, faraway Timor.

On this side of the seas and across them is our blessed Motherland, all the territories upon which, under the shadow of our flag, the sweet word Mother! is uttered in the beautiful Portuguese language... (Ministério da Educação Nacional, s.d., 5–6)

And the following passage details also the (filial) duties owed by all good citizens — including children — to the Head of State:

Our Motherland is a large family composed of all the Portuguese peoples, without distinction of place or race.

Like all families, it too has a head who fittingly rules it and represents it — the Head of State, who at present is known as the President of the Republic.

In a proper family, the head, who is the father, has to be loved, respected and obeyed by his children. So too, in a nation conscious of its duties, the Head has to be esteemed and honoured by its citizens.

To pay homage to our Head of State, to bestow upon him the honours owed to the high office he fills, is therefore a duty of loyalty to the motherland, which we are duty-bound to love and serve.

So, children, if on any occasion His Excellency, the President of the Republic walks by you, or you find yourselves in his presence, salute

him with respect, because in him you will behold the Supreme Head of the Nation to which you have the honour to belong, the Head of the great Portuguese Family. (Ministério da Educação Nacional, s.d., 174)

I will conclude this section with a brief outline of some of the ways in which the *Estado Novo's* regime, in all its nationalist insularity and intolerance of political or ideological pluralism (as proclaimed by Salazar's own slogans — '*orgulhosamente sós*' ('a nation proudly alone') and '*tudo pela Nação, nada contra a Nação*' ('all for the Nation, nothing against the Nation')) worked specifically to the detriment of women.

In many ways, of course, the rationale underpinning Salazar's overall intent was in no way specific to a Portuguese setting, and Rego's statement that her work is 'always about Portugal,' even when it clearly is not (see subsequent chapters regarding her work on nursery rhymes, fairy tales, world literature, etc.) should be read in this context: namely that the defining characteristics of oppression, including gender oppression, are a truly international affair. The collusion of domestic ideology and societal paternalism is an old story in Portugal, but globally, too, there have always been 'two ways of seeing the world that might be read as having significant political implications':

Upper and middle-class men look for the extension of familial hierarchy into the public sphere and middle-class women do not. [...] Elite men sought to control women's independence as well as the independence of the working class in imagining the world as a patriarchal family with themselves at the head. (Lowder Newton, 1989, 161)

From the late eighteenth century onwards, what by now amounts to an entire discipline (Women's Studies; Feminist Studies) has gathered an immense body of data on how, across boundaries of time and place, male monopoly over the public sphere (with its potential for power, heroism and abstract endeavour) has consigned women to the limitations of domestic agency, meaning that 'women were trapped in immanence while men could heroically struggle for transcendence, for the personal glory that comes with sacrifice and valour' (Benjamin, 1986, 79). Such apportioning of immanence and transcendence conformed exactly with the *Estado Novo's* governing ideology conventionally operated on the basis of a sexual double standard that demanded from women an asexual spirituality not required of the earthier male. Rego's work may

be preoccupied with this syndrome as a Portuguese phenomenon, but her very willingness to extrapolate from her own lived experience in two countries testifies to her awareness of the global nature of the problem.

Be that as it may, and returning again to specifically Portuguese concerns, a fair amount has been written about the conditions of suffocation and oppression experienced by people in general, but women in particular under the *Estado Novo* (Flunser Pimentel, 2000; Sadlier, 1989; Tavares, 2000). In 1940, as mentioned previously, the interests of the church and state in Portugal were officially intertwined through the signing of a Concordat with the Vatican. This authorized, among other things, the state's intention to enforce upon women the imperative of emulating the cultural icon of the Virgin Mary as the only acceptable role model of femininity. In Jessica Benjamin's words, 'the idealization of motherhood, which can be traced through popular culture to [...] anti-feminist [...] cultural politics, can be seen [...] to naturalize woman's desexualization and lack of agency in the world' (Benjamin, 1986, 85). Under the *Estado Novo*, domesticity, chastity and obedience to the husband as official head of the family — and through him Salazar as head of state, and God as universal ruler — were all officially preached by ministerial command.

The *Salazarista* blueprint for national life was partly modelled on Hitler's Germany and drew upon the formula that prescribed to women the concerns of *kinder, kücher, kirche* (children, kitchen, church), to the exclusion of all else.¹⁴ The envisioned prescription of domestic family arrangements entailed the subordination of the obedient housewife and mother to a benevolent yet authoritarian father-figure. In Portugal, under the fascist regime of Salazar, the duties of domesticity, obedience, submissiveness, piety and chastity were not merely preached but enforced through legislation on marriage, divorce and the right to work.¹⁵ Maria Antonietta Macciocchi offers an important analysis of

14 Under the *Estado Novo* a number of organizations were established that were based on Hitler's Germany. Amongst these was the *Moçidade Portuguesa* (*Portuguese Youth*), akin to the *Hitler Youth*, and boasting similar iconography: <https://slideplayer.com.br/slide/5964297/>

15 Darlene J. Sadlier offers a useful outline of legislation that gave women the vote only belatedly, that stated in the 1933 Constitution that everyone was equal before the law 'except as regards women, the differences resulting from their nature and from the interests of the family', in which husbands could force their wives to return to the

what she terms the problem of women's acquiescence to fascism in various European countries in the 1930s and 40s (Macciocchi, 1979).

Brecht compared the relationship that exists between women and X to that between a protector, or pimp, and his whores. The man puts them onto the streets to make profits from them, and gives them strength through pleasure. [...] [F]ascism has shown in a dramatic way that women could be made to serve, in the sense of both regression and repression. They are caught in the grip of a state masochism intended to produce [...] joy. [...] The 'emotional' plague of fascism is spread through a plague of familialism, which requires women to lose their autonomy in submitting to him who bears the whip. Women are crucified by continual procreation, and always subject to patriarchal authority as mothers, wives and daughters. (Macciocchi, 69–73)

Her insights bear a striking relevance to an understanding of the social order with which Paula Rego contended in the past, and upon which she continues to meditate today. Jane Caplan, commenting on Macciocchi's work, discusses the latter's argument that fascist movements enlist women's loyalty by 'addressing them in an ideological-sexual language with which they are already familiar through the "discourses" of bourgeois Christian ideology':

In abstract terms, this is to say that the system of signs and unconscious representations which constitute the 'law' of patriarchy is invoked in fascist ideology, in such a way that women are drawn into a particularly supportive relation with fascist regimes. (Caplan, 1999, 61)

This would include for example the promotion of abnegated motherhood, which with threefold utility serves the interests of patriarchy (sons and heirs for men), Christianity/Catholicism (mariological purity) and the state (soldiers for the fatherland's/motherland's armies). Let us look again at Caplan:

family home if they left it, and could also refuse them the necessary authorization to work, hold a passport or a bank account. The imbalance of power within the family entailed also, of course, a double standard in sexual morality. Following the iconic ideal of the Virgin Mary, female virginity prior to marriage was a quasi-official requirement. This desideratum was reinforced by governmental programmes such as for example the infamous 'Saint Anthony's day weddings,' in which couples who married in a mass Catholic wedding ceremony on that saint's day, and were able to provide evidence of both poverty and the bride's virginity, were refunded by the state for the cost of the wedding and received further household gifts such as pots, pans and vacuum cleaners.

If you are taken in by the Catholic Church's adulation of the Virgin Mary, you will also be open to address as fascism's fertile Mother; if the Holy Family is an ideal relation in your eyes, you will be readily incorporated in the fascist family. Thus the originality of fascism is not the content of its ideology, but the use it makes of pre-existent ideology which is already deeply inscribed in the unconscious. Macciocchi is saying that you can't talk about fascism unless you are also prepared to discuss patriarchy. [...] [She] locates the originality of fascism not in any capacity to generate a new ideology, but in its conjunctural transformation and recombination of what already exists. (Caplan, 1979, 62)

Macciocchi quotes Hitler as saying that 'in politics, it is necessary to have the support of women, because the men will follow spontaneously' (Macciocchi, 1979, 69). The enlisting of the female constituency's obedience was built into Salazar's own grand plan. The crucial importance he attached to the promotion of family values in themselves, but even more so as linchpins of social stability, was emphasized repeatedly in the course of interviews and orations throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s:

When we refer to the family what we have in mind is the home; and when we speak of the home we mean its moral environment and its function as an independent economic unit that both consumes and produces. Women's work outside the family sphere disintegrates home life, separates its different members, and makes them strangers to each other [...] Life in common disappears; the work of educating the children suffers and families become smaller. [...] We consider that it is the man who should labor and maintain the family and we say that the work of the married woman outside her home, and, similarly that of the spinster who is a member of the family, should not be encouraged. (Salazar, 1939, 161-62)

And elsewhere, in similar vein:

How could I break the wave of feminine independence that is coming over the world? Women show such a need for freedom, such a frenzy for the pleasures of life. They don't understand that happiness is reached through renunciation, rather than enjoyment [...] The great nations should set an example by confining women to their homes. But these great nations seem oblivious to the fact that the solid family structure cannot exist where the wife's activity is outside the home. And so the evil spreads and each day becomes more dangerous. What can I do, I myself, in Portugal? I know only too well, alas, that all my efforts to bring women back to older ways of living have remained practically useless! (Salazar quoted in Sadlier, 1989, 3)

Salazar was too modest about his own achievements. These statements, made in the context of a Catholicism that Paula Rego has described as 'scary' and 'ridden with guilt' (McEwen, 1997, 27) were prefigured by the shadowy spectre of Marian worship, which simultaneously served the patriarchal interests of the state and the theological necessities of the church.

This outline offers a glimpse into the backdrop to Paula Rego's life and the political/ideological set-up she left behind when she moved to Britain in 1951 (itself in the grip of a backlash as men had returned from war and women — who had been partly emancipated by the circumstances of the conflict — were relegated to their old roles). She left Portugal, but from her adopted home (which in any case, in the 1950s was not so very different from what she'd left behind) she continued to do battle with it in her work. In the words of one of her most perceptive observers, her painting is full of 'a profound revolt, moral, social and political,' and stands as 'a female assertion opposing the chauvinism of an ironic, dismissive, oppressive society' (Lacerda, 1978, 12). This applies both then and now, because as we know, some things never change.

Her work of the last fifty years, both before and after the establishment of democracy in Portugal, and notwithstanding the improvements in women's rights in many Western societies during that time, has been structured by strong narratives whose linchpin is survival. And survival, too, must have been what was originally on her father's mind when he famously urged her, aged seventeen, to leave Portugal because it was no place for a woman (quoted in McEwen, 1997, 44). This indictment has been corroborated by Rego's work. In it, however, paradoxically — and, as will be argued, in a mood of retribution — survival tends to be the monopoly of the female, while the failure to do so pertains to the male, both at an individual level and regarding the institutions of church, state and the patriarchal family.

In what follows I shall concentrate on works created between the 1980s and the time of this volume's publication, with some reference to earlier works of the 1960s. The 1980s mark Rego's move away from the abstract cut-and-paste method of the early work to a more naturalist narrative art. It is also the period in which the dimension of the personal and the familial comes to infiltrate her work, underlying the artist's political and ideological preoccupations with Portuguese national life. One of

the paradoxes of Paula Rego's work, when contemplated diachronically across six decades, is that her confrontation with the patriarchal, clerical and political interests of pre-democracy Portugal was raised to an even higher pitch in the decades that followed the advent of democracy in 1974 — a time when historically, but not, it would seem, for this artist, the ghost of dictatorship in Portugal had supposedly been laid to rest. In the works of the 1980s, but even more so in those of the decades that followed, her anger appears to escalate in proportion to the prolongation of disappointed political hopes. Such pieces include *The Sin of Father Amaro* series of pastels of 1997–1998 (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27), to be discussed in chapter 3, and the abortion works of 1998–1999 (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49), debated in chapter 4. The dawning realization that many bad, old instincts endure in post-revolution Portugal has resulted in mounting anger, as manifested in some of her most startling works to date.

From Practice to Theory

In reviewing the critical pursuit of interpretation, Frederic Jameson urged its practitioners always to historicize (Jameson, 1981, 9). With reference to R. B. Kitaj, a painter to whom Paula Rego is morally as well as emotionally akin. David Peters Corbett emphasizes precisely that drive to 'enter painting on the stage of history,' thus 'breaching the boundaries which separate art and history' and connecting 'the painting with the world' (Corbett, 2000, 46–48). Corbett directs us to Virginia Woolf's statement that 'there is a zone of silence in the middle of every art. The artists themselves live in it' (Woolf, 1992, 17). Live in it, create it, but also fill it, by reinforcing the paths whereby art extends into the world, and vice-versa. The inscription of the text (in this case the visual text) in history, which will be the method pursued here, gestures towards areas of theoretical debate that I wish to acknowledge now. What is in question here is the long-standing polemic between New Historicists or Cultural Materialists on the one hand and Postmodern and Poststructuralist methodologists on the other.¹⁶ The theoretical

16 For the present purposes the difference between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism will not be debated with any degree of theoretical depth. For an insightful discussion into these issues, consult Hawthorn (1996).

material to be outlined now refers on the whole to literary texts. For the present purpose, however, the term 'text' is taken to apply also to visual images. The interpretative strategy employed in what follows situates itself within a New Historicist practice summed up by Jeremy Hawthorn as follows:

The particular reading strategies with which I am concerned are those which can be loosely termed 'historicist', those that are committed to the belief that literary works are most fruitfully read in the illuminating contexts of the historical forces which contributed to their birth and the historically conditioned, and changing circumstances of their subsequent life. Such a project requires that one have some conception of the ways in which human beings relate to the past, the ways in which they trace the cunning passages of history and depict them in cunning passages of their own. (Hawthorn, 1996, 3)

In opposition to Derrida's notorious statement that 'there is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida, 1976, 158), New Historicist methods are concerned with a context beyond the text. The further implications of this theoretical commitment will also need to counter the objection, which Poststructuralism and Postmodernism alike promote, that in historical as in critical reading, it is impossible to privilege one interpretation over another as being the truth of the event in question.¹⁷ For Lyotard, in his by-now enshrined formulation,

it is therefore impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice-versa: the relevant criteria are different. All we can do is gaze in wonder at the diversity of discursive species, just as we do at the diversity of plant or animal species. (Lyotard, 1984, 26)

Norman Bryson sums up the post-structuralist rejection of context in favour of intertextuality as a two-step process whereby the text was separated both from a reference to the real world and from its author (Bryson, 1988, 187) — and, by implication, according to some of its critics, from any social or political engagement pertaining to either. The textualist position, however, does not accept the accusation of political disconnection or irrelevance. Both Derrida and, with greater legitimacy,

17 For a further discussion of this, consult for example Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism Reading Modernism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992).

Foucault identify a political dimension to their relativization of the concept of truth. Glossing over the important differences that separate them, both see a claim to Truth as the legitimization that historically has licensed oppression, torture and genocide, and the contestation of its possibility as resistance to such phenomena. In this regard, however, Catherine Belsey justifiably counter-argues that the claim that no existing language single-handedly maps the world accurately 'is not the same as encouraging people to subscribe to whatever conviction comes into their heads, or inciting them to make things up. Nor is it to settle for believing them when they do. It is perfectly possible to recognize lies without entailing the possibility of telling the truth, least of all the whole truth'. (Belsey, 1996, 85–86)

The textualism/contextualism debate gives rise to two categories of problems that confront New Historicist critics and theorists involved in a return to history in their practice. On the one hand they must engage with the textualist claim that denies the possibility of a valid reinscription of a text in history, by virtue of the inaccessibility of historical truth itself. For the textualists, History is itself just text, and any of a multitude of interpretations of any given event is as valid as any other. On the other hand, the New Historicists are obliged to counter a traditionalism within the discipline of History that does have faith in the possibility of linking historical accounts (history discourse) to an objective reality, but excludes the possibility that a literary (or visual) text, which it sees as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, might appeal effectively to historical truth. For Hawthorn, 'the first of these solutions trivializes literary [visual] texts along with all other texts; the second restores the importance of historical texts at the cost of again trivializing literary [visual] ones' (Hawthorn, 1996, 29). The challenge that faces New Historicist critics, therefore, involves establishing the validity of literary (visual) texts as engaged in, and contributing to, an ongoing dialogue between history and politics. New Historicism must contend on the one hand with the traditional historian's contempt for the historical validity of literary/visual texts, and on the other it must dispose of, or at least destabilize, Postmodernist and Poststructuralist affirmations of absolute interpretative arbitrariness in texts (so that any interpretation of an event, such as, for the sake of polemical edge, 'the

Holocaust never happened,' becomes as valid as another, such as 'the Holocaust did happen').

Whether present in a formative or merely in an informative manner, to a greater or lesser degree, history¹⁸ lies at the root of the approach I shall take with regard to Paula Rego's admirably pamphletarian art.¹⁹

New ways of inscribing art or literature into past history require innovative questions. I will interject here a personal anecdote. My five-year old daughter was very fond of a particular anthology of Greek myths for children, and especially the story of the Minotaur. This is not surprising, since Greek mythology in general, and this tale in particular, involve much of the standard fare of children's literature: here, a wicked animal and a resourceful princess. She was particularly interested in the ball of thread that Ariadne gave to Theseus to facilitate his exit from the labyrinth. Less straightforwardly, however, and somewhat eccentrically, her most pressing concern related to the colour of the thread. But on second thoughts, why not? Some of the most imaginative art historians in recent scholarship have taken to questioning the way in which, in Leo Steinberg's words — in a volume tellingly entitled *Other Criteria* — the art history establishment nurtures young scholars whose work is 'especially tame and conventional': 'we introduce them to the technology of research and teach them the proper set of questions to ask with respect to art' (Steinberg, 1975, 308). In much the same vein as Steinberg, and in a harsh critique of the traditional analytical methods of art history, Stephen Bann contends that the relationship between artists and history is an unexplored topic, and its omission introduces a fatal flaw into much writing on the history of art. Bann attributes this

18 For history, I mean broadly society, politics and ideology — that 'uncircumventable phantom of history' which Deborah Lipstadt calls 'irrefutable' ('Slavery happened; so did the Black Plague and the Holocaust,' Lipstadt, 1994, 21) and which Saul Friedlander defines as 'something irreducible which, for better or worse, I would still call reality' (Friedlander, 1992, 20).

19 The irrefutability of events, however, does not deny the multiple ways in which they can be understood. The Black Plague in the fourteenth century, for example, may have led directly to the end of serfdom. After up to one third of the population of Europe across the social spectrum died, erstwhile serfs were able to charge more for their labour and also more easily buy land now left without owners. The appalling death statistics meant that for the lower classes who survived, the changed world offered greater opportunities. See for example John Hatcher, *The Black Death: An Intimate History of a Village in Crisis, 1345–1350* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010).

methodological weakness to two factors. First, the process whereby, in defining itself as a discipline, art history adopted a prejudice inherited from archive-based historians against 'the serious historic value of artistic representations of history.' Second, and causally, the neglect of interesting questions (Bann, 1984, 104), a problem that applies to traditional historiography and to art history alike. What colour was Ariadne's thread? Or, in a more serious vein, let us consider for example the fact that until the implementation of standard procedures such as hand-washing by doctors (and later the advent of antibiotics) more human beings (women) died of post-partum infections than in all the world's wars put together. Which phenomenon is worthier of historical inquiry? The acquisition of basic habits of hygiene by physicians, or the territorial and religious conflicts of nations? The failure to ask new questions is intellectually (and sociopolitically) restrictive, whether in history, art history or any other discipline. Bann's justifiable dismissal of much traditional art history as intellectually irrelevant echoes the problem outlined above, regarding the old historicists's affirmation of the inadmissibility of visual or literary texts as historical evidence. Like mainstream historiography, traditional art history, to its detriment, has tended to concentrate on the purely aesthetic dimension of art works.

Jürgen Habermas (1978), Frederic Jameson (1981), Elizabeth Bronfen (1989) and more specifically with reference to the visual arts Mieke Bal (1990) have written of the master narratives that have habitually colonized or erased the marginal. Bal focuses on 'the figure's function as a semiotic object, as a machine for generating meaning' (Bal, 1990, 516), and on the 'incoherent' detail that challenges the convention of unity in painting as a powerful ideological weapon. Following on from Bal, Naomi Schor (1987) has discussed at length the aesthetics of detail as being possessed of a gender charge that, for Bal, demarcates the arena in which 'a battle over the marginality of women is fought' (Bal, 1990, 508). Throughout the readings that follow, close attention will be given to the impact of such details in some of Paula Rego's paintings. To give but one example from Bal's work, her interpretation of the spot of blood on Bathsheba's letter in Rembrandt's *Bathsheba at Her Bath* (fig. 0.1) (as signifying Bathsheba's complicity in her husband Uriah's death) leads Bal to argue that the painting opposes — or at least elaborates upon — the originating biblical script."



Fig. 0.1 Rembrandt, *Bathsheba at Her Bath* (1654). Oil on canvas, 142 x 142 cm.
 Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:
 Bathsheba_at_Her_Bath.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bathsheba_at_Her_Bath.png)

This manoeuvre, with modifications, is also discernible in Rego's use of familiar bodily, religious, and national iconography (models' poses, biblical references, folktales, maritime iconography, family metaphors) for the purpose of contesting multiple dimensions of received wisdom, social expectation and political unchangeability.

Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt have pondered the ability of art either to contain or unleash 'the potentially disruptive energies of history' (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000, 81). In what follows, I shall attempt to foreground the way in which gender synthesizes with a wider national dialectic but also, through a reverse process, the way in which history is telescoped back into the domestic arena of personal life. I shall seek to emulate what I believe to be Paula Rego's own drive in her work: namely, the recovery of repressed, unauthorized or untold stories, and the exposure of overt and covert agendas.

In so doing, I shall attempt to identify the sleight of hand whereby this artist, in a manoeuvre familiar to followers of her work throughout the decades, conflates two seemingly mutually exclusive political events, ideological positions or historical moments (in this case Portugal under

dictatorship and after the reinstatement of democracy) to render explicit their shared territory. During the *Estado Novo* dictatorship, her work critiqued the collusion between church and state in works that sought to pull the rug from under both. More controversially, in her post-revolution work, Rego attacks the master narrative of a contemporary Portugal (and by implication Western society) now complacent about its democratic and supposedly egalitarian status, but still bearing a disquieting proximity to, and affinity with, both recent and ancient pasts characterized by repressive instincts regarding religion, political inclination and of course gender. The central aspects of this polemic, aimed at the *grands récits* of both Portuguese fascism and present-day democracy, are themes such as love, sex, marriage, parenthood and abortion. At its very heart lies the old chestnut of gender.

What follows is a reading of sixty years of Rego's pictures that makes no attempt to engage with the formal or painterly aspects of her work. Two caveats are necessary at this point. First, I am not attempting to practise art history according to the traditional understanding of that discipline. As a student of literature and history, I am wholly unequipped for such an approach. Instead, my argument seeks to inscribe art, *this* art, within the history that informs and motivates it. Or, interchangeably, to restore historical/political meaning to the works, such that political intent is made central to the art. The aim is to foreground the polemical aspect of works that technically fit within the ultra-orthodox category of history painting: Rego also emphasizes their political dimension. In Paula Rego's own words, 'a painting is not just colours and form, but also history. [...] Paintings can be political' (quoted in Marques Gastão, 2002, 40). In her case, they always are.

The second caveat relates to the thorny issue of subjectivity in interpretation, a gauntlet that has been picked up by any number of art theorists. Griselda Pollock, for example, discussing what she terms 'deviant readings' that co-exist with generally accepted interpretations or the theories favoured by collectors, argues that 'which meaning will prevail ultimately depends upon the desire of the viewer' (Pollock, 1999, 112). She engages with Mieke Bal's (Bal, 1990) view of 'myth' (cultural narratives, such as Bible stories and 'historical' vignettes, that inform many visual representations) as 'an empty screen onto which the user, viewer or reader projects as active participant in the making of pictures

or texts', and concurs with Bal that 'there is no story, just the tellings' (Roszika and Pollock, 1991, 117).

In the case of Paula Rego, the dangers of 'anything goes' or of what Pollock terms 'the royal road to relativism' (Pollock, 1999, 119) may become more or less problematic with regard to different pictures. Some, such as *The Sin of Father Amaro* series (figs 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27) and the untitled series on abortion (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49), departing as they do from the reality of a pre-existing text or political event, offer reasonable grounds for interpretation. Others, such as the series on the family (figs. 2.1; 2.3–2.5; 2.8–2.11; 2.13; 2.14), discussed in chapter 2, may be more likely to invite the seductive but undeniably dangerous temptation of unfettered speculation. As regards the latter, however, it is not only true to say that Rego's work appears to invite such speculation, but that, moreover, she herself has explicitly encouraged viewers to take liberties with it: 'when I finish the picture I usually have a pretty pat explanation for it. But that's only one way into the picture, because one hopes, once a person's looking into the picture, that other things will come out that I'm not even aware of...' (Rego quoted in Tusa, 2001, 10). 'People have to work out their own story' (Rego quoted in Lambirth, 1998, 10).

At the risk of sounding defensive concerning the risks of interpretation (or over-interpretation), I will compound Rego's incitement to interpretative freedom by referring to Leo Steinberg's statement that 'though we all hope to reach objectively valid conclusions, this purpose is not served by disguising the subjectivity of interest, method and personal history which in fact conditions our work' (Steinberg, 1975, 309). 'How difficult it is to be oneself and to see nothing except what is visible,' lamented Alberto Caeiro, heteronym of Portugal's great modernist poet, Fernando Pessoa (Caeiro, 1970, 79, 85). 'I, thanks to having eyes only for seeing, I see the absence of meaning in everything. [...] To be a thing is to be not open to interpretation. [...] Reality does not need me' (Caeiro, *ibid*). Caeiro's admirably consistent refusal to move poetically beyond the gaze towards analysis might shun the trap of subjective reasoning, but it is not necessarily an option available to all. The problem, therefore, needs addressing. For Steinberg, subjectivity is also a concept that he uses idiosyncratically to refer to intellectual contingencies that make clear the particular aptness of a specific

critical apparatus to a specific work ('the historical precondition for the rediscovery of the subject,' Steinberg, 1975, 310). This may mean anything as transparent as the felicitous marriage of a determinate brand of theory to a given practice, or as wayward yet fruitful as 'an error which discovers a continent' (ibid.). The latter is a suggestion all the more apposite in connection with matters Portuguese, and in the context of a nation such as Portugal, which may have discovered Brazil thanks to a fortuitous contingency of ill winds and navigational error.²⁰

My title to this introduction is taken from John Osborne's well-known play. The connection between an author not renowned for political correctness in matters of gender and an artist who arguably swings the pendulum in the opposite direction but with equal forcefulness, may well seem improbable. Nonetheless, to my mind, these connections do exist, and are evoked by their shared desire to pit the individual against a brutish collectivity that saps desire from within. Both in Osborne and Rego, the traitor emerges as a patriot after a fashion, the mouthpiece for constructive destruction within an established order in need of radical refurbishment. Paula Rego's work has been described as 'an uncompromising reproach to the politics of control' and as 'underlining the frightening banality of human evil' (Morton, 2001, 108). If her output of the 1960s consistently argues the need for change, the body of work that emerges from the 1980s onwards lends itself to interpretation as the rage for a lost opportunity in a country or countries where, in a cod-democratic new era, much remains unchanged after all. 'My raw material is [Portugal]. But when I return there is always a feeling of shock. As if everything was more laid bare' (Rego, quoted in Marques Gastão, 1999, 45).²¹ And as we shall see in what follows, individuals, families, religion and nation are all grist to the same mill: in the realm of God, Motherland and Family, attack one and you attack all three.

20 See chapter 5, footnote 1, with regard to the Treaty of Tordesilhas.

21 The relationship with all things Portuguese, as will be argued, is always tinged with ambivalence. Agustina Bessa-Luís refers to a telephone conversation with Paula Rego as follows: 'I heard Paula on the telephone and her voice displeased me. It had the same annoying and detached tone as that of Vieira da Silva [another prominent Portuguese painter who lived a large part of her life in France] when she spoke of Portuguese matters. A mixture of indifference and enthusiastic welcome, much as one would receive a guest, almost a stranger' (Rego and Bessa-Luís, 2001, 7).

I. Past History and Deaths Foretold: A Map of Memory

'Is that love you're making?'

Arthur Osborne, *Is That Love You're Making?*

The discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [meant that] what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage. It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were. No doubt they were condemned all the same; but they were listened to; and if regular sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Ideal Homes

'The death [...] of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover' (Poe, 1951, 982). Poe's eulogy of the dead woman as muse encapsulates a centuries-long tradition, from Dante, Petrarch and Camões through Dickens, Herculano, and Tolstoy, to worship vanished female icons (Marilyn Monroe, Diana, Princess of Wales), loved at least partly

because they are dead. In commenting on Paula Rego's 1997–1998 series based on the nineteenth-century Portuguese novel by Eça de Queirós, *The Sin of Father Amaro* (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27), Ruth Rosengarten draws a contrast between Rego's empowered rendition of the female protagonist and the version created by her literary precursor, whose 'corpse becomes the visible sign of a Christian morality that silences female desire' (Rosengarten, 1999a, 24). In the analysis that follows in this chapter and in chapter 2, concerning works from the ten years that preceded the *Father Amaro* series, I shall pay particular attention to the ways in which the standardized roles of wife, mother, nurturer and ministering angel as extensions of that Christian morality are revised in Paula Rego's work. I shall also remark upon the resulting effects regarding the gender, class and racial assignation of the roles of victim/corpse and killer/survivor, in the work of an artist whose vision almost invariably defies expectations.

I will begin, however, by considering three works from the 1960s that, as much by virtue of their titles as by their visual effect (whose semantic accessibility largely depends on those titles), allude to the political regime at its height at the time of their creation. *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland* (fig. 1.1), *Iberian Dawn* (e-fig. 3) and *When We Had a House in the Country* (fig. 1.2) all variously but with uniform antagonism address cornerstones of the regime, through the person, symbolism and policies of its leader. In *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland*, the image that Salazar's propagandist machinery cultivated — namely that of the ascetic and monastic ruler, wedded to the nation and to his job — is replaced by that of a greedy, vampiric, quasi-cannibalistic spectre, disgorging the nation upon which he had previously banqueted.

Paula Rego's painting of 1960 poses many questions regarding the *Estado Novo* regime: why would Salazar wish or need to vomit a motherland with which he was supposedly at one? Which aspects of the motherland are being disgorged here? Is the need to do so, whether successful or not, a denunciation of the gap between theory (a motherland and its leader, united in proud isolation) and practice (the dissenting world of *realpolitik*)? Why does the motherland make its leader sick? Is the relationship after all not that of a groom and his willing bride, but rather that of a virus weakening its host? The same



Fig. 1.1 Paula Rego, *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland* (1960). Oil on canvas, 94 x 120 cm. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

ambiguity appears to operate in other works of the same period: *Iberian Dawn* (e-fig. 3)¹ and *When We Had a House in the Country*.

The title of *Iberian Dawn*, echoing quasi-fascist refrains of hyperbolic nationalism/patriotism ('tomorrow belongs to me'),² draws out the lampooning figures of various protagonists (the horizontal one on the left, the one in the centre and the large one on the right), each apparently engaged in the same retching behaviour as the Salazar figure in the painting of the preceding year. The soothing golden tones (signalling the birth of a new day and presumably of a new nation)

1 e-fig. 3 Paula Rego, *Iberian Dawn* (1962). Collage and oil on canvas, 71.5 x 92 cm, all rights reserved. Posted by Paula Mariño, 'Paula Rego: A Vontade Subversiva e Liberadora (Parte I)', *Muller-Árbore*, 12 May 2014 (scroll down the page to the third image: click on it to expand), <http://paulampazo.blogspot.com/2014/05/paula-rego-vontade-subversiva-e.html>

2 This reference echoes the song of the same title in Bob Fosse's film of 1972, *Cabaret*. In the film the song acts as a paradigmatic referent signalling the rise of Nazism as embodied in the youth of the nation, and is itself an allusion to an actual song of the Hitler Youth in the 1930s.

which take up almost exactly half of the picture's surface area contrast with the dismal, dysphoric grey of the other half. More crucially, the rising sun of the eponymous dawn is paradoxically located within the grey segment. Which will come to dominate? Sunlight or that mist out of which Don Sebastião was supposed to ride to save the nation, but never did? At the height of the *Estado Novo*, in the words of Fernando Pessoa who died two years after Salazar rose to power, many discerned no hope for the nation:

Neither king nor law, nor peace nor war,
 Can sketch in trace or essence,
 The dim glow of land
 Which signals Portugal's evanescence.
 A dim flame with no fire,
 Like a will'o the wisp.
 No one knows what is desire,
 No one knows their own soul,
 Or what is good or what is foul.
 (What distant anguish weeps nearby?)
 Everything is unstable and perishes,
 All is fragmented and vanishes.
 Oh Portugal, today you are mist...
 Now is the hour!
Valete, fratres.

Pessoa, 'Nevoeiro', (1979)

The same grey tone is picked up by one critic as being one of the signifying elements in *When We Had a House in the Country* (fig. 1.2) (Rosengarten, 1997, 44–46). Its title ironically refers to the colonies as the country cottages of the nation, and operates here as an indictment of the Portuguese colonial undertaking:

[This work] has implicit in it at the level of an absent secondary proposition, an acerbic criticism of Portuguese colonialism. What vision **could** be more critical of the history of Portuguese colonialism than this figuration, in visceral and depressing colours, giving, in a panoramic sweep of the horizontal scene, the simultaneity of the divergent destinies of colonizer and colonized? (Rosengarten, 1997, 44–46)

In the period spanning the decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-90s, Paula Rego abandoned both abstractionism and the cut-and-paste



Fig. 1.2 Paula Rego, *When We Had a House in the Country* (1961). Collage and oil on canvas, 49.5 x 243.5 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

method of figures drawn, painted, cut out and recollaged, and moved instead to a more figurative mode. This retained the narrative element of her previous production, even emphasizing it through the greater transparency that the naturalist method allowed. Many of the paintings of this new phase, including the untitled *Girl and Dog* series (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33) and most of the paintings on family themes (figs. 2.1; 2.3–2.5; 2.8–2.11; 2.13; 2.14), foreground the personal over the political, whilst they nonetheless retain, through allusion, a national-political content beyond the overriding sexual politics that inform them. On occasion, however, over the course of the 1900s Rego also returned to subjects that prioritized the political and colonial/race/class concerns of prior works.

In the first image I shall analyse in detail here, *The Fitting* (fig. 1.3), a mother witnesses the fitting of her daughter's ballgown by a kneeling seamstress.

The relative scale of the figures as well as the play with a foregrounding and backgrounding strategy, as seen so often in Paula Rego, is both perplexing and illuminating. The young daughter looms large in a billowing dress, which, it has been suggested, hides many secrets (Rego quoted in Rosengarten, 1997, 82). Her mother, although the smallest figure of the three, dominates with her authoritative stance. Her fiery, even demonic red hair and her quasi-clerical or militaristic attire is similar in some of its associations to that of the godmother in *The Bullfighter's Godmother* (fig. 2.10), another challenging female figure I shall discuss in chapter 2. In the foreground, though disempowered by her subservient posture and class status, is the seamstress.



Fig. 1.3 Paula Rego, *The Fitting* (1990). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 183 x 132 cm. Saatchi Collection, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The interplay of relations is equivocal, and the demarcation of the respective power positions is mutually contradictory: the mother, by virtue of her familial and class situation, may be the self-evident figure of domestic authority, but her small size relative to the other figures cancels this out to an extent. Her costume, moreover — a female rendition of either a priestly gown or a soldier's uniform — may signal either the aping of church and/or state authority, or transgression outside the sphere of domestic female rule and the usurpation of a masculine mantle of publicly exercised power. The daughter's status, albeit also imposing by virtue of her size, is constrained by her youth and implicit obedience to the mother, from whom her dress, according to Rego, may hide secrets. Additionally, she is her mother's potential successor in the social hierarchy, towering as she does over the kneeling seamstress, who may in fact be about to pull the (class) rug from under her feet or to strip the shirt (dress) off her back. A reversal and a revolution are hinted at, therefore, which would also account for the seamstress's disproportionately large stature in relation to her older mistress.

This atmosphere of threat and the blurring of power demarcations is enhanced by the ghostly figures painted on the wardrobe door, and by the disproportionately small child reclining in a lifeless position on the armchair. A final puzzle is introduced by the half-concealed poster of a Spanish flamenco dancer on the wall behind the wooden counter. The Spanish note introduces ambiguity through the allusion to two possible and mutually contradictory lines of interpretation.

The least challenging is that of the introduction of a schmaltzy, folkloric cod exoticism. Spain has been, for ten centuries, the enemy against which Portugal pitted itself in its determination to remain independent. The latter's Peninsular neighbour, however, and particularly Franco's fascist Spain, was the only destination outside Portugal to which Salazar ever travelled, including the African colonies, which he never visited. Spain alone, therefore (and almost for the first time in the history of two countries, which have traditionally either invaded one another's territories or existed inimically back to back), enjoyed the privilege of quasi-home status in the eyes of the Portuguese leader, as the only territory outside the national borders with which contact was not deemed to defile the 'proudly alone' purity of the *Estado Novo*. Spanish artefacts, and especially the gaudy flamenco dolls that were the most treasured possessions of many Portuguese little girls, were a condoned intrusion of pluriculturalism into the insularity of censored national life. The flamenco poster, therefore, might gesture towards the regime's acceptance of a controllable foreign intrusion, which, in effect, shored up the unity of the Portuguese-Spanish Fascist brotherhood.

On the other hand, however, it might signal the operation of a dangerous underground resistance. In the Iberian Peninsula, flamenco dancing and culture to this day carry implications that extend beyond the crude tourist diet of tame, apolitical exoticism. Flamenco is the music and dance of the Andalusian Gypsies, or Flamencos, and it had its roots in Gypsy, Andalusian, Arabic and Spanish-Jewish folk song. The religious heterodoxy introduced by these origins, some of which have set off resonances of Inquisitorial religious persecution since the Middle Ages, are further confirmed by the positioning of the flamenco practitioners (who also included heterodox Christians) as generally situated on the fringes of social acceptability. The themes of flamenco music and dance tend to be those of despair, love, religion

and death, the key concept in flamenco being the *duende*, which is the surrender by the dancer to absolute emotion. Flamenco, therefore, in its untamed version, becomes both the release of the unbridled self and the art form *par excellence* of the outsider, precisely those elements of society marginalized by a conflation of social, religious and political imperatives. Their interests would have stood in exact antithesis to the emotionally-corseted, religiously orthodox and politically oppressive parameters of the Salazar regime.

It is therefore fitting that the flamenco poster in this painting, which signals a dangerous slippage away from convention at multiple levels, should figure marginally, in a background and lateral position, half-hidden by a wooden sideboard and guillotined along both its horizontal and vertical axes. In a typical Rego sleight of hand, the sidelining of its effect (it features in the background and it is truncated) is countered by two factors: the eye-catching red colour of the dancer's dress and, more worryingly, the species-likeness between it and the ballgown that is being fitted. The outsiderishness and unorthodoxy signalled by the flamenco association lies both outside the centre stage (in the doubly peripheral shape of a foreign figure in an image within an image), but, more threateningly, very much at its heart (in the association between the daughter of the house and a gypsy dancer). The link between a debutante-style dress and flamenco attire draws the latter into a status quo that traditionally marginalized it, but which it thoroughly infiltrates in the manner of the Kristevan abject (Kristeva, 1982). Here, its agency threatens the integrity of the cycle of bloodlines and class, symbolised in the figure of the large daughter of the house. Her secrets, hidden under that suspicious dress (Rego quoted in Rosengarten, 1997, 82) — possibly by the equally large seamstress — remain undetected by a mother whose relative size and nescience may reflect the challenging of power structures within both the family and the nation.

The link between this picture and *The Maids* (fig. 1.4) is class, and specifically the working or underclass, as represented here by the seamstress, and in *The Maids* by the eponymous servants.

The inspiration for this work, Jean Genet's play of the same title (Genet, 1967), heightens the theme of revolution that is already present in the image itself: the toppling and murder by the servant of her master (or in this case mistress, gender here being certainly noteworthy: a man



Fig. 1.4 Paula Rego, *The Maids* (1987). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 242.9 cm. Saatchi Collection, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

in drag but even so a man). The picture has recourse to a discrete but identifiable period and to historical-political markers, which again substantiate a reading informed by the awareness of Salazar's regime as an enduring preoccupation for this artist. The first of these markers is the 1940s-style clothing of the mistress of the house, which makes a reappearance in other paintings of the 80s, such as *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9), also discussed in chapter 2. In Rego's *The Maids*, the mistress about to be murdered is in fact a man in perfunctory drag, as suggested by Rego herself (McEwen, 1997, 163); I shall return in due course to the significance of drag in connection with other pictures. Here the model sports the Brylcreemed haircut of the archetypal 1940s matinée idol, and the undefined shadow on the upper lip suggests the pencil moustaches of the same period, which were, of course, fashionable during the heyday of the *Estado Novo* period. Location markers are also

relevant: in more nation-specific ways. The open-plan living-room-cum-outdoor-veranda, for example, dovetails with the presence of the black maid to suggest the colonial setting already discussed in connection with *When We Had a House in the Country* (fig. 1.2). The colonial effect is further enhanced by the hibiscus flower in a vase on the dressing table, one of the luxuries and spoils of colonial high life. In this context, the inappropriately warm Prince-of-Wales check suit and thick tights worn by the mistress introduce a dislocation that signals eminent failure on the part of the European colonists to adapt and 'go native' (echoes of British dignitaries in the British Raj dressing for dinner in 40C).

The picture, particularly when elucidated by an awareness of the Genet plot, conveys an atmosphere of menace. Visually, the vocabulary of threat ranges from the obvious to the camouflaged. At first glance we are struck by the figure of the blonde child, whose fair hair and pale skin situate her firmly on the European side of the equation, and who is being at the very least restrained but possibly strangled by one of the maids. This ambiguous and potentially threatening pose was to be often repeated throughout Paula Rego's subsequent work, for example in some of the *Girl and Dog* pictures to be discussed next (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33) and in *The Family* (fig. 2.14). In *The Maids*, the next generation of authority figures is summarily dealt with through this act, while the black maid concerns herself with the current mistress (the man in drag who is presumably the mother of the little girl). The threat of the black mammy turned murderess of her masters and her masters' children is a familiar trope in the cultural imagination of slave economies and colonial powers (Christian, 1985, 181–215), and in Paula Rego it will resurface in the context of the *Girl and Dog* series (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33). In *The Maids* the black servant holds no weapon, but her left hand suggestively reaches for something inside a skirt pocket. More eloquently, however, her right hand appears to be positioning the rather bovine mistress's thick neck, much as one would adjust that of an ox being readied for slaughter (or that of an aristocrat's for the guillotine). The silhouettes of the tree branches outside resemble the grasping hands of both maids, the latter a motif that will be repeated in subsequent paintings (*Girl and Dog Untitled c* and *e*, figs. 1.30 and 1.32; *Departure*, fig. 2.8; *The Cadet and His Sister*, fig. 2.9).

The picture features two other intriguing elements. The first, and almost certainly ironic, is the lily artistically displayed on a side-table.

This flower, which will reappear in other paintings, carries well-known connotations of virginity and purity, and in particular associations with the Annunciation to Mary (the angel in the vast majority of depictions of the Annunciation carries a lily in his hand: see for example figs. 1.5; 4.42; 7.2). Here, however, it appears purely decorative in an unholy scene in which women are not in fact pure but forever damned ('thou shalt not kill', no exceptions). If the image refers to Genet's play, this is not a case of an annunciation paving the ground for salvation, but an execution leading to damnation. Indeed, the other significance of the lily is as the customary flower in funerals, here bringing an additional dimension of cruelty: who takes flowers to the funeral of someone they murdered?



Fig 1.5 El Greco, *Annunciation* (c. 1595–1600). Oil on canvas, 91 x 66.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El_Greco_-_The_Annunciation_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

More to the point here, however, are the links that lilies possess to Jesus at the Final Judgement in Christian art. A lily in his mouth or on

either side of his face, in conjunction with a sword, symbolizes mercy in judgement (Hall, 1991, 192–93; Becker, 1994, 178), a reference almost certainly paradoxical in connection with the Rego picture and its allusion to revenge killings: revenge upon the mistress, who is possibly guilty of class/race crimes, and the little girl, who might become so in the future.



Fig. 1.6 Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Last Judgement; Christ with Lily and Sword at Top, Flanked by Virgin and St John the Baptist Interceding on Behalf of the Humans Below*, after Dürer (c. 1500–1534). Print, 11.8 x 10 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Last_Judgment;_Christ_with_lily_and_sword_at_top,_flanked_by_Virgin_and_St_John_the_Baptist_interceding_on_behalf_of_the_humans_below,_after_D%C3%BCrer_MET_DP820341.jpg

The other figure to be considered here is that of the shadowy boar in the foreground, in the bottom right-hand corner. The boar or pig is a complex and sometimes contradictory symbol in art. Its negative connotations are multifarious, and apposite as regards the colonial indictment arguably intended by this image: the pig is a symbol of intemperance and gluttony, because of its habit of rooting about in the dirt, a behaviour



Fig. 1.7 Hans Memling, *The Last Judgement*, triptych, central panel (c. 1467–1471). Oil on panel, 242 x 180 cm. National Museum, Gdańsk. Wikimedia, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MemlingJudgmentCentre.jpg>

possibly coterminous with indiscriminate imperial pillaging. The flip side of this coin is the wild boar's theoretically ennobling symbolism in the Christian art of the Middle Ages, as a representative of the warrior and priestly classes (who, however, were also implicated in European/Portuguese colonial enterprises). It might even serve as a symbol of Christ (in whose name, of course, proselytizing to heathens was justified, Becker, 1994, 233). These latter associations, therefore, would indirectly link this animal back to the military and missionary dimensions of empire between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, as pursued by various European powers including Portugal.

Both the pig and the boar carry other conflicting connotations, namely those of favoured sacrificial animals versus unclean, untouchable and even demonic creatures. But of greater, and possibly more perverse interest here, is the boar's significance within the context of the medieval

theory of the Four Temperaments. Medieval physiology saw the body as governed by four kinds of fluids or humours, which, according to their relative distribution and intensity, determined temperament, disposition and health in individuals. The humours, their associated temperaments and their somatic conditions were also seen to bear an affinity with the four elements and with four animals whose natures they shared, as follows (Becker, 1994, 233):

Phlegm	Phlegmatic	Lamb	Water
Blood	Sanguine	Ape	Air
Bile	Choleric	Lion	Fire
Black bile	Melancholic	Pig	Earth

The pig is the animal associated with melancholy, which, in its turn, is identified with an introspective, intellectual and artistic temperament (Becker, 1994, 233). The cryptic pig in Paula Rego's picture, therefore, lends itself to an alternative (and antithetical) interpretation, not now as the avatar of imperial, colonial or dictatorial greed, but, on the contrary, as the overseeing, demiurgic presence of the artist/creator. It may be relevant, therefore, to listen to the artist herself on the subject of this animal: 'I always wanted to do a pig — it used to be my favourite animal: soft, but at the same time with those prickly hairs. [...] The pig eats its young. It is a pleasant animal to look at [...]' (Paula Rego quoted in Rodrigues da Silva, 1998, p. 9). The 'pleasant animal' that eats its young, the favourite animal of an artist known for painting somewhat worrying family scenes (the *Red Monkey* series, figs. 1.20; 2.3; 2.4; *The Family*, fig. 2.14 to mention but a few), here presumably stands as her alter ego: a creature guilty of a violent crime, whom she seems not only to absolve (in calling it a pleasant animal) but brings into being, imagistically and imaginatively, as the creator of this painting. The judgmental yet anarchic presence of the artist in animal shape will make a return in *In the Garden* (fig. 1.15).

The colonial theme has been reiterated by Paula Rego throughout her work. Two of its most interesting manifestations, *Mother* (fig. 3.19) and *First Mass in Brazil* (fig. 5.2) will be discussed presently. A further example is to be found in one of her most famous paintings, *Time: Past and Present* (fig. 1.8).



Fig. 1.8 Paula Rego, *Time: Past and Present* (1990–1991). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 183 x 183 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

This is one of the artist's most complex works, not only because of its large dimensions but also due to the deployment across the vast expanse of canvas of a multitude of symbols and narratives, jostling with each other for centrality and even for space. An elderly (possibly retired) sailor sits at home, surrounded by memorabilia from his travels, and by representatives of the next generation. The pageant of history unfolds around him but gestures also towards the present and future of his family (his young relatives) as well as towards unchanging national concerns (as betokened by various nautical items to be discussed in detail). The title of the picture invites us to ponder the themes of past and present time. What arguably speaks loudest in it, however, is the uncertainty of the future. At a personal level the future seems assured by the cycle of generations, represented by the old man, the equally old woman, and the three children who are presumably their grandchildren. Even glossing over the noticeable omission of the intermediate generation

of a father and a mother (a phenomenon which, as regards the absent adult/middle-aged male, is repeated to significant effect in *The Dance* (fig. 2.5), the future heralded by the children is not clear-cut. The little girl in the background stands against an empty landscape, which, given her grandfather's calling, presumably ought to be a beach with the sea spreading to the horizon, but is in fact merely an empty expanse of sand that might equally be a desert.

The sea metamorphosed into wasteland — a signifier of either national loss or national comeuppance — is a frequent signifier in Paula Rego. Beyond the iconography of Don Sebastião — the king discussed earlier, who crossed the water but lost his life in North Africa, and in the process lost the nation its independence — Rego, as will be seen, engages antagonistically throughout her work with the sailing adventures of the motherland (see for example the discussion of *Departure*, fig. 2.8; *The Cadet and His Sister*, fig. 2.9; *Mother*, fig. 3.19; *In the Wilderness*, fig. 3.23; and *First Mass in Brazil*, fig. 5.2. Her reasons may be grounded in sound historical common sense, rather than nostalgia. In the aftermath of the revolution of 25 April 1974 which in turn led to the independence of the African colonies in 1975, Portugal underwent a period of economic collapse and social instability — as had also been the case following the loss of the East Indian territories in the seventeenth century and of Brazil in 1822. Post-1975, more than one million people (the so-called and much-resented *retornados*, or *returnees*), left the former colonies over a period of less than two years, and flooded a country with a population of eight million, an almost non-existent welfare infrastructure, and a democracy undergoing teething difficulties. Since then, the national landscape has remained on many counts dismal, even in the face of the obvious rewards of restored democracy and political freedom. Not surprisingly, then, the future for this erstwhile sea-borne empire might, with reason, be depicted as the empty wasteland, or the room without a view that we contemplate in *Time: Past and Present*. This would have been true even in the early 1990s when the picture was created.

Outside, where we might have expected the sea to be, there is nothing. And inside are depicted the protagonists performing what has become a defunct script with appropriate props. Apart from the small girl outlined against the void of the ocean-less landscape beyond the door, the picture includes two other children: a baby in a cradle,

wearing an expression of fear on its face; and a small girl, sitting at a low table, ostensibly writing on a piece of paper which, however, is blank. The ominous symbolism of the up-and-coming generation faced with an empty future, which might represent the end of a national seafaring history, reverberates back to the old man, sitting idly in a chair, over the back of which is draped the oilskin jacket of former sea journeys. This beached sailor is himself the anthropomorphic rendition of the travel trophies arranged around the room, including the hippopotamus statue — a token, presumably, of exotic African destinations — and, more significantly, the small shelved boat, whose diminutive scale and exile on dry land speak clearly of obsolete imperial undertakings. This boat is a forerunner of one of similar import, discussed in chapter 3 in connection with *Mother* (fig. 3.19). And finally, still on the theme of former sailing heroes and ships put out to grass, and as if to add insult to injury, we see the figure of a small doll in the shape of a little sailor boy, presiding over man and ship. This infantilization (or mummification) inflicts yet another blow on the adventure of the Discoveries.

The other elements in the picture are more cryptic. On the walls hang numerous pictures and statuettes. Their subjects are dominated by religious and diasporic themes connected to the imperatives of the maritime enterprise: a praying woman (symbol both of the religious faith underpinning the proselytizing impetus for the maritime discoveries, and of the women left behind by adventuring males: '*quantas mães em vão rezaram [...] para que fosses nosso, ó mar*' ['how many mothers prayed in vain [...] that you might be ours, oh sea'], Pessoa, 1979); an angel (signalling the heavenly reward for national heroes); and a statuette of Saint Sebastian (the namesake of the doomed king who put an end to it all). The pictures strike a melancholic note. A careful reading of the relevant legend tells us that Saint Sebastian, known almost exclusively as the young man pierced with arrows as in the pose depicted here, in fact survived this ordeal only to be murdered at a later time; he might therefore be said to typify (not unlike the Portuguese Don Sebastião) a man who tempted fate once too often. After the arrow episode, a punishment exacted by the Roman authorities for his declaration of Christian faith, he was nursed back to health but returned to confront the Roman emperor, Diocletian. On this second occasion his defiance led him to be beaten to death with clubs, and his body thrown into the

Cloaca Maxima, the main sewer in Rome (Hall, 1991, 276–77). If to risk death once is a misfortune, to do it twice is carelessness. And the same maxim may be applied with a vengeance to Portugal's propensity to lose not one or even two empires, but three, in Asia, Brazil and Africa.

In *Time: Past and Present*, the largest picture-within-a-picture is that of the angel in flight. This figure, at face value uncontentious, may however carry a more cryptic significance. Its overall colour, entirely in tones of red and black, impresses as demonic rather than paradisiacal, and furthermore, it is cloven from top to bottom by a crack in the wood panel, which rends both the picture and the angel in two. The fractured result, compounded by the disturbing colour tones, invites broader speculation. The duality introduced by the crack, for example, might be seen to gesture towards a variety of heterodox (and heretical) religious schisms or Manichean beliefs, which in the Middle Ages unleashed religious persecution on a large scale throughout Europe. And religious heresy, transposed into a twentieth-century Portuguese context, translates as an attack against the church — one of the foundation stones of the *Estado Novo* — and therefore, obliquely, against the regime itself.

Finally, I wish to consider the small figure of the green-tailed mermaid, centre top, next to the painting of the maid with two children. The mermaid, a mythical sea creature that lures sailors to perdition, clearly stands outside Christian acceptability, in antithesis to the nuns, saints and angels of the rest of the interior decor (*pace* the possible unorthodoxies associated with the latter). The mermaid, therefore, acts at the very least as a direct (rather than cryptic) threat both to religious orthodoxy and to the sea-going policy which in the fifteenth century re-drew the lines of national history for five centuries to come. The pagan menace of a creature that sends conquering, empire-building navigators off the straight and narrow path, compounds all the elements of dangerous, non-Marian female sexuality, religious heterodoxy and anti-imperialist political dissidence which ran counter to the rule of government Paula Rego here holds in her line of fire.

The colonial theme has been reiterated by Rego in her work throughout the decades. Other manifestations of this — *Mother* (fig. 3.19) and *First Mass in Brazil* (fig. 5.2) will be discussed presently. In all of them the unfolding of national history is characterized by political mismanagement, with anarchy always close to the surface. This is the



Fig. 1.9 Benjamin Cole, *A Mermaid with Measuring Scale* after A. Gautier D'Agoty (1759). Line engraving, 19 x 10.6 cm. Wellcome Collection, CC BY, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ahv53sks/items?sierraId=>

tenor of the anti-Trinitarian triptych, *History I*, *History II* and *History III*,³ in which the staidness of the official version of national life surrenders to carnivalesque frenzy, and is irremediably wrong-footed by it. In this tripartite précis of history, both individual and collective agency (the demarcation between the two becomes blurred), are reenacted as a nightmare of rape, looting and pillaging, and thus become disconnected from any possible depiction as wise, noble or epic.

History, then, in this artist's vision, is driven by a multifaceted understanding of political management and mismanagement, in the context of which anarchy is always close to the surface.

3 This image has proved difficult to reproduce here, but it can be viewed in Ruth Rosengarten, 'Verdades Domésticas: O trabalho de Paula Rego' in *Paula Rego* (Lisbon: Centro Cultural de Belém; Ministério da Cultura; Quetzal Editores, 1997), pp. 43–117. The images appear on pp. 62–63.

A Home is Not a Home Without a Pet

In the mid- to late-eighties Paula Rego began work on a group of pictures that would emerge as the *Girl and Dog* series (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33). Over the following two years she returned repeatedly to the theme, and what transpires is the beginning of a project still ongoing, whereby the political code is deciphered through the vocabulary of the personal, the familial, the amorous and the sexual, and in which, invariably, the return of the repressed, leading to anarchy, is rendered both anthropomorphically (dogs representing men) and in a gendered fashion (through the figures of dangerous young girls).

In *The Maids* (fig. 1.4), as already observed, the death-bound mistress appeared to be a man in drag, down to the beefy shoulders, muscular legs, masculine period hair and pencil moustache. In what follows, I shall argue that from the mid-1980s onwards Rego cast the male in her pictures as the victim of a variety of murderous female impulses. The urge to do so has required her, on occasion, to transsexualize the protagonists of the literary texts from which she draws inspiration. In her series of images of 1997–98 based on the nineteenth-century novel *The Sin of Father Amaro* by Eça de Queirós, for example, which will be discussed in chapter 3, gender assignments of power and powerlessness are reversed, thus empowering the women (who are sometimes androgynous or even masculine — *Lying*, fig. 3.7; *Girl with Chickens*, fig. 3.8) at the expense of any number of skirt-attired males, clerical or otherwise (*In the Company of Women*, fig. 3.1; *The Ambassador of Jesus*, fig. 3.4; *Mother*, fig. 3.19). The same is true in *The Maids* (fig. 1.4), already discussed, in which the murder of a female mistress prescribed by the original text is both respected and subverted. Respected, since a murder does take place and since the figured who is to be murdered is costumed as a woman; but subverted, because in the end, as would be the case with the later *Father Amaro* pictures (for instance *The Coop*, fig. 3.12), Rego cannot after all bring herself to cast a woman in the victim role, and — in *The Maids* — does so only deceptively, through a cross-dressing or transgender manoeuvre. The deception, moreover, is left deliberately transparent, enabling the viewer to discern the victimized male underneath the rudimentary gender reversal.

Perfunctory disguises that allow the viewer to penetrate the reality they only half-heartedly camouflage are central to the works I shall now discuss, with reference to the metamorphosis from man to dog.

A Dog's Life

At the end of the 1980s Rego painted a series of works revolving around the theme of covert kinslaying (*Departure; The Cadet and His Sister; The Soldier's Daughter; The Policeman's Daughter; The Family*: figs. 2.8; 2.9; 2.11; 2.13; 2.14). These will be discussed in chapter 2. Regarding the *Girl and Dog* images that concern us now, studies from the field of criminology have purported to show that serial killers often begin their criminal careers with episodic animal mutilation (Felthous, 1980, 169–77; Goleman, 1991). If so, how appropriate that this artist's choice of themes, which underwent a significant escalation in violence from the 1980s onwards, should crystallize in that decade with the serial mischief inflicted upon a number of beleaguered dogs by a variety of scary girls. Let us look at Sanda Miller:

The *Untitled Girl and Dog* series of 1986 present variations on the same theme [of violence], but the brutality of the earlier animal drolleries is here replaced by a feeling of uncomfortable suspense in the recurring motif of the pubescent girl, lovingly tending a pet. But instead of tender nurturing, she seems about to inflict unspeakable acts upon the animal, 'castrated' into total passivity. Here 'the dividing line between nurturing and harming — between love and murder — is always hair-thin, for the artist's concern is not with good and evil at their extremes, but with the area between, the acts of cruelty with which love is shot'. (Miller, 1991, 58)

In Latin, the terms 'hospitality' (that which one provides to visitors within one's home), and 'hospital' or 'hospice' (the place where one goes to be sick and sometimes to die) share a common etymology. In Paula Rego, as remarked earlier, homeliness, which, as suggested above, surely involves pets, has a disquieting habit of turning *unheimlich*. Home and the home comforts become unwholesome, yielding not healing and health, but instead pain and death. With reference to the images of girls and dogs (or off-stage dogs) (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), Agustina Bessa-Luís wrote as follows:

The girls play with the dog *as if it were a child*. They bathe it, feed it, shave it *as if it were a man*, the dog is a man whom one pretends to serve in order to dominate him through servitude. The game consists of turning servitude into power. The dog, what does a dog signify? The guardian who patrols, grunts, threatens, warns of the presence of strangers, *or in other words, man*. It is necessary to treat him with respect, spoil him, utter words of enchantment, such as abracadabra, dress him, heal him, lull him into sleep *until he becomes harmless and it is possible to go to him on tip-toe and strangle him*. The girls with the dog are part of a revelation about the [whole oeuvre], a statement with regard to art. (Rego and Bessa-Luís, 2001, 16, italics added)

In an interview with John Tusa, Rego explains that 'painting something about Vic' (Victor Willing, Rego's husband) was the motivation behind the *Girl and Dog* series. Asked whether the paintings made reference to his illness, incapacitation and death from multiple sclerosis in 1988 she replied: 'Yes. It was so embarrassing because it's such a personal thing. You can't do it directly, you have to find a way around it' (Tusa, 2001, 10). This statement, illuminated by a later remark in the same interview ('my work is about revenge, always, always') brings us back in a neat circle to the impetus to do harm to those one loves, quoted in the opening to this monograph. The weakened dog in need of nursing, but instead in peril of being put down, may be man's but is clearly not woman's best friend. Rego's art becomes 'a way of saying the unsayable' (Greer, 1988, 33) and her dogs the displaced object of transference, the targets of a brand of aggression whose *modus operandi* is the simulacrum of stereotypical female caring roles, whether maternal, wifely, sisterly or filial. Thus the acts of nursing, feeding and shaving are translated into preludes to murder.⁴ The same process finds more literal translation in works later on in that decade, so that in retrospect, the dogs in the *Girl and Dog* series emerge as the only less extreme alter egos of a gallery of castrated monkeys (*Wife Cuts Off Red Monkey's Tail*, fig. 2.4), emasculated wolves (*Two Girls and a Dog*, e-fig. 4)⁵ and, more ostentatiously, eviscerated canine protagonists (*Amélia's Dream*, fig. 3.21). Together, they stand as the chorus line for a

4 ABC Australia, 'Carers Who Kill', 24 June 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/carers-who-kill/9889508>; <https://hellocaremail.com.au/relief-suffering-carers-kill/>

5 e-fig. 4 Paula Rego, *Two Girls and a Dog* (1987). Acrylic paint on paper on canvas 150 x 150 cm. © Paula Rego Gallery. Posted by leninimports.com, http://www.leninimports.com/paula_rego_gallery_2.html

performance leading to bloodshed closer to home, within the artist's own species and within everyone's symbolic family, in images such as *The Bullfighter's Godmother* (fig. 2.10), *The Family* (fig. 2.14), *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) and *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13).

Throughout her painting career Paula Rego has returned with some insistence to the theme of cross-dressing, drag and disguises of various natures: the men in women's clothing in *The Maids* (fig. 1.4), *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1), *Mother* (fig. 3.19), and *Olga* (fig. 1.11), or the female figure wearing soldier's fatigues in *The Interrogator's Garden* (fig. 1.10).



Fig. 1.10 Paula Rego, *The Interrogator's Garden* (2000). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 120 x 110 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

And while in *The Maids* the female murder victim is replaced by a man, in the *Girl and Dog* series painted between 1986 and 1987, the man in his turn is replaced by a dog. Paula Rego has stated in the past that in her view dogs are noble, vital and vigorous creatures, and that to reach their status is an honour (interview with Judith Collins, 1997, 125). The caveat

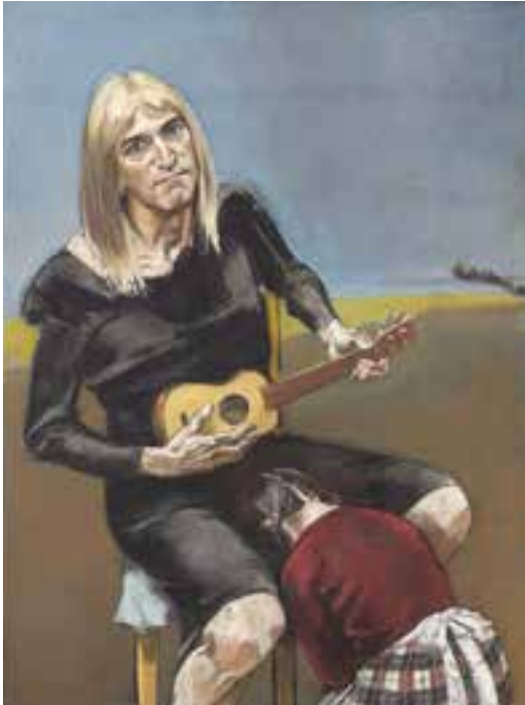


Fig. 1.11 Paula Rego, *Olga* (2003). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 160 x 120 cm. The Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom, all rights reserved.

to this statement, typically devious on the part of this artist, is that she was referring to a series of paintings called *Dog Women* (*Baying*), fig. 1.12; *Bad Dog*, fig. 6.14), painted much later, in 1993.

In these works, indeed, the *Dog Women* in question are vigorous and athletic, but also defiant, irreverent and even threatening. This is clearly not the case with the male dogs of the earlier *Girl and Dog* series (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), which, as Ruth Rosengarten has observed, are passive, docile, sickly or downright invalid (Rosengarten, 1997, 68). Elsewhere, indeed, the artist has commented that in her view the dog is the animal that most closely resembles man, in the same breath reminiscing about a dog she owned as a child, which was very small, which she didn't like very much and which 'had suicidal tendencies, and used to jump out of high windows' (Rodrigues da Silva, 1998, 9). Did he jump or was he pushed?



Fig. 1.12 Paula Rego, *Dog Women (Baying)* (1994). Pastel on canvas, 100 x 76 cm.
 Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In this earlier *Girl and Dog* series, the dog is cast as the avatar of the man (whose best friend he is, according to popular wisdom) and he is clearly imperilled at the hands of a series of perfidious little girls, who variously handle and manhandle (or womanhandle) him, pin him down, feed him, shave him and taunt him, sexually or otherwise. The idealized Portuguese woman of the *Salazarista* vision may have been the selfless wife, mother and carer, but if so, these little girls, the preoccupying distortion of that ideal, are the mothers of future Rego women, whose viciousness to dogs (*Amélia's Dream*, fig. 3.21) and men alike (*The Family*, fig. 2.14), leaves little to the imagination.

The dog is proverbially associated with faithful obedience to its master, a trait that may be carried to abject lengths. In traditional iconography this animal, ironically in view of the gender antagonism explicit in the Rego pictures, is often the symbol of a good marriage

(Becker, 1994, 84–85). In portraiture, for example, if sitting at the feet of a woman, or on her lap, a dog signifies marital fidelity, or in the case of a widow, faithfulness to her husband's memory (Hall, 1991, 105). If Paula Rego is drawing upon these allusions, however, one is tempted to see that gesture as ironic, when deployed, as it is here, within the context of a series of pictures in which the nurturing/wifely/maternal roles entail a level of ambiguity that easily translates into murderous intent. The vindictiveness with which the animals are treated in these images, therefore, also invokes the contempt with which dogs are also viewed in the many European cultures (including Portuguese) that use 'dog' as an insulting epithet (Becker, 1994, 84). In this series, the dog, who is supposedly man's best friend and who also represents him in these images, is mishandled by a girl who variously taunts it, ill-treats it and castigates it for its weakness. The aggression occurs in the context of traditional female activities such as nursing, feeding and bathing, but which, in these pictures, cross a thin dividing line and become violent. The result, one might say, is a gallery of bitchy girls and their dogs, embroiled in a series of unsettling games (of cat and mouse) — with or without the involvement of magic, black or otherwise.

Magic, as it happens, becomes a clear consideration in the next picture, *Abracadabra* (fig. 1.13).

'Abracadabra', as every child knows, is the word that, in fairy tales, triggers a moment of transformation, a leap from established reality into a parallel universe of sorcery. After the word is uttered, in fantasy narratives as well as in this painting, the status quo is destroyed. In this particular picture, especially when contrasted with others in the same series, nothing much has yet happened to the dog. But it will, as indicated by some of the implied metamorphoses in other images, in particular *Two Girls and a Dog* (e-fig. 4), with which this first picture bears particular affinity.

Abracadabra depicts a dog sitting on its haunches between two girls, with one leg lifted in the air. In view of the images to come, it is possible that the dog is exposing its belly in a posture of placation but also ill-advised vulnerability. One of the girls is not touching him, but instead positions her arms as if for cradling, although she holds nothing in them. Her posture heralds the nurturing stance of several of the other pictures in this series, and carries eerie echoes of a Madonna with child, or, as the



Fig. 1.13 Paula Rego, *Abracadabra* (1986). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 157 x 150 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

case may be here, an empty-armed Madonna without child. The themes of motherhood ending in a void and of a Madonna without issue will be explored in detail in chapters 4 and 7, in the context of the abortion pastels of 1998–1999 (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49) and the Virgin Mary cycle of 2002 (figs. 7.1; 7.3; 7.9; 7.10; 7.11; 7.12; 7.19; 7.20). In *Abracadabra* the other girl is depicted holding up both arms and hands in an invocatory gesture that presumably alludes to the title.

Two other elements draw the viewers' attention. First, the thematic touchstone of this series (which, following our argument, is of gender and love relations cast in an antagonistic mould), is ushered in by the hearts worn by the hieratic girl, not on her sleeve but rather as trophies and here displayed on the hem of her dress. In this picture, therefore, sexual politics are played out in the realm of the personal, the domestic, the amorous or the conjugal, and set roles are reversed with considerable fanfare. This intention is trumpeted by the second detail, namely the flowers lying plucked and discarded on the ground. In both art and poetry the flower

figures above all as a symbol of femininity, and since it draws upon sun and rain it stands as a symbol of acquiescence and humility (Becker, 1994, 115): both defining traits of selfless womanhood. Differently coloured flowers stand for different things (white for death or innocence, blue for dreams and mysteries, etc.), but here we are treated to the display of a broad spectrum of colours, signifying possibly Everyflower, or Everywoman (but certainly not Everyman). Or is it Everyman, after all? In still-life paintings flowers symbolize the evanescence of human life (Hall, 1991, 126), and because of their transience are also sometimes associated with the souls of deceased persons (Becker, 1994, 115). Bearing in mind the relative postures of the protagonists of these pictures — the soft-bellied dog, the girl crushing a bed of flowers from which the plucked ones have also presumably originated — the *memento mori* of flower buds prematurely picked should probably be heeded by the dog, rather than the girls. She loves me, she loves me not... Whether the answer to this enquiry is positive or negative, harm may in either case be the outcome for the object of these girlish affections.

The title, *Abracadabra*, suggests metamorphosis or change, and begs the question as to what exactly it is that this particular dog will change into. In parallel with that question, which subsequent pictures of incapacitated dogs amply elucidate, the next picture I wish to consider invites an altogether different kind of enquiry: namely, what it is that the dog might have changed *from*?

In *Two Girls and a Dog* (e-fig. 4), one of the later pictures in the series, we contemplate the same cast of protagonists, with the addition of two important components. With a deviousness that echoes the apparent unimportance of the flamenco poster in *The Fitting* (fig. 1.3), and which was to be repeated in subsequent works (the diminutive soldier and *mater dolorosa* figures in *The Soldier's Daughter*, fig. 2.11; the cockerel in *The Cadet and His Sister*, fig. 2.9), these components remain in the background, ostensibly as filler details or decor. In *Two Girls and a Dog*, they are the figures of a wolf-like dog and the silhouette of a man. I will return to these presently.

In this picture, which Rego has said is a deposition (more about this later), a dog is being shod by two girls, one of whom restrains his efforts to resist, and the other of whom forces a curious pair of slippers back to front onto his hind paws. The first thing that strikes us about this image

is the use of force, much more explicit than in *Abracadabra* (fig. 1.13). Here, the trajectory from masculine/canine power to powerlessness bespeaks much more explicitly the violence entailed in that change. The slippers being forced upon the dog's feet are of a curious type: furry like an animal's paws, but shaped like human feet with toes. They signal the half-achieved metamorphosis either from man to beast or vice-versa. The direction of change remains unclear, but in either case it is problematic for two reasons: first, because it signposts the imposition, clearly not welcomed by the dog, of a self that is not his own (since he is literally being forced to step into someone else's shoes); and second, the fact that those shoes are back to front alludes, with comic but also tragic literalness, to impaired progress along a route that appears to be going nowhere fast.

Regression is incorporated into the picture, not merely along the dimension of space (footwear that walks backwards), but, even more importantly, of time. The wolf in the upper left-hand corner may represent the past (pre-historic) ancestor of the domesticated or even abused animal in the foreground. Other than the Roman worship of the wolf, from the Middle Ages onwards the lupine acquired associations of evil, greed and heresy (Hall, 1991, 343). The wolf, the villain of any number of children's tales, is in many ways a true embodiment of the outlawed and dangerous Other. Christian symbolism, for example, addresses primarily the wolf-lamb dyad that casts the lamb as the symbol of the Christian faithful and the wolf as the embodiment of demonic interests (Becker, 1994, 331–32). More to the point as regards this picture, dogs have sometimes been depicted attacking wolves (Hall, 1991, 343), (for example in some Dominican paintings, possibly as an illustration of fighting the enemy within the self).⁶

Clearly, in the Paula Rego picture, an added dimension of complexity comes into play, since the wolf may be the representative of unorthodoxy but here it is shown as a small figure in the background, whilst his tamed relative is either a defeated/deposed (from the cross) hound/Son of God or worse, an abused pet. And he is further weakened by the presence of the two girls who, by assuming an atypical guise of female violence, reopen

6 The term 'Dominican' has sometimes been said to be based on the false etymology '*domini canis*' (hounds of God). Be that as it may, in fig. 1.15 the black and white dogs represent the protection of the faithful against evil.



Fig. 1.14 Andrea di Bonaiuto, *Church Militant and Triumphant* (1365–1367). Fresco, Basilica of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea_di_bonaiuto,_dettaglio_dal_cappellone_degli_spagnoli.jpg

hostilities between the mainstream and the outsider, thereby willingly casting themselves as the new occupants of the latter role. In this picture, it would appear, we are dealing with a wolf in girls' clothing.

In chapter 2 we will return to the topic of dogs/wolves who fall foul of little girls. And as ever in Paula Rego's work, the agenda — in this instance the one guiding human-canine interaction — will also be reflected through the prism of gender.

In *Two Girls and a Dog*, as suggested, the wild associations of the wolf are undercut by its size; likewise, the dog's position in the background and its lack of importance within the narrative of the picture emphasize its current domesticated status. Analogous conjectures may apply also to the figure of the gender-ambiguous man in a skirt, whose compromised status within the painting is more or less equivalent to that of the wolf, or possibly even less significant, since the wolf here might be said to carry greater imagistic impact than the man, by virtue of its striking eyes, which contrast with the facelessness (anonymity) of the shadowy human figure. In Rego, the weakening effect upon men of dressing in drag has already been observed, and will re-appear in later works (*The*

Company of Women, fig. 3.1; *Mother*, fig. 3.19; *Olga*, fig. 1.11). Be that as it may, both the wolf (now evolutionarily obsolete, because ‘civilized’ and tamed into a dog), and the eunuch-like skirted man⁷ (whose thunder is stolen in all respects — size, visibility, location — by the two girls in the foreground), stand out as exponents of their own peripheral status. Compositionally and thematically, each signals redundancy in a picture that casts girls on top.

Finally, the wolf carries one last association that might be of relevance to an anti-imperial undertow in this artist’s work. The she-wolf who in legend suckled Romulus and Remus became the icon of Roman imperial power. And the Roman Empire — through the image of the fasces, a symbol of Roman power — became itself the precursor to European fascism in the 1930s and 40s. More specifically, the influence of the Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula remains one of the key cultural roots of historic Portugal, including its imperial ambitions. However, empires — be they Roman, Portuguese or otherwise — eventually disintegrate, and Paula Rego has enjoyed rubbing salt in that wound since her earliest cut-and-paste works of the 1960s. In that context, therefore, the figure of a Roman wolf fallen upon hard times and demoted either to a background prop or to the status of domestic dog acquires political relevance. And through another cross-gender/cross-species/cross-dressing sleight of hand, when the female rendition of the symbol in question (the she-wolf of ancient Roman legend) changes sex and species and becomes the canine companion of a man in a skirt, all power is lost. In *Two Girls and a Dog* the imperial lupine mother metamorphosed into male pet symbolises the decline of men and empires, a decline emphasised by means of the pain undergone by a weakened canine male at the hands of a daughter/wife/mother.

If, much in the manner of the beleaguered dog, the man and the wolf are seen here as creatures on their way to extinction, or already extinct, their in-built fragility is reiterated by the last two components of the picture: first, the plucked daisy (once again, she-loves-me, she-loves-me-not) which, much as in the previous picture, may at any moment suffer the insult added to injury of being trampled by a sturdy female

7 Paula Rego has sometimes painted men in skirts as an indicator of male weakness and peril, for example in *The Sin of Father Amaro* series (*The Company of Women*, fig. 3.1; *Mother*, fig. 3.19).

foot. And second, the clay pitcher. The popular Portuguese proverb that proclaims that a pitcher taken to the fountain too often is bound to break — *'tantas vezes vai o cântaro à fonte que um dia quebra'* (which is another way of warning against pushing one's luck too far) is here taken one step further by a destructive authorial imperative, which seems unwilling to leave desirable breakages in the hands of fate: the hammer positioned next to the pitcher (which figures also as a potential weapon of assault in *Prey*, fig. 1.28) can have one use, or perhaps two, or even three: the annihilation of pitcher, flower and dog in one fell swoop. For they are all proven to be mortal, including the Son of God in images of depositions such as the one that follows.

The next picture, *In the Garden* (fig. 1.15), engages with themes of political import beyond antagonism in matters of gender.



Fig. 1.15 Paula Rego, *In the Garden* (1986). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

We are faced once again with the same cast of two girls restraining a dog showing signs of discomfort. The other components of the picture are a gladiatorial pair composed of a lion and an ape, a tiny escaping hare, and a towering cactus plant. The picture invites questions regarding

geographic location, which, as is often the case in Rego's work, carry political significance. The ethnicity of the two girls is not entirely clear, but they might be black, a possibility repeated in other paintings of the *Girl and Dog* series (for example *Abracadabra*, fig. 1.13; *Girl and Dog Untitled a, b* and *g* — e-fig. 6 and figs. 1.29 and 1.33 respectively). The native habitat of the lion and also, though not exclusively, of the ape, is Africa, and this is true too of the giant cactus, which sports heart-shaped flowers nestling between vicious looking spikes. If the heart shapes, as suggested previously, are shorthand for the personal love/marriage dimension, with all its implied Regoesque dangers, the African allusion keeps that personal aspect linked to wider concerns of national (and specifically colonial) politics.

Let us begin with the figure of the ape. In Christian art and literature the ape is almost uniformly evil, representing heresy and paganism. An ape with an apple in its mouth signifies the Fall of Man (which, in the final analysis, as is well known, was more readily attributed to Woman), and an ape tied up by a chain symbolizes the defeat of Satan. In the ape, man recognized a baser image of himself, such that the former came to represent vice in general, or humanity gone astray (Hall, 1991, 20).



Fig. 1.16 George Stubbs, *A Monkey* (1799). Oil on panel, 70 x 55.9 cm. Walker Gallery, Liverpool. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Stubbs_-_A_Monkey_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg



Fig. 1.17 Zacharie Noterman, *Monkey Art* (1890). Oil on panel, 54 x 65 cm. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zacharie_Noterman_-_Monkey_art.jpg



Fig. 1.18 Pseudo-Jan van Kessel II, *Still Life of Fruit with a Monkey and a Dog* (after c. 1660). Oil on copper, 16.5 x 22 cm. Dorotheum, Vienna. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pseudo-Jan_van_Kessel_II_-_Still_life_of_fruit_with_a_monkey_and_a_dog.jpg



Fig. 1.19 Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Antique Monkey* (1726). Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 65.4 cm. The Louvre, Paris. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chardin,_la_scimmia_antiquaria,_1726_ca._02.JPG



Fig. 1.20 Paula Rego, *Red Monkey Drawing* (1981). Acrylic on paper, 76.5 x 56 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

More curiously, however, from the Middle Ages onwards the ape, like the pig discussed previously, came to represent the activities of painting and sculpture (a famous example being Picasso's lithograph *Monkey as Painter*, e-fig. 5),⁸ an iconography also adopted by Rego.

The artist's skill, being regarded (and disregarded) by the likes of Plato as essentially imitative, became linked to this animal, also known for its miming abilities. The '*Ars simia Naturae*' (Art apes Nature) aphorism resulted in frequent depictions of the artist as an ape engaged in painting a portrait, sometimes that of a woman (Hall, 1991, 22).

But what are we to make of the use of a monkey that symbolically links artistic practice to sinfulness and evil, in the work of a woman who often places another animal (the dog) closely associated with loyalty to his (male) master, in the position of cast-down victim?

The dog in *In the Garden* is forcibly held by a black girl, whose assumed homeland (one of the African colonies) has been subject to claims of ownership by Portugal since the fifteenth century. Here, noticeably, the dog is clearly in paroxysms of pain. If every dog has its day, this day isn't it for Rego's beast, nor for the interests it represents. The latter are betokened *in absentia* by the ambiguous streak of blue in the background, which might indicate the sky or alternatively the vanishing ocean of unspecified sea-borne empires. The dog's pain may or may not be related to the actions of the hands ambiguously positioned near its backside, with a potentially violating intent that foreshadows the intrusive hand of another young girl in *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13). Cradling arms and homely aprons notwithstanding, therefore, the dog's obvious suffering gives the lie to any notion of maternal nurturing. And it is perhaps for this reason that the hare, an established symbol of the Earth-as-mother, as well as of human fertility and maternity (Becker, 1994, 137–38), is depicted in diminutive scale, and about to exit the picture plane.

In the absence of a caring mother, or at least of an orthodox one, the dog may be in difficulties, but he is not alone. The third animal in this composition is the lion engaged in a fight with the ape. The lion is the traditional representative of the ruling status quo and of its strong (absolutist) leaders. He is the king of beasts, symbolizing power and justice in their masculinist, imperial and Christian configurations. The

8 e-fig. 5 Picasso's lithograph *Monkey as Painter* (1954), 50.6 x 37.2 cm. © icollector.com. Posted by icollector.com, https://www.icollector.com/Monkey-as-Painter-Pablo-Picasso-Lithograph_i30709487

values and interests of God, King and Country (imperial or otherwise), as well as of patriarchy (the male lion as leader of the pack), are all embraced within the symbolism of this animal. In *In the Garden* (fig. 1.15), however, we see a lion antagonistically challenged by (and recoiling from) that artist-ape, which itself symbolizes evil, as do the girlish torturers of the dog, the latter depicted here as the lion's (man's) sidekick. All this animosity is unleashed within a garden several apples short of an Eden, and whose vegetation, favouring spiky African cactii, is conspicuously lacking in trees of either Life or Knowledge. In this non-paradisiacal scene, girls, women, female artists in the guise of monkeys, and even plants that represent daughter-colonies, mutiny against, and seemingly overcome both faithful domestic animals and the great beasts of the jungle, both portrayed here in various degrees of peril.

The dog is very small in the next painting, *Looking Back*.



Fig. 1.21 Paula Rego, *Looking Back* (1987). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

This picture involves what turns out to be an unholy female trinity of three girls, one sitting on a bed, one lying on it and one kneeling beside it. A dog, disproportionately small in relation to the rest of the figures, crouches under the bed. McEwen has suggested, albeit rather coyly, that the girl sitting on the bed is masturbating (McEwen, 1997, 146). If so, the traditional set-up of a woman posed as object of voyeuristic titillation for both artist and intended audience (both conventionally male), is here challenged in various ways. First, the euphemistic sexual delectation provided by the stylized, self-offering canonical nudes of traditional Western art (figs. 4.11; 4.12; 4.13; 4.17; 4.18 and others) is replaced by the cruder notion of exhibitionistic onanism. Second, the replacement of a female nude by a fully-clothed set of models (a forerunner of the abortion works of the 1990s, figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49) curtails the more obvious and immediate source of voyeuristic male gratification. Third, the act of self-sufficient pleasure for women (the sisters doing it for themselves) absolutely excludes men either as participants or recipients (viewers). Fourth, the potential *voyeurs* within the painting are *voyeuses*, and moreover they are girls rather than adults. Male expectations surrounding female bodies, involving more-or-less specific spectator fantasies about actual sex with the female object under contemplation, are contravened in this picture, through the self-sufficiency implicit in an act of masturbation that here does not even require the aid of a fetishistic representation of masculinity. And finally, the in-built, ready-made and all-female audience (all-female, since the male dog is ostentatiously consigned under the bed and has no view of the proceedings), not only denies access to male-viewer fantasies about sex with the aesthetic object but goes further and negates the very existence of a male gaze. The state of visual exclusion indicated by a dog that can see nothing extends to a similarly disenfranchised male audience, and to the obstruction of a titillated male gaze which here simply is not in question.

The act of masturbation, which is the blatant negation of an Other (see also chapter 3, fig. 3.2), and here specifically of a male partner, invites instead the partial participation of female spectators within and outside the picture, as partners in these various transgressions, from which the male is elided, except possibly as victim. The no-can-do, no-can-see token presence of the tiny dog serves to emphasize his exclusion

from any dimension of significant agency, animal disempowerment being instead re-affirmed by the reclining girl wrapped in a furry blanket. The blanket (pelt, fleece: a hunting trophy?) achieves her partial metamorphosis into beast (half-animal, half-woman, a twin of another dangerous half-and-half female, namely the mermaid (part-woman, part-fish) of *Time: Past and Present*, fig. 1.8), and thus stands for a different kind of appropriation. What is indicated here, as is the case in *Red Riding Hood (Mother Wears Wolf's Pelt)* (fig. 6.2), is the claim to another creature's skin, to non-human status and/or to a license for ferocity, which that animal may have once shown but is now hers. The girl's leonine features and mane-like hair associate her with the lion which, in the previous picture, configured the status quo in a more orthodox male rendition.

And if it were necessary to labour the point, this particular female lion (a lioness in drag, given her authority-conferring transgender mane), carries a bird on her shoulder, in the style of the standard cartoon pirate with his parrot, thereby reaffirming the suggestion of transgressive power. Here, therefore, she is both an outlaw pirate and a she-lion, a female imbued with stereotypically male powers, and all the more dangerous by virtue of that unmasked femaleness.

The sexual taunt of do-it-yourself sex in *Looking Back*, rendering the male redundant as it does, is taken one step further in *Girl Lifting Up Her Skirt to a Dog* (fig. 1.22).

Here the canine male is again brought into play, but merely as an aid to female malice. The dog faces the girl expectantly, but also with incomprehension, and there is no question here of male voyeuristic pleasure. His cocked ears and curled tail indicate that he is waiting for her next move. Other than the girl's provocative stance faced with her perplexed spectator, the rest of the picture also bespeaks aggressive sexuality. The phallic mountain in the background reiterates a prowess of which the dog himself appears incapable, and echoes the girl's taunting challenge, as do the blood red roses, another hackneyed signifier of sexuality, which here, as in *Abracadabra*, fig. 1.13, *Two Girls and a Dog*, e-fig. 4, and *Snare*, fig. 1.23) are scattered on the ground, ready to be trampled.

The dangers of critical analysis based on biographical information are too well-rehearsed to require further elaboration. However, Paula Rego herself opens the door to this line of speculation through the



Fig. 1.22 Paula Rego, *Girl Lifting Up Her Skirt to a Dog* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 80 x 60 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

information she has offered in interviews and in her book written jointly with Agustina Bessa Luís (Rego and Bessa Luís, 2001). The *Girl and Dog* series, as mentioned already, came about as the result of her desire to 'do pictures about Vic' in the last years of his life, before his death from multiple sclerosis in 1988. MS, a famously unpredictable disease, can be particularly cruel to men, causing, among other forms of incapacity, impotence. In *Girl Lifting Her Skirt to a Dog*, the sexual taunt is unmistakable, as is the dog's incapacity to respond to it.

The striped pattern on the girl's dress, which will reappear in a variety of forms in other paintings, carries semantic implications that variously allude to the traditional prison uniforms of story-book illustrations (Portugal), or to the attire of the standard comic-strip burglar (Britain). What remains technically ambiguous but painfully

decipherable, both in this and in other pictures, are the identities of the jailer and the prisoner. In view of Willing's entrapment by a condition that in its later stages deprived him of movement and reduced him to absolute dependence, the answer is easily come by.

Just as striking is the ambiguity conveyed by the position of the girl's hands, which in this picture lift the skirt in a gesture of sexual provocation, whilst in *Snare* (fig. 1.23) and in *The Little Murderess* (fig. 1.26), both of 1987, they enact violence and murder by strangulation. Bodily harm and homicide (and I would argue that it is very much homicide, rather than caninicide which is represented in the latter two images), therefore become akin to the sexual provocation of *Looking Back* and *Girl Lifting Her Skirt to a Dog*, with which these pictures share a similarity of intent.



Fig. 1.23 Paula Rego, *Snare* (1987). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. British Council Collection. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In *Snare*, sexual innuendo is apparent, albeit less explicit than in *Girl Lifting Up Her Skirt to a Dog*. The contrasting poses of power and powerlessness again dominate a picture in which the gender allocation of the standard missionary position gives way to a girls-on-top reversal played out as the male slave/female dominatrix of sado-masochistic bondage. Bondage, physical, sexual or otherwise, is brought into the equation by the title of the picture, and had also become apparent in some of the untitled *Girl and Dog* paintings of the previous year, to be discussed presently.

In *Snare* the narrative of toppled power — male by female — is also multilayered. As in previous pictures, the image features red roses as indices of sexuality: one plucked and abandoned on the ground beside the helpless dog, who is himself about to be ‘plucked’ (in the sexual sense of the term) by this unmaidenly maiden.⁹ The other flower is triumphantly displayed as the head dress (crowning glory) of a girl who, eerily, in the midst of violence, displays not a hair out of place.

The gendered reversal of fortunes is reinforced by the figures of the crab and the horse. By virtue of the shell that protects it from the outside world, as well as its connection to water, the crab is associated with the womb (Becker, 1994, 69), or the wish to return to it. This impulse, in turn, is psychoanalytically associated with what, for want of a better term, might be termed vulnerable mummy’s boys. In Christian symbology the crab also bears links to Christ and with the Resurrection (Becker, 1994, 69). As such, therefore, here it provides also a political link (and challenge to, or lampooning of) the *Estado Novo* regime, whose interests, as mentioned previously, were entangled with those of the Catholic Church. This helpless sea creature might play on the identification between Salazar and the pseudo-messianic, lost Don Sebastião (unable to return from overseas to right historical wrongs) as well as undermining the regime’s propaganda machinery, which drew upon the symbolism of Christian iconography. The purpose of such propaganda was to present Salazar as the would-be saviour of the nation: a modern Don Sebastião who *did* return and *did* claim Africa — albeit now its southern

9 Paula Rego appears often to play on the visual pun, and on the possible metaphorical implications of plucking (plucked flowers, plucked geese — in *The Soldier’s Daughter*, fig. 2.11), as alternative renditions of the theme of the weakening of the male (Samson shorn).

rather than northern parts (Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau and the Atlantic archipelagos, as opposed to Morocco and Ceuta) — to replenish the nation's piggy bank. In Paula Rego's work, however, the upended Christian crab, reminiscent of the proverb that charity begins at home, is clearly unable to set itself to rights, much less a nation and its wider troubles.

The crab here evinces impotence rather than the gift of eternal life, and it finds an avatar in the harnessed horse in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture, which, much like the hare of *In the Garden* (fig. 1.15), is literally, as well as figuratively on its way out. The horse, sometimes represented as a chthonic or infernal creature, has traditionally been understood to harbour associations with life-giving, albeit dangerous, forces. Its strength can signify unbridled impulsiveness but, if harnessed by reason, it can convey global justice (the white steed of *Christus triumphator*, Becker, 1994, 145–46).



Fig. 1.24 John Thornton (glazier), *Apocalypse* (detail Christ on Horse (Apocalypse) (1405–1408). Great East Window, York Minster, United Kingdom. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:York_Minster_-_Christ_on_the_White_horse.jpg

As a symbol of youth, strength and sexuality, furthermore, the horse is the favoured mount of battling kings and noblemen (Becker, 1994, 145–46), well worth a kingdom, and without which they risk becoming Richard III. It is also, and very much to the point here, the attribute of Europe (Europa), as one of the mythical Four Parts of the World.



Fig. 1.25 Luca Giordano, *Series of The Four Parts of the World: Europe* (between 1634 and 1705). Oil on canvas, 60 x 75 cm. Fundación Banco Santander, Madrid, Spain. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Luca_Giordano_copies_-_Series_of_the_Four_Parts_of_the_World._Europe_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

The latter, usually personified as a female figure in the art of the Counter-Reformation (and therefore of an absolutist Catholic imperative), serves as a reminder of the worldwide spread of Roman Catholicism, with Europe in particular habitually foregrounded as the Queen of the World. Weapons and a horse allude to victory in war (Hall, 1991, 129). In *Snare*, however, the horse, which is neither glorious nor unbridled nor triumphant, is harnessed not to reason, but to a tame, domestic wheel-cart, and it is depicted as diminutive in scale. The triumphant leadership it might have embodied, therefore, much like the overturned Christ associations of the crab, appear enfeebled. And if the horse in one of its guises represents Europe and its bellicose imperatives, the latter, which in a specific Portuguese context translate

as the imperial outward reach of the nation, in this image share the plight of the disempowered crab.

Snare, as already argued, bears clear affinities with *The Little Murderess* (fig. 1.26), through a move that turns sex into violence, specifically murder.



Fig. 1.26 Paula Rego, *The Little Murderess* (1987). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Here the positioning of the girl's hands, reminiscent of those of the servant poised to attack her mistress in *The Maids* (fig. 1.4) will find later echoes in the sister grooming her brother for war in *Departure* (fig. 2.8), while the act of grooming becomes in its turn coterminous with aggressive behaviour in some of the *Girl and Dog* pictures still to be discussed, as well as in later images such as *The Family* (fig. 2.14), *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) and *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13).

Although chronologically part of the *Girl and Dog* series, neither *The Little Murderess* nor *Prey* (fig. 1.28) feature a dog. Both, however, fit thematically within the preoccupations of the series. In *The Little Murderess* the composition, as clarified by its title, focuses upon a young girl with a ligature stretched between her hands, poised to strangle or having just strangled a victim off-stage (which is where, in time-honoured tradition, the bloodiest crimes of Greek tragedy traditionally take place). If this connection were not enough to elevate the girl's status, her size and scale, defined as they are in proportion to the other objects in the picture (the chair, the pelican, and the ox and cart in the background), would do so beyond any doubt.

In this picture it is unclear whether the murder has already occurred or is about to take place, but whether the former or the latter, the annihilation is in any case already so thoroughly achieved that the victim figures only *in absentia*, and is noted metonymically by means of a pile of (sacrificial?) clothes scattered across the bed and floor.

The ox may throw some light on the murder that has or is about to be committed, since it is one of the sacrificial animals of choice in Antiquity; it also functions as a symbol of contemptible (bovine) contentedness, as well as meekness in the teeth of an inauspicious fate. Even more revealing, however, is the presence of the pelican perched on a chair, painted in the manner of a typical Portuguese arts-and-crafts object. The pelican, present elsewhere in Paula Rego (*Sleeping*, fig. 1.27; *The Family*, fig. 2.14) elicits the collective folk memory of the self-sacrificial motif *par excellence*, as the bird which pierced its own breast in order to feed its young with its blood. But when murder and suicide become indistinguishable, it might not be unreasonable to suspect a cover-up.

This legend of the self-wounding pelican, however, was the later version of an earlier rendition. In the earlier narrative the bird plays a less laudable role and kills its ugly offspring, although three days later it repents and revives them with blood from a self-inflicted wound (Becker, 1994, 230). In the Middle Ages the initial version gave way to the later one, which itself becomes allusive of Christ's sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. Medieval fastidiousness, it would appear, recoiled from the possibility of a murderous mother, as well it might. The Medea-style echoes of mothers turned killers, which reverberate



Fig. 1.27 Paula Rego, *Sleeping* (1986). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Arts Council of Great Britain. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

through the paradigm of Lilith,¹⁰ Eve and the Fall (loss of eternal life), were assiduously smothered by the medieval mentality that prevailed in the following centuries, promoting, as it did, the cult of Mary as the antidote for the shortcomings of humanity's First Mother.¹¹ The worship of Mary, as we have seen, was also encouraged in Portugal by the political authorities under Salazar. And it is tackled head-on by Paula

10 See chapter 4 for the story of Lilith, Adam's first wife and murderer of her male children.

11 See for example Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador 1985).

Rego, in her portrayals of young girls whose mock-maternal, murderous behaviour sets them on an early path to violence. In this picture, the selfish and selfless pelican echoes the moral uncertainty of seemingly good mothers who may after all turn out to be atavistically bad.

Young girls are the mothers of the future, and the mother in Portugal, as we have seen, was the pivot around which home, nation and ideology gravitated. She was simultaneously the lowest of the low in the power stakes of *realpolitik* and the foundation stone of the power infrastructures. If the mother were to run amok, the entire edifice of society would collapse. In *Prey* (fig. 1.28), more clearly even than in *The Little Murderess*, Rego appears to treat us to the spectacle of that downfall.



Fig. 1.28 Paula Rego, *Prey* (1986). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 150 x 150 cm.
Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Not uncommonly in the case of this artist, seemingly unimportant details open up paths to interpretation. This will be the case, for example, when we come to look at *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) and *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11). In *Prey*, the title of the painting itself prompts us to focus on small details, since the eponymous figure must be the bird caught between the jaws of the small fox in the background, in the bottom right-hand corner of the picture. In European lore the fox is the villain of countless folk tales, standing for slyness and cunning, and, in medieval art, for the Devil and his attributes, including mendacity, injustice, intemperance, greed and lust (Becker, 1994, 120). The fox, whose shadow is here projected upon a satanic red ground, grips between its teeth a bird that appears to be a dove, the iconic representation of no less than the Holy Spirit itself. The bloody encounter between the two animals thus lays down the battle lines between good and evil, as enacted by the picture's more prominent protagonists, in what may turn out to be a biblical but also a political allegory.

The imperilled dove sets the tone for yet another attack by Rego on the holy regalia of Catholicism and — following yet again the logic that her enemy's friends are her enemies — on its secular (politicized, state) associations. And the religious theme is reiterated through the inclusion of the three figs situated discreetly in the shadow of the girls' bodies. In the Judaeo-Christian imagination, figs carry an association with the leaves with which Adam and Eve covered their nakedness in the aftermath of the Fall. More to the point, given both the nature of the discussion underway here, and the fact that we are presented with the fruits, rather than with the leaves, it is relevant to note that in the New Testament Jesus curses a fig tree to be fruitless as a condemnation of the Jewish people (Matthew 21:18–22, Becker, 1994, 111). In Christian art a withered fig tree came to symbolize the synagogue as the locus of religious heresy. And the fig tree sometimes replaces the apple tree as the Tree of Knowledge, and as the source of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. In Paula Rego's work, religious heresy tends to address itself to Roman Catholic rather than Jewish orthodoxy. In this case, however, Judaism may be signalled by the presentation of fruits that act either as the ostentatious display of the shameful (but here shameless) forbidden fruit, or as the defiant yield of a tree supposedly cursed with Semitic barrenness, but in this instance disobediently fruitful.

As is often the case in her work, in *Prey* Paula Rego draws upon the device of distorted scale to make her point. In the absence of perspectival points of reference that might justify the appearance of monumental size, the two girls appear to be giants within a relatively dwarfed world. They stand by and look down upon a building whose small scale is, it would appear, real, as opposed to being the effect of distance or angle. Because of this, and because of its compositional juxtaposition with the girls, the building appears to be fingered as the target of an attack that would link it to the ensnared bird — possibly about to fall foul of a malicious foot or the conveniently positioned hammer (analogous to that in *Two Girls and a Dog*, e-fig. 6), which is almost as big as the building itself. Since the edifice may be next in line for destruction, it is interesting to speculate on its function, which is undetermined by its appearance. It might fit into any one of several categories, including that of residential, religious or public building — or all these rolled into one. Like *Everyflower*, in a previously discussed work (*Abracadabra*, fig. 1.13), this may be *Everybuilding*, the amorphous representation of any or all aspects of communal existence. Be that as it may, its primary function here appears to be that of foregrounding its own destructibility. And whether it is a venue for domestic, religious or municipal/state activities, its impending destruction hints yet again at a direct attack against the status quo that anchors itself on these edifices, and against the rule of law they underwrite.

The next seven pictures to be considered are very much a series within this series. They are all tableaux rather than narratives, and with one minor exception (or possibly two), they include only two protagonists, namely the girl and dog central to the paintings just discussed. All six thematize scenes involving the nurturing of the dogs by the girls: spoon-feeding, offering a drink, shaving, caressing.

Beginning with *Girl and Dog Untitled a* (e-fig. 6),¹² this image conveys the lowest level of aggression of the six. A woman offers a drink to a dog whose mouth she may or may not be forcing open with her thumb.

The most contentious aspect of this image, which is repeated in subsequent and more openly aggressive images, is the manner in which

12 e-fig. 6 Paula Rego, *Girl and Dog Untitled a* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm. © hundkunst. Posted by Petra Hartl, 'Paula Rego — *Girl and Dog*', *hundkunst*, 30 November 2018 (sixth image down, on right-hand side of panel), <http://www.petrahartl.at/hundundkunst/2018/11/30/paula-rego-girl-and-dog>

the dog held on the girl's lap is stripped of both species-specific (canine) and adult characteristics, becoming reduced instead to the status of a human infant with all the helplessness that entails. Upon closer inspection, however, other elements stand out. The woman appears to be black, a fact that puts out yet another semantic feeler in the direction of those earlier and later works of anti-colonial intent.¹³ In this context, a wealth of documentary and imagistic evidence from civil rights and earlier abolitionist activism sets up reverberations here, creating an effect that is both poignant and menacing. The trope of the black mammy obliged to nurse the children of her white masters, possibly at the sacrifice of her own offspring, which has echoes in every colonial or apartheid regime, is, in its more sentimental or *whitewashed* renditions, a comic salt-of-the-earth character (Mammy in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Eliza in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). As such, it obfuscates a reality closer to that of the tragic *mater dolorosa*. In the latter capacity, however, the black mother of generations of enslaved or colonized sons is a bereft mother with the potential for demonic metamorphosis, all the way up to and including the murder of those master-race children, or masters, or dog-avatars. And the latter, in their turn, in the Paula Rego version of this blueprint plot, are variously infantilized, made fragile and metaphorically or concretely manoeuvred into a soft-belly-uppermost position, prior to the striking of a variety of blows.

In *Girl and Dog Untitled b*, the atmosphere of doom is reinforced through recourse to a variety of compositional props, such as the lilies on the floor in the foreground.

Lilies occasionally feature in Paula Rego's pictorial universe (in *The Maids*, fig. 1.4, but most notably in a painting of the following decade, *First Mass in Brazil*, fig. 5.2, to be discussed in chapter 5. Historically, the iconography of the lily possesses a multiplicity of meanings, as I discussed earlier in this chapter. It is a flower closely associated with death; it is also the flower almost always wielded by the archangel Gabriel in pictures of the *Annunciation* (figs. 1.5, 4.42, 7.2), and possibly for that reason, via a tortuous sublimating path (sexual impregnation transposed to virginal conception), as well as due to the shape of its

13 Examples of Rego's work that engage openly with the themes of empire and colonialism are *When We Had a House in the Country* and *First Mass in Brazil*.



Fig. 1.29 Paula Rego, *Girl and Dog Untitled b* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm.
 Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

pistil, this flower, in tandem with its association with purity and innocence, also carries a strong phallic significance (Becker, 1994, 178).

The lily of the valley is also a medicinal plant used for a variety of ailments. Gerarde's *Herbalist* of 1633, for example, tells us that white lilies and lilies of the valley are used to treat the treatment of ailments

associated not with the state of infancy (as would obtain in the case of these babyish dogs), but with problems at the other end of the age spectrum; in other words, the 'second childhood' of senescence: gout, inflammation of the eyes and memory problems. Interestingly, ointments derived from this flower were also thought to alleviate specifically male problems: 'tumours and apothumes of the privy members' and 'apothumes in the flankes, coming of the venery and such like' (Gerarde, 1633, 191). The lily, therefore, addresses the ailments of males either sexually weakened, sexually infected or in their dotage. However, it also bears relevance to the lives of women in the fruitfulness of their prime (hence perhaps another link to the Annunciation): 'the water thereof distilled and drunke causeth easie and speedy deliverance, and expelleth the fecondine or after-burthen in most speedy manner' (Gerarde, 1633, 191). Pain in childbirth, as decreed in Genesis, was the punishment that — in addition to the sanctions shared with Adam — befell the female sex alone, in the aftermath of Eve's disobedience ('in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children', Genesis 3:16). The lily, therefore, alluding as it does on the one hand either to male impotence or alternatively to promiscuous sex resulting in venereal disease, and on the other hand to female fecundity acquitted of that Genesiacal pain, would appear to deliver a double blow to the biblical presupposition of aggravated culpability accruing to the female sex: first because it relieves women from punitive suffering in childbirth; and second because it hounds men either with accusations of illicit lechery or with taunts of sexual disempowerment, both of which may be seen as the unmanly extrapolations of Adam's inability either to restrain or resist Eve in the Garden of Eden. And in addition, the lily that thus delivers sinful women from travail, by a symbolic sleight of hand appears to deliver them also from Evil; as the flower connected with the Annunciation of Mary's blessed motherhood, it appears to address both female pain *and* blame, simultaneously acquitting all mothering women from the consequences of Eve's original sin.

In Paula Rego's work, however, the movement across categories (good and evil, pure and tainted) is never straightforward, involving instead a disquieting blurring of boundaries. Thus the Angel Gabriel's lily traditionally held out to Mary in almost all pictures of the *Annunciation* (figs. 1.5, 4.42 and 7.2) might at first glance appear to pardon the actions of the potentially aggressive mother/murderer in

the picture being considered here. Yet motherhood in this artist's work, always problematic as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, here, lilies notwithstanding, appears, at the very least, a taunt and at worst a threat levelled against the helpless male. What is in question in *Girl and Dog Untitled b* is no longer merely the do-it-yourself sex of *Looking Back*, fig. 1.21 or *Girl Lifting Up Her Skirt up to a Dog*, fig. 1.22, but, even more challengingly, do-it-yourself pregnancy, in view of a male incapacity that the lily's therapeutic uses cruelly evoke. The uncomfortable reminder applies to any given generation of ageing Josephs (*Joseph's Dream*, fig. 3.10; *Our Lady of Sorrows*, e-fig. 21) but also to future generations of young males. If, thanks to the lily, women other than Mary may also be pain-free in delivering their baby sons, the same flower, in association with the dog on the girl's lap — in a pose that carries intimations of infant, lover and patient — presages those newborn sons' future decline into impaired, gouty, blind and impotent old age. 'The man who used to be your little boy grew old' (Pessoa, 1979).

Girl and Dog Untitled c (fig. 1.30), is the other image in this series that at first glance displays only slight or no aggression on the part of the girl towards the dog.

A woman feeds a dog with a spoon, but stands beside him, rather than restricting him in any way. In context, however, the first note of warning is sounded by her ethnicity, which here again appears to be black/African, with the implications already discussed. Other familiar echoes are the customary use of bestiary references, in this case an owl, as well as motifs that recur in other paintings, namely flowers reminiscent of grasping hands on garments and pieces of cloth, and prison-bar patterns.

The owl, a nocturnal bird, is associated with darkness, sleep and death, and is seen in general as a bird of ill-omen. Although more positively associated with wisdom or religious enlightenment, even these traits have a negative side (Becker, 1994, 223–24). The Bible, possibly because of an instinctive suspicion of any attempt to breach the divine monopoly over knowledge, counts it among the unclean animals, and in Christian symbolism it figures as a reference to Christ's death. In this picture the owl oversees proceedings from the background, perched on a trunk, pedestal or lectern (the latter appropriate, given this bird's preaching and/or studious connotations). Mysteriously, it appears to sport a pair of hybrid bat-like, albeit colourful wings, the bat and the owl being in



Fig. 1.30 Paula Rego, *Girl and Dog Untitled c (1986)*. Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm.
 Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

any case animals that share a common symbology. Like the owl, the bat partakes of the attributes of the night, and was also included in the Biblical list of impurities; its wings also refer to death. The bat has, moreover, additional links with vampirism perpetrated against sleeping children and women, and with blood-sucking associated with sexual violation. Since it lives in caves, which are the supposed entrances to the afterlife, the bat acquired the attributes of immortality; and because of its nocturnal habits as well as the fact that it sleeps upside down, it was sometimes accused of being an enemy of the natural order. Finally, because of its half-mammal, half-bird status, it has often symbolised ambiguity, alchemy or metamorphosis (Becker, 1994, 35–36).

Bat and owl, therefore, both potential hell-dwellers, here figure in a seemingly congenial tableau, but within which, in effect, the dog, as the representative of masculinity and of the status quo, is enfeebled (like a blood-drained child or damsel), as well as being once again deprived of his species traits (he stands precariously on his hind legs like an inadequate human, and is fed like a baby or an incapable, sick or elderly person).

Three additional components of the image contribute to the impression that all is not as anodyne as it first appears. First, the perspective of the garden path leading to the fence is distorted. At first glance it appears like an indeterminate toothed structure (somewhat like a denticulated wheel or an open mandible seen in profile, or as the lateral view of a *vagina dentata*), positioned as if ready either to bite or, given the angle of aperture, to swallow the dog in his entirety. The dog himself is standing on a piece of cloth whose pattern here appears to be flowery (specifically tulips), but which, when repeated in a subsequent picture (*Girl and Dog Untitled e*, fig. 1.32), due to the variation in angle, resembles instead either (hellish) flames or hands, reaching out either in pleading or in menace. And finally, in the background there is a wooden fence. The fence's posts only acquire significance in the context of the repetition of patterns explicitly or allusively reminiscent of prison bars, recurrent throughout this series of paintings (the playpen in *Girl and Dog Untitled e*, fig. 1.32; the pattern on the bedspread in *Girl and Dog Untitled d*, fig. 1.31; the pattern on the girl's shorts in *Girl and Dog Untitled g*, fig. 1.33; the stripes on the girl's dress in *Girl and Dog Untitled b*, fig. 1.29 and in *Girl Lifting Up Her Skirt to a Dog*, fig. 1.22).

The bar-like fence posts in *Girl and Dog Untitled c* (fig. 1.30) suggest a possible reference to the force-feeding of hunger-striking political prisoners, here casting the dog (the representative of the status quo) as the victim of that self-same plight, and thus offering a reversal of the usual handling of civil disobedience under dictatorship.

In the second force-feeding picture, *Girl and Dog Untitled d* (fig. 1.31), the relative positions of girl and dog are equally ambiguous.

Here the girl sits with the dog on her lap, holding a spoon in one hand and propping open his jaw with the other, whilst he attempts to turn away. The position of her arm is ambiguous: twisted and not necessarily supportive, conveying instead the impression of duress. It is unclear whether she is caring for the dog or attacking him, nursing



Fig. 1.31 Paula Rego, *Girl and Dog Untitled d* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm.
 Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

him or strangling him. The dog's colour, yellow for cowardice or hypochondria, emphasizes his pusillanimous or at least disempowered status, as reiterated by the other objects in the room: the pattern on the bedspread, again allusive to prison bars, and the chamber pot in the background, which reinforces the theme of incontinence or invalidism.

The last two pictures in this series are linked through the focus on a vulnerable area of the dog's anatomy, namely his throat. In *Girl and Dog Untitled f* (e-fig. 7) a dog sits again in an anthropomorphic (supplicant) posture, balancing on his hind legs, in what appears to be a playpen.



Fig. 1.32 Paula Rego, *Girl and Dog Untitled e* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm.
 Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Although the playpen seems to be open on one side, the dog remains confined within his perimeter. The only part of him that reaches outside it, although, as it would appear, to no particular purpose, is his phallic tail. Facing him is a girl who holds his jaw in her hand, although it remains unclear whether the intent behind that gesture is as a precursor to caressing, feeding or slaying. The bars of the playpen repeat the striped prison-bar pattern seen elsewhere, while her skirt and hat set off inter-imagistic reverberations: the tulip/hand pattern on her skirt mirrors that of her left hand and also that on the piece of cloth in *Girl and Dog Untitled c* (fig. 1.30), while the bat-like motif of the hat again evokes the symbolic meanings already discussed in connection with the figure of the owl in that same painting.

The last noteworthy component of this image, other than the girl's skin-colour, reminiscent of other black/African protagonists, is the diminutive building in the background. A twin of the vulnerable dwelling in *Prey* (fig. 1.28), it prefigures a homeliness that however gives way to the Freudian uncanny in these pictures. Its size, and therefore its vulnerability, highlight by association the similarly dwarfed status of the dog in relation to his friend/aggressor.

The next picture in this series is *Girl and Dog Untitled f (Girl Shaving a Dog)* (e-fig. 7).¹⁴

A young girl sits in a nursing chair, but she is engaged not in breast-feeding the dog but in shaving those areas of his face and neck habitually shaved by men. The dog is thus once again anthropomorphized. The grooming theme will find an echo in two paintings to be discussed in chapter 2, namely *Departure* (fig. 2.8), and *The Family* (fig. 2.14), in both of which the nurturing coexists with something more menacing. In *Girl and Dog Untitled f* (e-fig. 7), too, and particularly in view of the dog's gritted teeth, the girl's actions lend themselves to dual interpretation as either shaving or throat-cutting.

The image, of course, sparks an obvious question: if this is indeed a dog, why shave him? The attempt to answer that question invites speculation regarding the erasure of the animal's canine traits, here, in this worst of both worlds, replaced by ineffectual pseudo-humanity. Furthermore, the act of shaving stands also as an attack on his dignity, since shaved dogs (usually poodles), tend to be both ridiculous and toy-like.

If this is not a dog but in fact a man, or a man's representative in this series of paintings, his object-position invites further questions. For example, under what circumstances is a man shaved by someone else, rather than shaving himself? Two of the possible answers to this question translate into antithetical formulae of masculine power or powerlessness. First, this man/dog may be enjoying the privilege of being shaved by a (black) subaltern — a servant whose temptation to let grooming slide into murder (cutting his throat rather than shaving it, in a re-run of the pending murder in *The Maids*, fig. 1.4) would always, in an imperial or colonial setting, carry the price tag of her own life.

14 e-fig. 7 Paula Rego, *Girl Shaving a Dog (Girl and Dog f)* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm. © artnet. Posted by artnet.com, http://www.artnet.com/artists/paula-rego/untitled-girl-shaving-a-dog-vlh_T0Pcp27ldu8Pf4n-fQ2

Alternatively, a man may be shaved if he is an invalid or too disabled to do so for himself, a state vindictively hypothesized in previous images, which depicted the rendering of services such as feeding or offering a drink. These, more unequivocally than shaving, are acts less likely to be performed by the subalterns of a powerful master than by the carer for an enfeebled patient. In *Girl and Dog Untitled f*, e-fig. 7, the more anodyne interpretation of a little boy at his mother's knee becomes doubly improbable, since young boys don't require shaving, and grown men who do tend not kneel for that purpose at the knee of maternal figures.

The final unanswered enigma in the picture refers to the shape (possibly a bird) in the top centre left of the painting, which, in an echo of the owl in *Girl and Dog Untitled c* (fig. 1.30), looks down on proceedings against a background of seeming hellfire. As is the case with so many other Rego pictures,¹⁵ whatever the private significance of this figure, its beady eyes assign it the role of spectator in the violence underway centre stage. This comical figure becomes the avatar of the many matter-of-fact girlish witnesses (and therefore accessories) to numerous acts of violence in this artist's universe.

Finally *Girl and Dog Untitled g* presents us with yet another aspect of ambiguity: a girl prepares to place a necklace around the neck of yet another hapless dog. The question is, will she pull the ends of it too tight? When does a necklace become a hangman's rope?

As referenced at the beginning of this section, criminological research on psychological profiling has found that serial killers often begin their activities with animal mutilation and killing. In Paula Rego's work during the decades of the eighties and after, serially violent young female protagonists progress from attacks on dogs to crimes against humans, in particular the family, both in its consanguineous and marital guises. As discussed in chapter 4, in her pastels of the late 1990s on the theme of abortion, the violence may be said to extend this anti-family agenda to relatives yet unborn. In the next chapter I shall concentrate on the series of paintings on the subject of the human family that spanned the decade of the 1980s.

15 See for example *Amélia's Dream* (1998) (fig. 3.21), which again picks up the theme of female violence against dog-men.



Fig. 1.33 Paula Rego, *Girl and Dog Untitled g* (1986). Acrylic on paper, 112 x 76 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

2. (He)Art History or a Death in the Family: The Late 80s

It is only once those levels of culture [the material world of the domestic, women's anxiety-producing power as mothers, household managers, and silent participants in enterprise] are actively explored that women's contribution to culture [...] can be taken adequately into account. It is only once this taking into account begins that any historicism can produce something more than history as usual.

Judith Lowder Newton, 'History as Usual?
Feminism and the "New Historicism"'

I find that curious: a woman who can love a man until the very end.

Paula Rego (interview)

Families and Other Animals

In 1986, approximately around the time that Paula Rego began to work on her paintings based on the theme of the family, Pope John Paul II made a statement to the effect that 'as the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live' (John Paul II, 1986, 11). Salazar (see Prologue), Hitler and assorted despots down the centuries had got there first, but be that as it may, the Pope's was a statement with which, albeit with a different intent, Rego would probably agree. The implication being, of course, that if you don't like the world as it stands, change the family. Whatever it takes: charity, for Paula's women, definitely begins at home. This chapter will consider family (and hence national) dynamics in the paintings of the second half of the decade of the 1980s.

One of Rego's reviewers has suggested that any number of her works might borrow for a caption the title of Raymond Carver's novella, 'What we talk about when we talk about love'. He further comments that her work, 'bulletins from the front line in the sex wars', involves the realization that while 'quite a lot of male art explores the way in which men can be attracted to women while at the same time fearing and/or disliking them, these pictures involve something close to a reversal of that' (Lanchester, 1998, 5). Prior to the *Girl and Dog* paintings (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), the depiction of animals who represented ambivalently loved relatives had already achieved expression in works of the early 1980's, such as *Pregnant Rabbit Telling Her Parents* (fig. 2.1), *The Red Monkey Beats His Wife* (fig. 2.3) and *The Red Monkey's Wife Cuts Off His Tail* (fig. 2.4), all from 1981. Purely within its own terms and quite apart from the possible autobiographical referent that some critics have opted to foreground in these and subsequent works of the 1980's, a painting such as *Pregnant Rabbit* speaks eloquently of dysfunction in the family and by extension the nation.

Salazar's isolationist blueprint for national life, involving one-party political hegemony, sought echoes in the formula of the hierarchical happy family (father, son, mother, daughter), within which deviation from established parameters was as much to be discouraged as was ideological pluralism in the nation at large. That formula assigned roles according to the criterion of gender. For women the options were either single and virgin (daughter, sister) or married homemaker (wife, mother). In *Pregnant Rabbit Telling Her Parents* (fig. 2.1), however, deviation from the established norm is clearly of the essence, as are its consequences: something Rego, returned from Britain to Portugal in 1956 as a young woman pregnant by a married man would have understood all too well.¹

1 In an interview with Rachel Campbell-Johnston on the release of his 2017 documentary about his mother ('The visions that haunted Paula Rego'), Willing recalls Rego telling him that, as a student at the Slade School of Art in the 1950s, she had several abortions before she finally had a child by Victor Willing, who at the time was still married to another woman. Conflicting feelings about pregnancy and the difficulties faced by some women run through Rego's output, from her mid-to early works to more recent paintings: *Pregnant Rabbit Telling Her Parents* (1982, fig. 2.1); *Untitled: The Abortion Cycle* (1988, figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49); some of the *Virgin Cycle* (2002, figs. 7.1; 7.3; 7.9; 7.10; 7.11; 7.12; 7.19; 7.20).



Fig. 2.1 Paula Rego, *Pregnant Rabbit Telling Her Parents* (1982). Acrylic on paper, 103 x 141 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The title of this picture sets the ground for such a reading, by way of the suggestion that the pregnancy in question is unwelcome. The parents, a cat and a dog, are sketched in economical brush strokes although the mother's expression bespeaks consternation. The father, moreover, is comically depicted smoking the hackneyed cigar conventionally shared with prospective sons-in-law after parental approval for the marriage has been sought and granted. Here, however, the cigar is presumably being smoked on the occasion of the revelation that there is to be no son-in-law, merely his illegitimate offspring. The rabbit's parents, therefore, will be disgraced by the behaviour of a daughter whose alienation from their own moral values is underlined by the fact that she belongs to a different species.

More to the point, if the rabbit's species differs from that of her parents, they, too, are themselves from different (and mutually antagonistic) sectors of the animal kingdom, the mother being a cat and the father a dog. Reproductive insularity (marrying a member

of one's 'tribe') might be said to be a reflection within the family of state isolationism outside it. And by the same token the implications of rupture from prescribed endogamy, as represented threefold within this curious family unit, stretch widely: what is in question here, other than the rabbit's illicit fecundity outside approved social rules (unmarried motherhood) is the assertion of a generational repetition of transgressive reproduction, stretching back at the very least to the parents. The latter, being as they are a cat and a dog, each committed the sin of marrying the enemy, with the result of producing an alien child (non-rabbits who engendered a rabbit: a fecund one, as befits a rabbit, but in this case disreputably so). Intercourse with the Other (cat and dog), itself carries at least two further implications: first, a break from the fiction of the homogenous and united family as a bulwark of social stability. And second, the dangerous consequences, for any monolithic regime, of the act of sleeping with the enemy, behaviour likely to give rise to dangerous alliances outside the interests of the status quo. Exogamy *ad absurdum*, as here, the dangerous act of bringing the outside in, has clear implications beyond the nucleus of the family. It is the symbolic lowering of the drawbridge that might result in the infiltration of outsiderishness and difference: the infiltration of Kristeva's abject into the status quo. In this context, we are left pondering the significance of the unidentifiable shadow lurking behind the rabbit, possibly the symbol of that unknown quantity: a new species arising out of unorthodox miscegenation.

If in *Pregnant Rabbit* the exogamy of cat and dog couplings disrupts the imperative of *Salazarista* insularity, the same theme is heightened by the dangerous carnival of irreverent slapstick that characterises the *Red Monkey* mini-series, which includes two images to be discussed here: *The Red Monkey Beats His Wife* (fig. 2.3) and *Wife Cuts Off Red Monkey's Tail* (fig. 2.4).

The Red Monkey's colour is perplexing with regard to a protagonist whose salient traits (husbandly authoritarianism and wife-battering) otherwise place him well within the mainstream of the social order he emblematises. Red, however, under *Salazarismo*, was seen as a colour with such powerful political (specifically communist) associations that the very word, for example in otherwise anodyne book and film titles, led to almost automatic censorship by the state machinery. Here, therefore,



Fig. 2.2 Lorenzo Lotto, *Nativity* (1523). Oil on panel, 46 x 36 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lorenzo_Lotto_017.jpg



Fig. 2.3 Paula Rego, *The Red Monkey Beats His Wife* (1981). Acrylic on paper, 61 x 105 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

it introduces an element of the paradoxical through its association with a protagonist who would otherwise appear to be on-message to the point of caricature *vis à vis* the patriarchal enforcement of wifely obedience within the marital home. The Monkey's attack would fit easily within the *Estado Novo's* boundaries of justifiable force exercised by husbands against wives. And if so, the colour red — of satanic as well as communist associations — might here become linked not to the identification of a party political affiliation but instead to an authorial gesture of indictment — by demonization — of the husband, and of the social conventions that condone his actions. This move on the part of the artist would therefore be doubly contentious, by lining up the interests of Catholicism (as the declared ally of state and patriarchal interests) on the side of the Devil.

This reading is reinforced by another component of the image. The Red Monkey, as signposted by the title, is striking his wife, who holds their child in her arms in archetypal Madonna-and-Child pose. Behind him lurks a genuflecting figure with a dark faceless mass for a head and hands piously linked in prayer. It is tempting to construe the many contradictions built in to this image into a coherent indictment of the destructiveness — but also self-destructiveness — of the political order that Paula Rego attacked then and continues to attack now. Here we have a monkey whose colour, as stated, possibly disidentifies him from the right-wing ideological preferences to which we would otherwise suspect him of subscribing, in his capacity as autocratic husband and *pater familias*. Behind him (literally and metaphorically), stand the powers of the faceless but ubiquitous church and state, the latter two conflated into a single body, presumably in allusion to the 1940 Concordat. In a further complication that parallels that of the colour red on a fascist body, the representative of the established order here attacks the Madonna and Child (figures technically revered by that self-same order), as well as potentially, at a personal level, destroying the representative of the next generation, who is his own and therefore the status quo's son and heir. The deed is witnessed by the kneeling figure whose presence contributes to the composition's identification as a simulacrum of a Nativity (figs. 2.2; 7.4), or a Madonna and Child (fig. 4.17) or even a *Pietá* (fig. 4.18). Is the church condoning an attack on the Son of God? Or was the Son of God not actually divine, but the outcome

of a not-so-immaculate conception? When a Virgin is not a virgin, what becomes of the edifices of patriarchy, church and state?

The killing of another son and heir by the representative of those three institutions will be a central theme of the *Father Amaro* series discussed in chapter 3 (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27). In the *Red Monkey* series, an added dimension of marital aggression becomes apparent in the following picture, as does the identification of the eponymous figure with the power configurations already outlined. In *Wife Cuts off Red Monkey's Tail*, fig. 2.4, the wife, now in her turn faceless (a frequent attribute of autocratic power in Paula Rego), stands with a gigantic pair of scissors in her hands, from which she carelessly lets drop her husband's severed appendage.



Fig. 2.4 Paula Rego, *Wife Cuts off Red Monkey's Tail* (1981). Acrylic on paper, 68 x 101 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The latter, red, tumescent and erect in the previous picture, here presents an antithetical aspect of greenness (decay), deflation and flaccidity. The monkey succumbs to projectile vomiting, behaviour reminiscent of that other famous picture of 1960 (fig. 1.1, *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland*), and thus becomes associated, through this bodily misadventure, with the eponymous protagonist of that earlier painting. More emphatically

even than in that earlier image, here the monkey surrenders to an absolute loss of somatic self-control, as symbolized by the act of vomiting in public. And finally, to the right, behind the wife, in a pose that echoes that of the faceless figure at prayer in the previous picture, is an ambiguous black and white shape, cut in half by the edge of the picture itself, in formal reiteration of the dismembering act perpetrated by the wife upon her husband.

So Sorry For Your Loss

Attacks on males by their female relatives provide the thematic thread I shall follow in my analysis of the series of seven paintings to be considered now, and to which I shall refer as the *Family* series. They include *The Dance* (fig. 2.5), *Departure* (fig. 2.8), *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9), *The Bullfighter's Godmother* (fig. 2.10), *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11), *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13) and *The Family* (fig. 2.14), in this rather than in chronological order.

As individual perversity wreaks havoc on the ideal family in Paula Rego's work, Portugal's imperial strolls along foreign beaches are also reduced to uncertain palimpsests, both historically and in this artist's map of memory. *The Dance* (fig. 2.5), one of her best known pictures, has attracted a number of interpretations, including John McEwen's biographically-oriented reading and Fiona Bradley's meditation on the relations between the male and female protagonists (McEwen, 1997, 168; Bradley, 1997, 19).²

Whilst taking on board those readings, which are supported by Rego's own son (see McEwen, 1997, 168), I should like to argue that in this seemingly happy or at least gently mournful picture, as in all the other family images to be discussed, Rego may also seek partly to explore the political preoccupations already discussed at some length. In doing so, she opens within the sphere of the familial a space for debate on the way in which the personal and the collective are linked through the workings of the ideological superstructure of the state's colonial policy.

2 *The Dance* was painted in 1988, the year that Rego's husband, Victor Willing died. It features two young men whose features bear a strong resemblance to the dead man, and who may have been modelled by the couple's son. The painting has more commonly been interpreted as an attempt at catharsis ('saying goodbye to Vic').



Fig. 2.5 Paula Rego, *The Dance* (1988). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 273.3 cm. Tate Modern, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The Dance presents the romantic but also cosy setting of what appears to be a village *al fresco* dance. Judging by the clothes of the protagonists, it is taking place on a summer night on a beach against a background of sea and cliffs. History (or at least family history, but the two will become entwined), is introduced to the painting by way of the cycle of generations represented here: the foetus still *in utero* inside its pregnant mother's body, the little girl, four young women and a middle aged or elderly one, as well as two young men, the model for one of them being the artist's son, Nick Willing. Already, however, we are struck by a numerical gender imbalance. It is interesting to note that in an echo of the absence of viable males in the *Girl and Dog* pictures (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), the women here dance with each other, with self-sufficient light-heartedness. Be that as it may, it is at this juncture that the combination of cast and background symbolism interact, to turn a village affair into a national concern.

The scarcity of men, and in particular of mature and elderly men (the very youngest generation of males is potentially present in the shape

of the child yet unborn), suggests the death or at least the departure of adult males before they can take their places in communal life as the village elders. In Portugal, the lack of men due to death or absence has always been primarily associated with one specific aspect of national life: voyages across the sea, here the background to the events of the dance: a sea which, whether during the period of the maritime discoveries and empire-building in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or during the waves of economic emigration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or by reason of the colonial wars in Africa in the second half of the twentieth century, or simply in the context of the life of a fishing nation, took the lives of young and middle-aged men across the country and inscribed premature bereavement as a collective problem.

Oh salty sea, how much of your salt
Comes from tears of Portugal!
To cross you, how many mothers wept,
How many children's prayers were not met
How many brides were left bereft
That you might be ours, oh sea!
Was it worthwhile? Everything is worthwhile
If the soul is not too small.
Those who wish to turn the Bojador Cape
Must first conquer heartache.
Upon the sea God bestowed danger and the abyss,
But in it He mirrored paradise. (Pessoa, 1979)

Fernando Pessoa's famous poem, half-lament, half-jingoistic exhortation to further sea-going efforts, articulates the ambivalence of a nation whose history of imperial power came at a price of human life that the country never fully accepted, and on one occasion resented sufficiently to topple a government. That turnabout in political fortune, the moment when the colonial enterprise that had shored up national economic stability in the twentieth century was deemed insufficient to justify bloodshed and political repression at home and abroad (in the African colonies fighting for independence), is cryptically signalled elsewhere in this picture. In the darkened background on top of the low cliff that overlooks the ocean, stands a fortress. Portuguese fortresses of this nature still pepper the coasts of East and West Africa and the length of South Asia, as the last vestiges of Portugal's military and commercial outreaches over five centuries (fig. 2.6).



Fig. 2.6 A view of the ruins of Fort Chapora, Goa, India. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chapora_fort.JPG

More to the point, they are also to be found along Portuguese coastlines, the most famous being that at Caxias on Lisbon's estuary, which the fortress in this picture strongly resembles. Caxias, some five miles outside Lisbon on the Estoril coast, was the most infamous of Salazar's jails, where political prisoners were held, often without trial, and tortured (fig. 2.7).

As such, it still figures in the Portuguese imagination as one of the icons of a regime whose other defining characteristic was its attempt to construct a third overseas empire in Africa. Sea and fort, therefore, inscribe the process of history, both recent and remote, within the village and family theme of what has largely been regarded as at worst a melancholic, and at best a happy picture, yet in this reading appears tainted by a personal, a national and a political lament (men dead, lost at sea, men imprisoned). But the final and most disturbing note is struck, with typical Regoesque perverseness, through the depiction of women who, in view of the oblique symbolism, ought to be wretched but are not. The same thought-provoking light-heartedness will reappear in other paintings in this series. A shared thematic thread links *The Dance to Departure* (fig. 2.8).



Fig. 2.7 Caxias Fortress (Forte de São Bruno), Lisbon, Portugal. Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forte_de_S._Bruno_-_Oeiras_\(108723153\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forte_de_S._Bruno_-_Oeiras_(108723153).jpg)



Fig. 2.8 Paula Rego, *Departure* (1988). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 151.4 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved

I will digress briefly here to note that some attention has been focused in the past (Rosengarten, 1999a, 24) on the theme of incest in Paula Rego, in paintings such as for example *Snow White Playing with Her Father's Trophies* (e-fig.14), *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9), *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11), *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13) and *The Family* (fig. 2.14). A lot of ground remains to be covered on this topic, not just in connection with these pictures, but with others such as the *Father Amaro* series (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27), for the purpose of which Paula Rego drew upon an author, Eça de Queirós, who returned repeatedly to incest as a central theme in his writing. For the purposes of the current discussion, however, I shall consider incest abstractly, rather than in any sexual specificity, as the behaviour whereby clearly demarcated and prescribed rules of familial interaction are subverted within the very terms of those prescriptions, in order to deconstruct them. Thus, if family love was one of the proclaimed linchpins of the Salazar regime, it is at the very least perverse to carry that notion of familial love to a point (incest) at which the fabric of society itself comes under threat. The approved concept of love for one's kin, when appropriated and warped, undermines that which, in a less extreme rendition, it purportedly shored up. Incest may thus be seen to engage with the notion that while it is true that in well-adjusted communities family members love each other, they clearly must do so only up to a point and only in a certain (non-sexual) way (Bell, 1993; Herman and Hirschman, 1977).

The implications of this, moreover, clearly extend beyond the confines of the family. Within an authoritarian state, the distinction of categories and the demarcation of differences become arguably more important than in democratic regimes, since they govern the general process whereby individuals, entities and behaviours are classified and either authorized or excluded by the established order. Incest, therefore, the behaviour which with absolute literalness brings together what ought to be kept apart, is a crime in itself, but it is also the thin end of the wedge: other than undermining at a very specific level the family metaphor of the happy state, its transgression of the rules of sexual intercourse gestures also to the wider dissolution of pre-set boundaries between other categories (specifically the mutual exclusivity of consanguinity and sex), as prescribed by a variety of

ideological and state *desiderata*. Incest may thus come to act as the metaphor for more abstract considerations regarding the dissolution of categorical differences within any number of definitions — black and white, right and wrong, good and evil, morality and immorality — whose mutually exclusive essence thereby becomes blurred or relativized.

In *Departure* (fig. 2.8) a girl, possibly a sister, grooms a man's hair prior to the eponymous act.³ He sits and she stands on a terrace overlooking the sea, against a background of high ramparts headed not now by a fortress, but by residential dwellings: in Paula Rego the *locus delicti* of family life with a twist. Beside the two protagonists, on the floor of the terrace, is a valedictory old-fashioned travelling trunk, presumably the young man's, with his travel coat draped across it. The symbols of departure set against the background seascape may be argued to carry the same ocean-bound/imperial/colonial connotations of other Rego pictures. Here, however, the poignancy is exacerbated by the coffin-shape of the trunk, to which the coat adds either the quasi-funereal aspect of ritual draping, or, alternatively, the impression of a fallen body.

Auspices of a doomed national imperative, however, be it economic migration or empire-building, are once again paraphrased by a cause of death much closer to home. Although the implement the girl holds in her right hand is a harmless comb, the position of the left hand may elicit an otherwise far-fetched uneasiness when an analogy is drawn with the hand of the maid on her mistress's neck in *The Maids* (fig. 1.4), or those of the girls in *Girl and Dog Untitled b, d, e* and *f* (figs. 1.29; 1.31; 1.32 and e-fig. 7). This uneasiness is further exacerbated by the unexplained bloodstains faintly visible on the girl's apron in *Departure*. These stains reflect the red discolouration on the ground by her feet, which also raise disturbing possibilities. Combing one's hair is not an activity generally known to produce much blood loss. In this picture, therefore, it is not just familial and sexual love that become confused (see Paula Rego's comments in interviews about a potential dimension of brother-sister

3 It has also been suggested to me that the girl's attire may indicate a lower-class status, such as that of servant rather than sister to the male protagonist. Whether the twin of past and future aggressive female relatives or of the murderous maids of a previous painting, the props and accessories pertaining to this figure, as I argue here, renders her a menacing rather than nurturing presence.

incest in this work),⁴ but caring and violence too. Disturbingly, in an echo of the *Girl and Dog* pictures, grooming and killing, love and murder (kinslaying), also blur into each other, not for the first or last time in this artist's work. Were the colonies really the happy children of the European motherland? Did those who set off to wage the wars that perpetuated the enterprise of empire have uniform support back home? When does empire-building turn into family division and kinslaying? Who is being punished here, and for what?

The Cadet and His Sister (fig. 2.9) picks up a motif that will reappear over the following decade, namely that of men being dressed by women (*The Family*, fig. 2.14; *Mother*, fig. 3.19), possibly in an echo of those earlier dogs being simultaneously tended and emasculated.



Fig. 2.9 Paula Rego, *The Cadet and His Sister* (1988). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 212.4 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

4 Regarding the young man in *Departure*, Rego had said: 'Incest leads nowhere. His future is destroyed' (Rego, quoted in McEwen, 1997, 167). She also alludes to associations with incest in works of this period (*The Cadet and His Sister*) and later ones (for example in the *Father Amaro* series).

The Cadet and His Sister casts yet another young man being readied, possibly for war, by his eponymous sister. He gazes at the backdrop of an avenue lined with cypresses (the traditional trees of cemeteries) which stretches into the distance. She kneels at his feet and ties his bootlaces, but succeeds, while in this genuflecting, ministering stance, to retain a commanding position in the picture, by virtue of her size and clearly-visible face, which contrasts with those of her more slightly-built brother, seen only in profile. Beside her on the ground are her handbag and gloves, the latter positioned at an angle that echoes the previously-established pattern of grasping hands (*The Maids*, fig. 1.4; *Departure*, fig. 2.8; *Untitled b*, fig. 1.29; *Untitled d*, fig. 1.31; *Untitled e*, fig. 1.32; *Untitled f*, fig. 1.36), and also the tulip shapes on the cloth and skirt of *Untitled c*, fig. 1.30 and *Untitled f*, e-fig. 7).

In small scale in the foreground left-hand corner is a small cockerel, and it is tempting once again in the case of this picture to work from the small but significant detail to the more obvious larger ones, since the cockerel provides the point of entry for a fusion of the personal and the collective. In Portuguese legend and iconography this bird and in particular the one known as the Barcelos cockerel, after the town involved in the mythical events associated with this animal, was a bird-shaped metal weather-vane, which saved from the gallows a Galician man, falsely accused of a crime. To this day painted wooden or clay Barcelos roosters can be bought in souvenir shops, tourist outlets and markets all over Portugal. The suggestion that the bird is significant might be an instance of over-interpretation: Paula Rego often wrong-foots her overly enthusiastic exegetes (the current author included) by saying that she includes objects such as this cockerel or the pink pig in *In the Wilderness* (fig. 3.23) for no other reason than because she liked their colour or shape, or simply felt like it. At the risk of disregarding this hint, one may be forgiven for seeking further meaning in an object as laden with symbolism as the Barcelos rooster being included in a picture depicting young men going off to war. What one makes of it is, literally, another story. The inclusion, in a picture about military endeavour, of a mythical beast that saves a foreigner (and a Spanish foreigner at that) from the wrongful arm of the Portuguese authorities, raises questions of law, justice and nationalist entitlement in Portugal's dealings with other nations.

The cockerel, therefore, in contrast as we shall see to cypresses (in cemeteries filled with the bodies of young men killed for the motherland), signals the defeat of the status quo by an individual, and destabilizes the interests of the nation as a significant subject in this painting of family history. The war, signalled here by the soldier's status, thus ceases to be a background detail and becomes central to this example of family portraiture and history painting.

And if *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) is a painting about the motherland as much as about the family, the theme of incest already discussed may simply be a way of noting a general dysfunctionality (of which incest would be the extreme instance), extrapolated from the dimension of consanguinity to its metaphorical counterpoint at the level of national life (Portugal and her old sister and enemy, Spain; Portugal and Galicia, which historically has nurtured a treasonous desire to abandon mother Spain and marry sister Portugal; rebellious colonial 'children', within the context of a war fought by young soldiers in Africa). Regarding the young man in *Departure*, Rego had said: 'Incest leads nowhere. His future is destroyed' (Rego, quoted in McEwen, 1997, 167). Whether destruction is always a bad idea, however, is a moot point, not least in the case of an artist who enjoys doing harm to those she loves.

A reference to incest here would therefore underwrite once again the script of an imperilled motherland, whose *Salazarista* corporate image, based on the linchpin of the happy family utopia, is exposed as unviable and false. In this context, the background setting becomes important. The cypresses lining the avenue that stretches away from the protagonists, as mentioned earlier, are the traditional trees of Portuguese cemeteries, and their principal association is with death. Their presence in this image, therefore, as well as speaking for itself, also suggests that the white stone walls and benches are part of a cemetery setting — a less than auspicious scenario for a young soldier about to depart to war. It is perhaps eerily apposite, therefore, that the cypress avenue upon which his gaze is focused seems to lead nowhere.

The sister whose tender attentions, if seen in the light of the *Girl and Dog Untitled* series, may be sinister, is dressed in blood-red clothing, one step beyond the discreetly blood-stained apron in *Departure*. Together with the militaristic red beret, her clothes offer further possibilities. Rego

depicts severe female clothing in images of the same period, such as the mother's suit in *The Fitting* (fig. 1.3), discussed in the previous chapter. Another point for consideration with regard to the sister's attire in *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) is the symbolism of red, which, as outlined previously, was a colour of political (communist) and religious (satanic) ill-repute in the ultra-Catholic *Estado Novo*. Red, moreover, other than its left-wing and luciferine connotations, was also the colour of the carnations that became associated with the revolution that toppled the *Estado Novo* on 25 April 1974 (e-fig. 8).⁵

That revolution took the form of a military coup by army officers, who are possibly evoked by this woman's militaristic head gear and her family links to a young soldier. Furthermore, young soldiers, as previously stated, were the fodder whose deaths in the colonial wars sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction against the political regime of Salazar and paved the way for the April revolution and for democracy.

This female protagonist's clothes evoke one further association. Her suit corresponds to the fashion of the late 1930s and early 1940s, made visually iconic by many war-time films (primarily of British and American origin) both in Britain, where Paula Rego lives, but also in Portugal, where she was brought up. The 1930s and 40s saw the rise and consolidation of fascism in Europe. They were also the decades of Salazar's drive for dictatorial power and the period in which, as discussed previously, he laid down his plans for a society in many ways analogous to Hitler's Third Reich. The fashion of these clothes therefore acts as a double-edged sword: by evoking the period of World War II, it gestures both to the nature of Salazar's wartime sympathies and to their frustration at Hitler's eventual defeat. A tangential effect of these associations is the possibly circuitous but nonetheless tenable notion that if, in the 1940s, Salazar's political inclinations led him to identify with a genocidal regime and with an unholy German war, his own wars of the 1960s and 70s (whose victims were not Jews but black Africans) here become tarred with an analogous brush.

5 e-fig. 8 The revolution of 25 April 1974, which toppled the *Estado Novo* regime and restored democracy, began as a military coup but was welcomed by the general population. As the army took over key institutions and locations, women lined the streets and placed red carnations in the barrels of the soldiers' guns. Photograph posted by 'This day in History – 25 April 1974: Portugal's Carnation Revolution', Club of Mozambique, 25 April 2017, © Club of Mozambique, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/this-day-in-history-25-april-1974-portugals-carnation-revolution/>

In *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) a woman sends off her close male relative to war and potentially to death. If this particular Portuguese war was fought in a morally indefensible cause, its gender effects in this picture may nonetheless entail a liberating impact not dissimilar to that temporarily achieved during World War II for women all over Europe. When the cat is away the mice are free to play, or to usurp the rights and privileges (including the donning of power clothing) that habitual fall to the monopoly of men. The same theme is repeated in the next two pictures, *The Bullfighter's Godmother* (fig. 2.10) and *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11).



Fig. 2.10 Paula Rego, *The Bullfighter's Godmother* (1990–1991). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 122 x 151.4 cm. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In *The Bullfighter's Godmother* (1990–1991), the two protagonists stand in a bare, monastic room, presumably his, as the godmother puts the finishing touches to her charge's bullfighting attire. A young girl sits in a chair with the bullfighter's traditional cape draped over her knees and onto the floor. The room is windowless and, although spacious,

dark and claustrophobic.⁶ Its shadows have an ominous character, which potentially reiterates the motif of a final farewell evoked by the two pictures just discussed. And this latter aspect is emphasized by the brownish red, reminiscent of dried blood, which, together with grey, is the dominant colour in the room, acting as the omen for the kind of death a bullfighter might be expected to suffer. The atmosphere of foreboding is accentuated by the black clothes of the godmother (black, in Portugal, being traditionally reserved for mourning purposes), and specifically by the black tie worn by men (but here by the young girl), exclusively as a token of bereavement.

A godparent in a Catholic country such as Portugal is the appointed conduit of godliness, religion, tradition and citizenship. His or her task is to guarantee that the godchild is raised in the Catholic faith, which in Portugal, during the years of dictatorship, was shorthand also for raising a son or daughter who would conform to the will of the state. This particular godmother is associated also with the bullfighting tradition which, in the Iberian context, is the purest distillation of masculine values. The art of bullfighting — and it is as an art that this pursuit is generally understood in Portugal — pays homage to the values of religion and patriotism, as well as to the quintessential male attributes of machismo and courage in the face of death.⁷ Under the *Estado Novo*, as we have seen, all four were seen as constituting the infrastructures of a country in which, according to the conjoined decrees of church, state and patriarchy, men were men and women were women. In bullfighting, men are brought together as in battle, as buddies, comrades or gladiators, pitted not against each other but against the bull which is the common (and identifiably different) adversary. Through bullfighting, male solidarity against a categorized Other is reaffirmed for the greater good of the status quo.

In this boys-only club, however, Paula Rego's painting strikes a dissonant note. What is in question here is not God-the-Father — the

6 With regard to a later picture, as discussed in chapter 3, Paula Rego discussed the desirability of sets using mirrors which increase the impression of space without, however, granting her protagonists the advantage of an open window for the same effect. In fact, in many of her paintings she either depicts windowless rooms, as here, or at best paints windows without a view (*Time: Past and Present*, fig. 1.8; *The Policeman's Daughter*, fig. 2.13; *Mother*, fig. 3.19).

7 In Portuguese bullfights the bloodiness of the pursuit is toned down: unlike in Spain, the bull is not killed at the end.

summit of that pyramidal structure of male values that bullfighting works to shore up — but a godmother. The latter thus emerges as the usurper of masculine concerns, rights and duties. The female figure stands tall, taller than the young man, whom, moreover, standing *in loco parentis* to him as she does, she doubly infantilizes. She is hieratic and spectral, and wears black garments that seem improperly to anticipate a death foretold. And if she is sending him to his death, her didactic and pastoral roles, inappropriate in any case — given that she is a woman — constitute not so much a generational handing down of tradition, but its premature nipping in the bud, since this very young man's career will end almost before it has begun.

In any case the godmother, by virtue of being a *mother* and not a *father*, inevitably jolts the process whereby heritage, tradition, nationhood and authority are typically passed down the hierarchy that descends from God through political rulers, to husbands, fathers and sons, traditionally bypassing the subaltern female sex. In this picture, instead, both tradition and the right to its transmission (analogous to Adam's Genesiacal monopoly over naming the world in Eden) are hijacked by the godmother, who, in handing these things down to the next generation of young males, simultaneously anoints and damns the emblematic youth represented here. When Jehovah created the world, including of course Portugal as God's own country, the achievement was commemorated by the *fiat* that there be light. Altogether properly here, in this portentous room, the sources of light are on the whole mysterious, apart from the free-standing table lamp whose radiance, however, is veiled by a black shade. The latter would be more suitable to a satanic seance than in the preamble to bullfighting, that most orthodox of Portuguese rites of honour.

Light and darkness, and the semantic ramifications they set up, are also of the essence in *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11).

Once again I will begin here with an analysis of two figures who, although located in the foreground, have their impact at first glance reduced to secondary status by virtue of their reduced scale. They are an exiting soldier with his pack slung over his shoulder, and a faceless, woman veiled and kneeling with hands linked in prayer, in the archetypal posture of the *mater dolorosa*. The effect of their diminutive stature is compounded by their positioning in the dark corners of the



Fig. 2.11 Paula Rego, *The Soldier's Daughter* (1987). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 151.4 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

painting, which accentuates the contrast with the much larger and sunlit figure of the central protagonist.

The scenario conjured up by these two figures is clearly that of the archetypal 'men must work and women must weep' script, which is, however, comprehensively given the lie by the other components of the painting. These involve the central figure of a girl, presumably the daughter of the title, busy plucking a dead goose. She sits under a broad archway in sunlight, against a background of buildings and a rampart which may lead to the sea but is blocked by a closed gate. At first glance, the girl is engaged in a suitably feminine task: preparing the bird for the meal that will feed the family. Other components of the picture, however, raise the question of who exactly is about to have his goose

cooked here. The obvious answer appears to be already given, in view of the fact that we are dealing again with the tale of a departing soldier, presumably bound for war.

The inauspiciousness of his departure seems to be emphasized by the fact that the soldier is not following the obvious exit route, up the steps, through the gate, out to sea, sun and bellicose glory, but is rather descending through an obscure path into a darkness haunted by a weeping figure (the kneeling woman). Perhaps for this reason his size is disproportionately small, in a literal rendition of the performance of his death or disappearance. More than the question as to who is dead or dying (man or goose), the painting invites speculation as to who is doing the killing. If the soldier is to die in battle, or has already done so, a fact which would give his fading presence here the status of a ghost, his obvious killers would be the nation's enemies. However, it is also possible to argue that the national interests that dispatched him into battle are responsible for his death.

Furthermore, back home, matters are even less transparent. The daughter who at first glance appears obediently to fulfil her part in the traditional division of labour (men fight, women nurture; men kill and die, women breed), may here be seen to be blurring those boundaries. She sports inappropriate festive flowers in her hair (an intertextual allusion to the accessorizing of other, more openly dangerous female counterparts in *In the Garden*, fig. 1.15, *Snare*, fig. 1.23 and *Prey*, fig. 1.28) and her grip on the goose is unforgiving. Presumably she has already been responsible for wringing its neck, which, in an echo of the Red Monkey's tail in an earlier picture (fig. 2.4), is now broken and limp. The goose, furthermore, is not simply dead; in death it is subjected to further mutilation by plucking, which evokes the shaved dog and the groomed man in *Untitled f* (e-fig. 7) and *Departure* (fig. 2.8) respectively. The place in the sun claimed by this young girl therefore accrues further significance.

The goose has long-standing mythical associations with love and conjugal fidelity; in some traditions, moreover, was thought to be homologous with the swan, itself linked to feminine beauty and the virtues of helplessness, sacrifice and gender submissiveness, and identified with the cultural icon of the Virgin Mary (Becker, 1994, 130): 'behold the handmaid of the Lord', Luke 1:38. The fact that, in this

painting, those qualities may have met their deaths at the hands of a young girl recalls Virginia Woolf's notorious exhortation to women, urging them to discard the chains of stereotypical femininity and domestic confinement by symbolically murdering (specifically, and of particular relevance to this picture, strangling) 'the Angel in the House':

I discovered that [...] I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, 'The Angel in the House'. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing [...]. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her — you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it — in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. [...] And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. [...] Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: 'My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the wiles and arts of your sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. [...] And she made as if to guide my pen. I now record the one act for which I take some credit to myself [...]. *I turned upon her and caught her by the throat.* I did my best to kill her. [...] I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have *plucked* the heart out of my writing. [...] She died hard. [...] *Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.* (Woolf, 1943, 150–51, italics mine)

'Women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been "killed" into art. [...Until quite recently] the female imagination has perceived itself, as it were, through a glass darkly' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, 17). The goose/swan that represents that Marian ideal in Rego's picture meets its death at the hands of an unangelic daughter. She sits clutching the victim of her crime, disloyally adorned in celebratory red flowers, at the moment of yet another death: that of her departing father.

The demise of the father and the resurgence of the angel-killer may also be tortuously evoked through other mythical reverberations emanating from the symbol of the swan.



Fig. 2.12 Anonymous, *Leda and the Swan* (16th century). Oil on panel, 131.1 x 76.2 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leda_and_the_Swan_\(Philadelphia_Museum_of_Art\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leda_and_the_Swan_(Philadelphia_Museum_of_Art).jpg)

Most notoriously in Greek mythology, the swan was the disguise adopted by Zeus in order to rape Leda, as depicted in any number of canonical images in the history of art (fig. 2.12).⁸ That particular gesture of masculine and divine despotism, encapsulated in the claiming of a godly *droit de seigneur*, had issue. Leda gave birth to twin girls, Helen

⁸ The theme of Leda and the swan has inspired painters and sculptors alike: Michelangelo, Leonardo and Rubens, to name but a few.

and Clytemnestra, each of whom would in a different way become responsible for significant male deaths. Helen's adultery and elopement led to carnage at the siege of Troy (Achilles, Paris, Hector, Ajax), but had even wider, indirect repercussions. One of the key players of the Trojan War was her brother-in-law, Agamemnon, Menelaus's brother and Clytemnestra's husband. Agamemnon, as is well known, set off for Troy to fulfil his duty to his brother, and for that purpose sacrificed his own daughter Iphigenia to the gods for the sake of a favourable wind. At the end of the Trojan war, he was murdered by Clytemnestra in revenge for their daughter's death.

The rape of Leda by that original swan (whose Regoesque avatar has his own actions nipped in the bud) in the original myth sets off a chain reaction of events made memorable in the Homeric epic and in the tragedies that enshrine the earliest stirrings of Western culture. The tenor of these stories, seen from one angle, is the pitting of man against woman or husband against wife in betrayal and death, and the unleashing of conflicts at home and abroad. In the course of these, some women admittedly die (Iphigenia, Clytemnestra), but enough survive and escape with impunity (Helen, Medea), to gloat *ad infinitum* in their unpunished crimes. The plot of female criminality allowed to go scot-free was immortalized by the tranquil words of Helen in *The Odyssey* and Medea's lighthearted goodbyes in Euripides's play, *Medea*. In *The Odyssey*, Helen, now back in Sparta with her lawful husband following the fall of Troy, whose destruction she had arguably provoked, is visited by Telemachus, son of Odysseus, on a mission to seek news of his missing father, who had failed to return home from the war. On this socially embarrassing occasion, she serenely refers to her past Trojan self as the 'shameless creature that I was' (Homer, 1984, 68). More scandalously still, in *Medea*, in the aftermath of her murder of her own children in retaliation for her husband's betrayal, the eponymous heroine orders an annual feast by means of which the people of Corinth (but not she herself) will solemnize and 'expiate this impious murder'. As for Medea herself, 'I [...] will go to Athens' (the seat of justice as articulated by men) 'to make my home' (Euripedes, 1989, 60). Helen's understatement regarding the consequences of her actions and Medea's absolute escape from retribution tacitly acquit female actions that bring down male civilizations: an outcome possibly also favoured by Paula Rego.

This returns us to *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11) and to this particular death. Here, too, hallowed domesticity strays towards an imminent bloodbath. The girl and the dead goose (or swan), which, rather than doing the raping is itself being 'plucked', are in a solitary place. They are entirely alone, since the soldier and the weeping woman appear to exist in a different dimension, as attested by their minuscule size and shadowy presence. The girl is partly sheltered by an archway, but with no indication of an intent to conceal herself, and although the perspective is unclear, she may be partially visible from the white building, whose windows, however, are blank. If in the parlance of the standard detective story we ask who was the last person to see this goose alive, in the absence of any obvious witnesses, the accusing finger points to this apparent criminal, who, as is so often the case in Paula Rego's work, appears serenely at ease at the scene of her crime. 'I [...] will go to Athens'. And why not? Greece is a nice place for a well-deserved break.

The next picture, *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13), also bears a title that places it within the realm of the familial and the domestic.

A girl or young woman sits in a room by a window without a view, alone except for a black cat, and polishes a man's boot, presumably that of the eponymous policeman and father. Light streams in through the window, but whether it is sun or moonlight is not clear. Ruth Rosengarten has detected in this work both sexual tension conducive to yet another reading of incest (the daughter's hand inside the father's phallic boot), and the metonymical allusion of that authoritarian boot to state power. In this reading, therefore, familial (paternal) and political (state) authority become enmeshed (Rosengarten, 1997, 75). If so, however, the interweaving of masculinity and femininity, and of personal and collective interests, is far from simple.

Both in Portuguese and in English, Paula Rego's two languages, to clean someone's boots (or more specifically to lick them), signifies submissiveness to the point of abjection. In a specifically Portuguese context, and in a country in which, to this day, it is not uncommon for men to have their shoes polished by young boys in the street in exchange for a small payment (echoes of the kneeling seamstress in *The Fitting*, fig. 1.3), there may also be a class dimension inherent in the notion of not being obliged to clean one's own footwear. Here the act possibly alludes to nothing more than filial conformity to the female



Fig. 2.13 Paula Rego, *The Policeman's Daughter* (1987). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 151.4 cm. Saatchi Collection, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

domestic duties that traditionally facilitated male activity in the public sphere. Thus, the daughter polishing the boots — or boot — which is her father's badge of state-authorized power, appears at first glance to submit to and collude with the premises of a hierarchical, divided, class-ridden, gender-unequal world.

Male power, like God's, therefore, is represented in the shape of the father's boot, which stands for him *in absentia*. But is that in fact the case? In another possible reading, all that remains of the man in this enclosed place is in fact a void, his absence made conspicuous not by a pair of boots but rather by a useless, unmatched one. A man wearing only one boot, clearly, will limp. This single boot, furthermore, carries all the implications of what is symbolically being done to it. Fiona Bradley refers the image of the arm, elbow-deep inside the boot, and

its powerful sexual charge, to Rego's awareness of the controversy that surrounded Robert Mapplethorpe's ICA photography exhibition of the same year as this picture, and which included an image of 'fisting', a fist rammed inside a man's anus (Bradley, 1997, 22).⁹

If what is in question both in Mapplethorpe and in Rego is anal sex or even rape, and in Rego not now the rape of a mythical female Leda but of an unnamed male — and, more to the point here, of a father — incest, the act which in the father-daughter modality habitually carries connotations of paedophilic abuse, now undergoes a reversal of the customary gender positions in relation to brutality and helplessness. The standard distribution of power according to gender and family role, whether in the context of voluntary sex or of forcible intercourse, is radically turned inverted also, more clearly even than in the *Girl and Dog* images discussed in the previous chapter. And given the father's defining characteristic, namely his status as policeman, as laid down by the picture's title, it is not simply paternity in its domestic and familial guise which is involved here, but a whole network of symbolic fathers: law makers, law enforcers, heads of state, rulers, fathers of the nation, priests and even God-the-Father himself. This leads to further complications. For example, if in Salazar's vision for the nation, men appeared as parents in many different permutations (fathers of their daughters, of their wives, of their female parishioners, of their country and of its colonies), women, as discussed before, were acceptable not just primarily but exclusively as mothers and daughters, within the domestic confines of the home space. Paula Rego takes on this monolithic discourse on its own terms, and exposes the appalling fragility at the heart of paternalistically-defined power. The boot being dutifully polished (the male organ being manually stimulated) becomes also the hole or the anus into which a violating hand and a muscular female arm are brutally rammed, in an enactment of the most humiliating sexual act performable upon one man, usually by another. The submissive daughter, busily going about the domestic activities that sustain the father's career interests, becomes the raping demoness who breaks every last taboo, and who, disturbingly, does so while paradoxically

9 Paula Rego, however, does not acknowledge a link between Mapplethorpe's photograph and her own work. Sketches and studies for this image, indeed, do not present the hand inside the boot, but rather holding the outside of it in an enfolding gesture. I am grateful to Robert Hinde for pointing this out to me.

continuing to fulfil the role of the angel in the house. In Paula Rego's work, as will be discussed in chapter 3 with reference to *The Ambassador of Jesus* (fig. 3.4), the right hand, conveniently, often does not know what the left hand is doing. In *The Policeman's Daughter*, while one hand rapes, the other hand ministers, in mockery of the maternal tactic of being cruel to be kind. Through the agency of this dutiful daughter dressed in the generic white of adolescent communicants, young brides and novice nuns, a veneer of polish, thick or thin, is imposed upon unreconstructed masculinity, while at her hands extant regimes willy-nilly undergo assorted reforms.

The unconvincing innocence of the girl, in any case, is promptly given the lie by the black cat, a truly Regoesque index of ambivalence. In her study of nursery rhymes and fairy tales, Lucy Rollin identifies cats as archetypally female: nurturing mothers but also murderers (Rollin, 1992, 31). Even *Puss in Boots*, according to Jack Zipes (2012) was originally female. In Portuguese, Cinderella, famously risen from the ashes (cinders) to triumph and queendom, is also called 'Gata Borralheira' (she-cat in the hearth). The cat has further associations with the serpent in Kabbalist Jewish tradition, and was imported into Christian lore with the same charge of wrongdoing. During the Middle Ages and enduringly in children's fairy tales, cats, and more particularly black ones, were considered to be witches' familiars, the symbol of the Devil (Becker, 1994, 53), whilst in popular superstition they are the harbingers of bad luck.¹⁰ In this picture, therefore, the cat as the devilish partner-in-crime of this disquieting policeman's daughter embodies a multifaceted onslaught against patriarchy (the father), dictatorship (the policeman) and religion (God as the antithesis of Satan/magic), which in Portuguese national life stand — and here fall — together.

With reference to this image, Germaine Greer and Colin Wiggins (Guardian 20 November 2004) discuss a video played at an exhibition of Rego's work at the Tate Britain, in which Robert Hughes sought to link Rego's work to a great anti-fascist tradition of art, connecting the jackboot in *The Policeman's Daughter* to a symbology of totalitarian power. Greer and Wiggins contest Hughes interpretation and counter it by quoting Rego herself as saying that the girl in the image 'is a very obedient girl' who conspires to perpetuate male authority. I would

10 Alternately good and bad luck in Britain; bad luck in Portugal.

argue that it takes a bad case of tin ear to miss the sarcasm in Rego's comment.

I will conclude my consideration of this series of paintings with a work appropriately titled *The Family* (fig. 2.14).



Fig. 2.14 Paula Rego, *The Family* (1988). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 212.4 x 212.4 cm. The Saatchi Collection, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Critical approaches to this image have differed widely. John McEwen links the final version to its initial subject and title (*The Raising of Lazarus*), which he connected to the biographical fact of the artist's widowhood in 1988, the year the picture was finished (McEwen, 1997, 167–68).¹¹

¹¹ Rego's husband, Victor Willing, became incapacitated by multiple sclerosis and died an invalid in 1988, the year this image was created.

Ruth Rosengarten avoids biographical data, preferring to bring to this image a reading that emphasizes the antagonism of the two central female protagonists towards the helpless male (Rosengarten, 1997, 75). Her approach dovetails with the points I shall now raise, which also emphasize the aspect of force variously exerted against the man by a coven of three Shakespearean witches, although McEwen's reading also supports the love-hate syndrome detected by my earlier analysis of, for example, the *Girl and Dog* images as clear cases of wishing to harm those one loves (Rego, quoted in McEwen, 1997, 138).

The juxtaposition of the man against his two immediate antagonists, and the positioning of the latter's arms, refer us back to the postures of any number of girls and dogs in images discussed previously (*Two Girls and a Dog*, e-fig. 4; *In the Garden*, fig. 1.15; *Untitled b*, fig. 1.29; *Untitled d*, fig. 1.31; *Untitled e*, fig. 1.32) and to the same themes of harassment, bodily harm and violent, untimely death. The check or crossbar pattern on the little girl's skirt also sets off echoes of prior works (the prison-bar motif of the skirt pattern in *Untitled a*, e-fig. 6 and *Untitled b*, fig. 1.29; of the fence posts in *Untitled c*, fig. 1.30; of the pattern on the bedspread in *Untitled e*, fig. 1.32; of the playpen bars in *Untitled f*, e-fig. 7), as does her position (reminiscent of the girls in *Snare*, fig. 1.23, *Untitled g*, fig. 1.33 and *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, fig. 6.3), tauntingly standing between the legs of a man who, possible incest aside, is manifestly debarred from taking advantage of the possibilities raised by such provocation, due both to his invalidism and to restraint by sheer force (the woman who holds him from behind). Whether standing between a male's legs (*The Family*, fig. 2.14; *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, fig. 6.3) or holding him between theirs (*Snare*, fig. 1.23; *Untitled g*, fig. 1.33), therefore, in Paula Rego it always appears to be a case of girls on top. Compositionally, the way in which the juxtaposition of the protagonists in *The Family* evokes that of many of the girls and helpless dogs of earlier works lends force to Agustina Bessa-Luís's argument that those dogs represent men (Rego and Bessa-Luís, 2001, 16), and Rego's own statement that she was 'painting something about Vic' in the last stages of his illness (Tusa, 2000, 10).

Be that as it may, sexually and otherwise, the male figure in *The Family* (fig. 2.14) appears to have reached the end of the road, as indicated by the greenish pallor of his skin. The point is cruelly hammered home through antithesis, by way of the figure of the third female protagonist, a

small girl whose piously conjoined hands contrast with her improbably pregnant body. Since biologically — given her apparent age of six or seven — pregnancy is not a possibility, both it and the little girl herself, in her capacity as the youngest member of the cast, may be argued to represent the future: a future that she personifies, as well as being pregnant with it ('*grávida de futuro*', Lispector, 1990, 98), in sharp contrast to the man, who clearly has none.

The little girl stands near a painted wooden oratory. One panel depicts what appears to be an altogether proper scene of piety: Mary Magdalene stands by and watches as Saint Michael, in his habitual representation, slays the Devil in the shape of a dragon. Other than the slayer of dragons and demons, Saint Michael was also the saint who weighed up the souls of the dead (psychostasis), in order to measure their just deserts (Hall, 1991, 208), a role that may explain his connection here with Mary Magdalene, who in her turn represents the embodiment *par excellence* of carefully balanced female sin and virtue. If Mary Magdalene, like Helen of Troy and Medea, signals the ambivalence evoked by a woman's sins left unpunished, the bottom wooden panel of the oratory offers another take on the battle between good and evil. This time it depicts the affront caused by expecting thanks for refraining from sin: the panel depicts La Fontaine's fable of the wolf and the stork. In this tale, the wolf chokes on a piece of food and begs the stork to help. The stork does so by pulling out the piece of food with its long beak, and is offended when the wolf fails to thank it. The wolf retorts that its thanks were expressed by refraining from eating the stork.¹² In Paula Rego's universe, criminals (usually female) habitually go all the way, and when they hold back from full-blown criminality, it is a case of being thankful for small mercies. In this paradigmatic picture, in fact, the self-restraint of the wolf does not appear to find an echo in the 'real world' of the protagonists, two of whom appear to be on the verge of enforcing an untimely death upon the third. And yet again, as elsewhere in this artist's work (*Time: Past and Present*, fig. 1.8; *The Policeman's Daughter*, fig. 2.13; *Mother*, fig. 3.19), the background to a scenario of juxtaposed dead-ends and unholy worlds-without-end is the vindictive desolation of a window with no view, opening onto nothing.

12 Details regarding both aspects of the oratory were obtained in conversation with Paula Rego.

3. The Sins of the Fathers: Mother and Land Revisited in the 1990s

To arrive at the truth in all things, we ought always to be ready to believe that what seems to us white is black if the hierarchical Church so defines it.

St Ignatius de Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*

$2+2$ (God willing) = 4

Medieval equation

Burning Books

'In addition to papism, the Reverent probably suspected [the parrot] of latent femaleness' (Kingsolver, 1999, 71). Papism aside — because it is something to be taken for granted in the context of the pictures to be discussed now and in *The Crime of Father Amaro*, the Eça de Queirós novel that inspired them — Barbara Kingsolver's parrot, by name Methuselah, combines two suspicious traits which are defining concerns in Paula Rego's depiction of femaleness: a penchant for profanity and resilient longevity.

'I have always been a literary painter, thank goodness, like all the decent painters'. Walter Sickert's quip, quoted by Virginia Woolf (Woolf, 1992, 36), sets him among the ranks of an increasingly depleted group of artists which include Paula Rego. In 1997–1998 Rego used *The Crime of Father Amaro*, a novel by the nineteenth-century Portuguese writer Eça de Queirós, as the inspiration for a series of pastels that incorporated all of the preoccupations raised in previous chapters (nationality, gender,

religion), within a body of work whose referent, more markedly even than before, was Portugal itself, past and present (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27).

Before proceeding to a brief account of Eça de Queirós's novel, and to a consideration of Rego's works themselves, I wish to discuss briefly some similarities and differences in Eça's and Rego's respective nineteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetic positions. Paula Rego is one of the most literary of contemporary painters. Her work often begins with a prior narrative or literary text (Eça de Queirós, Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys, Thomas Hardy, Jean Genet, Franz Kafka, Henry Darger, Blake Morrison, Fernando de Rojas, fairy tales, nursery rhymes). Her relationship to the texts, however, as she herself acknowledges, can go further even than the originals in terms of polemic edge and the degree to which she destabilizes their power games and hierarchies. In her own words, 'I always want to turn things on their heads, to upset the established order, to change heroines and idiots. If the story is "given" I take liberties with it, to make it conform to my own experiences, and to be outrageous. At the same time as loving the stories I want to undermine them, like wanting to harm the person you love' (quoted in McEwen, 1997, 138) The stories she tells, therefore, stories recounted, as Marina Warner would have it, 'from a place [...] generally overlooked, the female child's', (Warner, 1994, 8) and with the intent of causing anarchy, are as much profanities uttered against the 'master text' — the literary text — as they are against the meta-text, the status quo against which she deploys her sacrilegious imagination.

Commenting upon some of her early work of the 1960s, Germaine Greer contends that works such as *Centaur* (1964) (e-fig. 9)¹ are both flatteringly imitative pastiches of Picasso and the Catalan Primitives, and biting satires of them, their motifs not so much quoted as snatched for outlandish purposes (Greer, 1988, 29).

This double-edged defiance, which flatters by allusion while simultaneously hijacking a prior master-text, operates also with

1 e-fig. 9 Paula Rego, *Centaur* (1964). Collage and oil on canvas, 140 x 139 cm. Casa das Histórias, Cascais, Portugal, all rights reserved. Posted by Martin Gayford, 'Remarkable and powerful — you see her joining the old masters: Paula Rego reviewed', *The Spectator*, 22 June 2019, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2019/06/remarkable-and-powerful-you-see-her-joining-the-old-masters-paula-rego-reviewed/>

reference to Eça de Queirós's novel. The pivot of the relationship between text and image in this case is laughter, but, more particularly, differing modes of laughter.

Both Paula and Eça laugh with the intent of social critique. But Eça de Queirós laughed at what was bad in society in order to point the path to goodness; in other words, he laughed irreverently but with a missionary zeal and in the service of social and moral reform.² Paula Rego's laughter carries a different resonance.

Marina Warner talks of Rego's universe as 'a home that's become odd, prickly with desire, and echoing with someone's laughter'. (Warner, 1994, 7). Less cryptically, Victor Willing observed that while Rego 'discovered early that humour can disarm the pompous and insincere', she also 'disappointed some admirers who wanted more, when she decided that some things are not a laughing matter' (Willing, 1988b, 273). Thus, what many critics have seen as Eça's great flaw as a writer — the inability to know when to stop laughing and begin weeping³—has no equivalent in Rego's darker approach. In this artist, mirth is abruptly reined in and can turn nasty with disconcerting suddenness, aiming not so much to reform as to wreak havoc.

But if Paula Rego is a hit-and-run artist, a changeling at the heart of the status quo, she is also, and causally, a defensive one. In an echo of the enduring desire to give fear a face through painting it, Victor Willing argues that she laughs at the characters in her stories in order 'to make them less dangerous'. The intent to tackle perceived threats, however, is carried as far as possible and then possibly a little further than strictly necessary for defensive purposes. Defense often becomes disproportionate retaliation, and as Willing argues, it can entail also 'a great deal of violence' perpetrated against her characters (Willing, 1971, 44).

While acknowledging the shared thematic territory between Rego and Eça in these pictures, therefore, it is also necessary to recognize what separates them. In doing so, it may be helpful to consider Ernst van Alphen's distinction between the concepts of figurative and figural painting. The former refers to illustrative work whereas the latter specifically does not imply 'a relationship between an object outside the

2 See footnote 7.

3 Alfredo Campos Matos, *Dicionário De Eça De Queirós* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1993).

painting [for example, in the text] and the figure in the painting that supposedly illustrates that object'. In the latter case, the figure in the painting 'is and refers only to itself' (Alphen, 1992, 28). I would suggest that in the case of the *Father Amaro* pastels, as in much other work by Paula Rego, while the works ostensibly gesture to a text and even to specific scenes within that text, what is involved is in fact a figural rather than a figurative performance entailing, in some cases, no more than a superficial reference to the narrative and protagonists. The text thus becomes the pre(text) for images to which it may be more or less tenuously linked. The pictorial responses to the prior text differ from it to varying degrees, in terms of what is ventured both thematically and ideologically. Whether dealing with fairy tales, nursery rhymes, other writers, composers (Verdi, Puccini), artists (Hogarth), or film makers (Disney), Rego's pictures are in equal measure homages to, exaggerations of or challenges to beloved but recalibrated precursors. And the text therefore may at times act as no more than the catalyst for an elaborately choreographed performance: that is, the apparent link between the text and the pictures is, in fact, incidental. In the more extreme instances, the connection between text and image is severed and the images declare independence from the written word to which they had purported to refer. Sometimes, then, though by no means always, the picture as performance enacts its separation from a text whose un-relatedness to that selfsame picture is foregrounded, leading to the creation of a universe whose disturbing alterity to the instigating narrative actually *becomes* the point. Or one of the points. A point rendered all the more intriguing, for all the surface parallels that are allowed to linger.

The preoccupations that had driven the works of previous decades might be said to lead directly to the place where we find ourselves in this phase of Rego's work: namely a set of images triggered by Portugal's most resolutely anti-clerical novel, a text that pointed to a social reality in which truly there was no place for a woman. Or not, at least, for one who was not dead. Eça de Queirós published *The Crime of Father Amaro*⁴

4 Until a recent translation by Margaret Jull Costa, the title of the novel was usually rendered as *The Sin of Father Amaro* rather than the actual *The Crime of Father Amaro*: a clear instance of inexcusable translator liberty, since in the novel Amaro is both a sinful priest and a murderous one. In the first version of the novel he murders his newborn son with his own hands although by the third version he contracts out the killing to someone else. In the English exhibition and catalogue Rego opted for the term 'Sin'.

in 1875 at a period in the nation's political life when the conflict between the absolutist and liberal factions that had led to a civil war earlier in the century had not entirely abated. A system of two-party rotativism ensured political stability at the price of stagnation. The perceived threats of republicanism and atheism were kept at bay through the signing in 1847 of a Concordat with the Vatican (a forerunner of Salazar's similar move in 1940), which guaranteed the legislative yoking of church and state interests. The analogies between the nineteenth-century status quo against which Eça pitted his satires and Paula Rego's church and state *bêtes noires* are striking, and almost certainly contributed to the attraction this novel held for her.

Briefly, the plot involves the figure of a Catholic priest, the eponymous Amaro, newly appointed, thanks to his contacts in influential circles, to the prosperous parish of Leiria, a small town in central Portugal. Amaro takes lodgings with a middle-aged matron, Augusta Caminha (known as São Joaneira because she is a native of the small town of São João da Foz) and her nubile daughter, Amélia. He quickly settles into a comfortable life in a pious environment shored up by the devout support of a number of *beatas*, devout women who submit to priestly authority in all matters, both spiritual and secular. Amaro, forced into the priesthood by his childhood benefactress, the Marchioness of Alegros whose servant his mother had been, finds clerical life satisfactory in the power it gives him over his predominantly female flock, but eminently unsatisfactory in terms of the celibacy vows it imposes on him. The plot moves steadily towards the foreseeable seduction of Amélia by Amaro. After the humiliation of a poverty-stricken, orphaned childhood lived among servants, the hardships of the seminary and the daily degradation of being, as he sees it, a celibate eunuch amongst men, Amaro now rejoices in being leader of the pack: as priest in an ultra-Catholic society he rules society in the name of God, church and state; and as her lover he controls the body and mind of the adoring Amélia, 'the flower of the congregation'.

Amaro and Amélia enjoy their sexual encounters in the house of the sexton, which Amélia visits once or twice a week, ostensibly to pay charity calls on the latter's crippled daughter, Totó, who is bedridden with tuberculosis. After a while, Amélia finds she is pregnant and the lovers' world threatens to collapse. With the connivance of Canon

Dias, Amaro's hierarchical superior and moral mentor — who is also the lover of Amélia's mother — and the grudging help of Dona Josefa, Dias's sanctimonious and disapproving sister, it is contrived that in the later stages of gestation, when the pregnancy will become impossible to conceal, Dias will take São Joaneira away for their annual seaside holiday while Amélia retreats with Dona Josefa to a remote country house. There she will give birth in secrecy and dispose of the child through some form of discreet arrangement, prior to returning to her old life.

Things proceed smoothly enough up to a point, but Amélia dies in childbirth, an event whose causes are glossed over by the two priests to the world at large and to her oblivious mother in particular, as the consequence of a ruptured aneurism. One other event, perhaps the crucial one as regards the moral structure of the novel, remains to tell. To Amaro falls the task of disposing of the newborn infant who, in his anticipatory thoughts, he had wished stillborn. When it comes to making the necessary arrangements, he faces a dilemma: his servant, Dionísia, formerly the town whore, her very name suggestive of unbridled amorality, offers him two choices: the first is a *bona fide* wet nurse who will rear the child with reasonable guarantees of discretion, albeit in a community and country where sniggers about suspicious priests' 'nephews', 'nieces' and 'godchildren', sometimes, although not frequently, had been known to ruin sacerdotal careers. The other is a woman called Carlota, who is sinisterly known as a 'weaver of angels' (*tecedeira de anjos*) because no child placed in her care ever survived longer than a day or two, being instead dispatched, as ironic local parlance would have it, to become an angel in Heaven. Amaro wrestles briefly with his conscience but hires Carlota and when his son is born delivers him unbaptized to the infanticidal nanny. When he hears the following day that Amélia has died of post-natal complications he tries to rescue the child but finds that he is already dead. The aftermath of inconsolable sorrow for his dead lover and guilt about his murdered child is the narrative postscript of a prosperous Amaro seen ten years later. On that occasion we learn that, following the events narrated here, he was relocated to an even better parish where he now lives untouched by the earlier scandal, wields power in clerical circles and still has an eye for the ladies. The final nail in the coffin of priestly honour sees Amaro

and Dias reunited and joking about the merits of confining love affairs to married confessants, on the grounds that in the event of an inconvenient pregnancy, he who is the husband is the father. As is always the case in Eça's writing, throughout the narrative but more emphatically so in these concluding pages, the personal is made political through the metonymical extrapolation from Amaro's moral decadence to that of the nation at large.

'The truth, gentlemen, is that foreigners envy us... And what I am about to say is not intended as flattery: whilst we have in this country respectable priests like your good selves, Portugal will hold up its head with dignity in Europe! Because Faith, gentlemen, is the pre-requisite of Order!'

'Undoubtedly, Count, undoubtedly', said the two priests emphatically.

'And if in doubt, gentlemen, look around you! What peace, what life, what prosperity!'

And with a grandiose gesture he showed them Loreto Square which just then, at the end of a serene afternoon, distilled the essence of the city. [...] Pairs of ladies went by, with false hair pieces and high heels, an air of exhaustion, with greenish skin, a sign of racial degeneration; young men of ancient families rode by on skeletal nags, faces still pale from a night out on the tiles; on the benches of the square people stretched out like vagrants; [...] and this decrepit world moved slowly under the bright sky of a wholesome climate [...] in lazy idleness towards where the four doorways of a tavern loomed dark and the alleyways of a neighbourhood of prostitution and crime led out like open sewers. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 499–500)⁵

Perversely in the case of a writer who was a professed atheist, only readers who believe in God can find solace from the outrage of Amaro's unpunished crimes in the belief of his damnation in the hereafter. For non-believers like Eça himself, this is truly a case of crime without punishment. Until the advent of Paula Rego.

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

The Sin of Father Amaro is a series comprising sixteen large pastels and nineteen sketches. Some refer directly to episodes in the novel, some are

5 Page numbers in translated quotations refer to the original passage in the Portuguese text, in the edition detailed in the list of works cited at the end of this book.

imaginary re-workings of certain scenes, and some are entirely unrelated to the original narrative but may reflect emotions experienced by the protagonists or the reader or both, with elements of wistfulness and might-have-been. The latter two on the whole relate to revenge fantasies.

I shall begin with *The Company of Women*. Rego's art teacher from her school days in Estoril was an Englishman called Patrick Sarsfield to whom, when she left, she offered a picture of a man lying drowned on a beach, the first and forerunner, as he was later to hazard, of the many men-as-victims in her work. This early propensity may have links to her depictions of childhood, in a way that is particularly apposite when considering this picture. Alberto Lacerda has written of Paula Rego that she 'knows all about the ligaments of innocence twisted by perversity and oppression' (Alberto Lacerda, quoted in McEwen, op. cit., 83), a description that adapts itself exactly to an early narrative flashback to the young Amaro in the novel:

The servants described Amaro as a milksop. He never played, never ran around in the fresh air. [...] He'd become very timorous. He slept beside one of the old nannies, always with a lamp lit. The maids, in any case, also effeminized him; they called him pretty boy, cuddled him, kissed and tickled him, and he rolled around under their skirts, touching their bodies with happy giggles. Sometimes [...] they dressed him in girl's clothes, laughing heartily; he submitted to them, half-naked, languidly, with lecherous eyes, his face flushed. And the maids used him in their intrigues: he was the one who told tales. He became very manipulative, a liar. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 35–36)

Although the spirit of the image is drawn from this passage, the title is drawn from another passage in the period when Amaro, posted to Leiria, has taken lodgings with São Joaneira and her daughter, Amélia:

Right from the beginning, cosily surrounded by comfort, Amaro felt happy. [...] The days went by peacefully, with good food, a comfortable bed and *the gentle company of women*. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 94, italics added)

It is the early Amaro of the first passage quoted above, however, the child as the father of the man, whom Rego focuses upon in this picture. She has explained that in certain of the images, and specifically in this one, she chose to use an adult male model to represent the child. In this way, I would argue, not only is the young Amaro depicted as



Fig. 3.1 Paula Rego, *The Company of Women* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 170 x 130 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

foretelling the nature of the adult man but, moreover, by a reverse (and perverse) process, the man is brought back to disempowered childhood, emasculated by the skirt he wears and clinging to the capacious skirts of the women servants. Dress, or undress, is important in these images. In three of the four pictures in which Amaro figures (*The Company of Women*, fig. 3.1, *Mother*, fig. 3.19 and *Perch*, fig. 3.20) he is only partially dressed (in two he is bare chested and wearing a skirt, in the other he wears a dressing gown and in all three he is barefoot). A half-naked, barefoot man is unfit to go out into the public sphere where men supposedly belong, but is instead confined to the home, the domestic setting where in theory women dwell.

Beyond the introductory flashbacks to childhood, the body of the novel concentrates on the adult Amaro, the priest who despotically demands from Amélia, and to a lesser extent from the devout old women that surround him, absolute submission to his will and desires: an autocratic impetus that Eça deterministically traces back to that early childhood disempowerment at the hands of a series of controlling women: the mother who granted him no father, the Marchioness who made him a priest, the servants who alternatively teased and mollycoddled him, and the Virgin Mary who, in his seminary days, figured prominently in his adolescent fantasies. We shall return to the latter presently, when discussing *The Cell* (fig. 3.2). In the novel Eça consigns Amaro's childhood traumas to an explanatory flashback, whereas in *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1) Rego foregrounds the effects of a psychologically damaged childhood in her depiction of this melancholic and then murderous man-child.

The mirror that appears in this as well as in other pictures in this series (*The Ambassador of Jesus*, fig. 3.4; *The Coop*, fig. 3.12; *Mother*, fig. 3.19) will be important to this reading. A considerable amount has been written about the deployment of mirrors within paintings. Norman Bryson for example has suggested that 'what the mirror [...] within a picture introduce[s] is the idea of a radical disjunction' (Bryson, 1990, 152), a separation between states or terms coterminously deployed within the same image. To this, one might add that a mirror can also be said to relativize viewpoints and interpretations, and to shatter the illusion of a unified objective perception of reality on the part of the viewer ('what I think I see is what is in fact there'), by offering an alternative view with some differences. In the case of *The Company of Women*, it will be suggested, reverting to Bryson's terminology, that the disjunction introduced is a split between the self (the present self) outside the mirror and the past childhood self whom the mirror reflects back, and to which the adult self longs to return while being debarred from doing so. In this series (for example, *Mother*, fig. 3.19), Amaro never looks directly into the mirror. Paula Rego has suggested that she deploys mirrors in order to provide the illusion of space without the need to allow the characters the benefit of doors or windows, a remark that suggests their confinement in enclosed spaces. With reference to *The Policeman's Daughter* (fig. 2.13), John McEwen advances the notion

of windows that are open but offer no view and no means of escape (McEwen, 1997, 167). As mentioned in earlier chapters in connection with *Time: Past and Present* (fig. 1.8) and *The Policeman's Daughter*, the mirror that devolves the gaze upon the solipsistic self, much like the window without a prospect, bears relevance both to an individual (psychological) and to a national (historical) plight, as conjured up by Eça in nineteenth-century Portugal and by Rego's post-dictatorship work in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Later on in this chapter I shall argue that the mirror with a single view (the self), and the window with a restricted view of the sea or with no view at all (*The Policeman's Daughter*, fig. 2.13; *Mother*, fig. 3.19), represent a series of knives turned in historical wounds. For now, however, I shall argue that at the level of individual psychic concerns a mirror can be defined as the stage upon which the narcissistic plot of self-love and self-search is enacted. The mirror is the surface that reflects the self caught in the vortex of the inward-looking gaze.

If, as Paula Rego suggested, the adult man in *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1) represents the lost child, the mirror into which he wishes to gaze while being debarred from doing so represents the narcissistic pull, which, in Amaro, will remain unsatisfied, and which itself alludes to a more atavistic desire. Following Freud, the Oedipal son fears castration by the father as retaliation against his incestuous desire for the mother and resolves this crisis by relinquishing that desire and learning to identify with the male parent. The reward is entry into the sphere of empowered masculinity. The dismissal of the mother was the price paid for the gratification and privilege of becoming a man, but a repressed longing for her may endure in the unconscious, triggering future pathologies, including narcissism. With some modifications of orthodox Freudian logic, in Eça, Amaro's narcissism (self-love) becomes a compensatory mechanism rendered necessary by the loss of the mother. The man who gazes in the mirror, or, as may be the case here, wishes to but cannot, is the arrested Oedipal son whose filial detachment has been only imperfectly achieved. Presently we will discuss the manifestation of that narcissism in Amaro's dealings with Amélia, in particular in the episodes represented in *The Ambassador of Jesus*, but the problem is also given brutal iconographic expression in *The Cell*.



Fig. 3.2 Paula Rego, *The Cell* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 120 x 160 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

If Eça shirked mother-son incest as the most emotive form of the taboo,⁶ Paula Rego's less hesitant scalpel lays it bare for us with an added sacrilegious twist and horribly few punches pulled. In *The Cell* (fig. 3.2) we contemplate not only sex with the mother, but sex with Mary, Humanity's Mother, as well as masturbatory sex, which by definition is narcissistic sex without issue. This picture corresponds partly to that episode already referred to in the novel, in the course of which Amaro, while a young seminarist, fantasizes sexually about the Virgin Mary.

In bed, at night, he tossed and turned, unable to sleep, and in his thoughts, in his dreams there burned, like a silent fire, a desire for the female. Hanging on the wall in his cell there was an image of the Virgin, crowned with stars, standing on a globe, her eyes gazing at the immortal light, crushing the serpent underfoot. [...] As he looked at the picture, Amaro forgot her holy status, saw nothing but a beautiful blonde girl; he

6 Eça did in fact write a novel involving mother-son incest, which was only published posthumously as *A Tragédia da Rua das Flores* (*The Tragedy of the Street of Flowers*). Instead, in his lifetime he published what is generally regarded as his greatest novel, *Os Maias* (*The Maias*) of 1888, which included brother-sister incest.

loved her: he undressed, sighing, peering lasciviously at her out of the corner of his eye: and sometimes his curiosity even led him to imagine lifting the demure folds of her blue tunic and thinking about her figure, her curves, her white flesh. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 42)

In *The Cell* that scene is depicted by Paula Rego with a profanity magnified at various levels. Amaro, the adolescent again portrayed as a mature man, lies on a bed in a suspicious posture. Let us hear the artist herself: 'He is deeply lonely and is masturbating. I am sorry for him, but he ought not to take advantage of Our Lady' (quoted in Marques Gastão, op. cit., 44). The effigy of the Virgin concealed under the bed presumably acts as the fetishizing accessory to the forbidden act of onanism. The composition transgresses a breathtaking number of taboos. First the religious taboo of sex with, or *à propos* of, the Virgin Mary. Second, the Freudian interdiction of desire for the mother, let alone, as here, a Holy Mother and a virginal one at that. Third, the gender betrayal entailed in the abandonment of masculinity (because if masculinity is the status attained in the post-Oedipal phase by the son who successfully jettisoned desire for the mother in favour of identification with the father — and, in the case of a priest, with God-the-Father — that trajectory is here reversed by this foetal, contumacious, womb-driven, mother-desiring son). Fourth, the act of spilling one's seed for pleasure rather than procreation. And fifth, the desecration of the monastic space (his cell in the seminary), which traditionally is the realm of God the Father and of celibate priests. If as Mieke Bal (1990, 515) argues, the figure of the woman set in domestic interiors constitutes a genre within which the household becomes a female affair and men are intruders (for example in the seventeenth-century Dutch school of Vermeer, Ter Borch and de Hooch), Rego (and in the novel *Eça*) reverse that generic expectation. They do so, moreover, by setting up as object of temptation the only woman who, 'alone of all her sex' (Warner, 1985) should never be seen as such; a man who ought to be sexless but is tempted by her even so; and in a place (a seminary), to which no woman should ever be admitted but is, in representation if not in the flesh. The abject, camouflaged as the iconography of orthodox worship, undertakes the task of dismantling it. In *Eça* and Paula, the result is a libidinous priest who breaks all his vows, deflowers a virgin, begets a son and murders him. No need for a hammer (*Sleeping*, fig. 1.27; *Prey*, fig. 1.28) to dismantle this particular holy edifice.



Fig. 3.3 Johannes Vermeer, *A Lady Writing* (c. 1665). Oil on canvas, 45 x 39.9 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johannes_Vermeer_-_A_Lady_Writing_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Instead in *The Cell*, she depicts an empty space from which the woman has decamped, leaving in her place the mocking simulacrum of a fleshless effigy, as well as a space that is cell-like yet (because sexually defiled) no longer monastic, and, either way, *unheimlich* rather than homely. In this picture Amaro is simultaneously an adult man and a foetal presence. He lies both on top and not on top (because the bed separates them) of the statuette of the Virgin. She in her turn is positioned as the obliging receptacle for his sexual and emotional outpourings, but paradoxically also as the unattainable object of desire whose (maternal) lap is rendered inaccessible by the mass of the bed.

Paula Rego's rendering of Amaro's standard Oedipal relationship to a variety of mothers and lovers, holy and secular, lends itself also to

post-Freudian psychoanalytic readings (Lacanian and Object Relations Theory). According to the various reformulations of writers such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Melanie Klein, Karen Horney, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, in parallel to the Oedipal castration conflict with the father and the final identification with him by the son, there operates a much more fundamental need for escape from the mother (Horney, 1973; Kristeva, 1982; Chodorow, 1979; Dinnerstein, 1987). According to Horney and Dinnerstein, the psychic dominion of the father becomes apparent as being, after all, a less ominous alternative than subsumption into the body of the mother, and therefore preferable to the danger that the mother represents.

Contrary to mainstream Freudian thought, these authors reinstate the maternal as the focus of their analysis. Dinnerstein and Chodorow argue that in a culture in which the care of children falls almost exclusively to the woman, the mother is simultaneously the first love, the first witness and the first source of frustration of the child. The mother allays hunger, tiredness, pain, boredom and fear, or fails to do these things. She is the source of all that is good and all that is bad in the sensorial world of the infant, who experiences the mother as holding absolute power of life or death over him or her, a fact that determines the nature of relations with women (mothers) in adulthood. According to this understanding, the post-Oedipal mother becomes the entity who must of necessity be confronted and discarded by a son who, according to Simone de Beauvoir (1988), will define himself as an independent being by means of his rebellion against her, or by means of her erasure. Karen Horney, too, and later Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, followed the same line of argument:

Men have never tired of fashioning expressions for the violent force by which man feels himself drawn to the woman, and side by side with his longing, the dread that through her he might die and be undone. And for the grown son, furthermore, the mother under patriarchy comes to be seen as the representative of a sex disenfranchised from power, which luckily is not his own. (Horney, 1993, 134)

The development of masculine identity, therefore, and the integration of the ego, are seen to depend upon a process of painful separation from the mother, which paradoxically goes hand in hand with an

enduring if contradictory desire for return to amniotic fusion within the maternal womb. That fusion, however, can only be attained at the price of abandoning all that was achieved when the Oedipal son relinquished desire for the mother in exchange for entry into the Symbolic Order: the empowered realm of the father, of language and of masculinity (Lacan, 1992). The mother signifies regression to lack of autonomy, the loss of post-Oedipally achieved individuation. The return to her and to the state of pre-identity she emblemizes signals both a danger to the self and a crime against the Law of the Father. The punishment would be a loss of separateness which however, paradoxically, may also appear as the paradisiacal recovery of lost unity with the maternal body in infancy (Chodorow, 1979; Dinnerstein, 1987).

The mother, therefore, is everything and nothing, literally the be-all and end-all of the son who loves her but must abandon her, only sometimes to find, as is the case with Amaro, that he can never fully do so. Her impact is necessarily double-edged, encompassing at it does the 'good mother' - 'bad mother' - 'powerless mother' triad, and her effect upon the filial male psyche is equally blurred. Rego's portrayal of this ambivalence is achieved through the unsettling images of a taciturn Amélia/Mary, and her impact upon Amaro, in pictures such as *The Ambassador of Jesus*, *Amélia's Dream* and *Mother*. The resulting disquiet is commensurate with a similar ambiguity in the portrayal of Amaro himself. In *The Cell* (fig. 3.2) he appears simultaneously as grown man and foetal child, and the desecration perpetrated against this sacred Mother, as well as all other mothers, is both the act of a child denied his (sexual) wish and the rape of a woman by a resentful adult. But what Paula Rego taps into here, furthermore, is the compounded impetus of defiance not just of the mother but of the Father (God) whose sexual chattel here is defiled by the contumacious Oedipal son. The sexual possession of any mother, let alone a Holy one, Bride of God and Mother of that God's Son, must have seemed the iconoclastic equivalent of vindictively killing several birds (a maternal one, a paternal one, a religious one and by association a political one) with one stone, through the fulfilment of recidivist Oedipal desire.

The figure of the man who could not or would not grow up is not new in this artist's work. In this group of pictures, as in her earlier

Peter Pan series, Paula Rego deals with a maternally-fixated, mother-loving, mother-hating and mother-raping, emotionally-arrested son unable or unwilling to exchange the mother for the father, Mary for God, or Amélia for the Pope (in this case papal intransigence regarding priestly celibacy). More importantly, she emphasizes not the quaint but rather the murky implications of that masculine refusal to grow up. If what the mirror reflects back at the narcissistic son is the regression unleashed by the inability to accept the loss of the mother in exchange for identification with the father, it is not surprising that in these pictures Amaro can never allow himself to gaze with any safety into that abyssal maternal space, which, for him and for men in general, encompasses both delight and death. In the twisted, pathological spiral that is the desiring and hating mother-son encounter, we find truly enacted that maxim according to which Paula Rego defined some art as being underpinned by the desire to harm those one loves. And both in the novel and in the images, the father (Father Amaro) too, as represented by God and his Church, are both indicted and discredited.

For the adult but still narcissistic Amaro, orphaned of his mother at an early age, his destiny controlled by the old Marchioness who decided his future, and alternatively bullied and pampered by her women servants, Amélia represents one of two possibilities. First and more straightforwardly in the novel she is the woman whose surrender in the face of his despotic love pours balm on the wounded Oedipal ego:

From their very first tryst in the sexton's house, she had surrendered to him absolutely, her whole self, body, soul, heart and will. There wasn't a single hair on her body, the smallest idea in her head, however insignificant, that did not belong to the priest. [...] Amaro enjoyed his power over her prodigiously: it made up for past humiliations. [...] Now, at long last, he had that body, that soul, that living, breathing being at his feet, and he ruled over her like a despot. [...] One day she went as far as saying, thoughtfully:

'You could even become Pope'.

'Stranger things have happened', he replied seriously. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 336)

Second, and this is one of the aspects in which Paula Rego's vision so audaciously foregrounds what Eça opted to understate, Amélia is also, in Amaro's eyes, a secular rendering of Mary, a Virgin he sinfully deflowers and a Holy Mother whom as an adolescent he had dreamed of possessing in incest and profanity. In a later scene in the novel Amaro goes one step further. As part of his seduction campaign, he uses his priestly importance to achieve that which, paradoxically, that priestly position forbids, namely sexual gratification:

He drummed into her ears the glory of the priesthood. [...] He dazzled her with venerable scholarship: St. Clement who called the priest 'an Earthly God'; the eloquent St. John Chrisostom who said that 'the priest is the ambassador who delivers God's instructions'. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 338)

The Ambassador of Jesus, however, refers specifically to the scene in the novel in the course of which Amaro meets Amélia in the sacristy and dresses her in a cloak intended to adorn a statue of the Virgin. In a passage of extraordinary eroticism, he places the cloak on Amélia's shoulders and, as she gazes at herself in the mirror, he embraces her from behind and kisses her hard, whispering that she is 'lovelier than Our Lady' (Queirós, s.d., 345). Both become aroused, but the ultimate profanity (sex on the floor of the church with the Virgin, or at least with a woman wearing her clothing) is cut short when Amélia snaps out of her ecstasy in terror at the sin that she has nearly committed. Paula Rego's picture, staged in front of a mirror in which once again we see Amaro's reflection, whereas he himself does not, taps into two different concerns: first his hypocrisy, as he sits with one hand on Amélia's forehead in priestly blessing whilst the other rests on her thigh; and second, Amélia's moment of recoil, by-passing any preliminary delight. As ever in Paula Rego's work, unlike in the original text, frustration rather than pleasure especially befalls the male.

It so happened that one day he showed her a cloak for Our Lady, which had arrived a few days earlier, a gift from a rich parishioner from Ourém. Amélia admired it a lot. [...] Amaro unfolded it, causing its embroideries to sparkle by the light of the window. [...] And looking at Amélia, comparing her tall form with the that of the dumpy statue of the Virgin: 'It's you who would look wonderful in it. Come here...'

She took a step back:



Fig. 3.4 Paula Rego, *The Ambassador of Jesus* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 180 x 180 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

‘Heavens, no, what a sin!’

‘Nonsense’, he replied [...]. It hasn’t been blessed yet. It’s as though it was coming from the dressmaker.

‘No, no’, she said weakly, but eyes already shining greedily. [...]

‘Don’t be silly. Let’s have a look’.

He placed it on her shoulders, secured it with a silver clasp. [...]

‘Oh, baby, you are lovelier than Our Lady’. [...]

He drew up behind her, crossed his arms over her breasts, held her tightly — and his lips on hers, gave her a long, silent kiss. [...] Her breathing quickened, her knees trembled: and with a sigh she leant on his shoulder, pale and overcome with pleasure.

But suddenly she stood straight [...], her face burning:

‘Oh Amaro, how dreadful, what a sin!... (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 343–45)

In an author whose obsession with incest has become notorious — all of his most important novels deal with it, whether real (between cousins;⁷ between brother and sister;⁸ between mother and son,⁹); or symbolic (between son-in-law and mother-in-law;¹⁰ between Amaro as priest and spiritual father and Amélia as his daughter in the parish flock;) — mother-son incest nonetheless remained taboo, with the exception of a novel he left unpublished, and which only became available posthumously, eighty years after his death.¹¹

The subject, however, is addressed indirectly in *The Crime of Father Amaro* too. Amaro, as already discussed, is orphaned of his father and brought up among women (his biological mother who however also dies young, the Marchioness who finances his education and the servants who cosset him), only to be brutally separated from them at puberty and closeted in the all-male world of the seminary, where the only female presence is the fetishistic picture of the Virgin Mary on the wall of his cell. This transition from all-enveloping femininity in childhood to

7 José Maria Eça de Queirós, *O Primo Basílio (Cousin Basílio)* (Lisbon: Livros do Brasil, s.d.). With reference to *Cousin Basílio*, a novel published in 1878 while he was still working on revisions to the third version of *The Crime of Father Amaro*, Eça wrote the following: '*Cousin Basílio* represents above all a small domestic tableau which will be very familiar to anyone acquainted with the Lisbon middle classes: the sentimental lady, uneducated and not even spiritual (because she is no longer really Christian; and as for the sanctions of justice, she is completely unaware of them), destroyed by romance, lyrical, her temperament overexcited by idleness and by the very objective of Peninsular marriage, which is lust, made nervous by lack of exercise or moral discipline, etc., etc. In short, the downtown bourgeoisie. On the other hand her lover [...] a cad without passion nor any justification for his tyranny, who seeks nothing more than the vanity of an affair and love free of charge. Then we have the housemaid, full of secret rebellion against her condition and thirsty for revenge. [...] A society based on these premises is not on the path of truth. It is a duty to attack it. [...] My ambition is to portray Portuguese Society such as it has emerged from Constitutionalism since 1830 [...] and show it, as if upon a mirror, what a sad country they are, both men and women. [...] It is essential to needle the official world, the sentimental world, the literary world, the agricultural world, the superstitious world [...] and with all the respect due to institutions which are eternal, to destroy false interpretations and achievements as instituted by a rotten society'. Eça de Queirós, letter to Teófilo Braga from Newcastle, 12 March 1878, in *Obra Completa* (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1979), III, 517.

8 José Maria Eça de Queirós, *Os Maias* (Lisbon: Livros do Brasil, s.d.).

9 José Maria Eça de Queirós, *A Tragédia da Rua das Flores* (Lisbon: Livros do Brasil, 1984).

10 José Maria Eça de Queirós, 'Singularidades de uma Rapariga Loira' in *Contos* (Porto: Lello e Irmão, s.d.).

11 *A Tragédia da Rua das Flores*, op. cit.

absolute separation from it upon entering the masculine world of God-the-Father will leave Amaro forever prey to post-Oedipal bereavement and ensuing narcissism. The narcissistic injury is partly, but only partly, soothed when, upon arrival in Leiria, he settles into his lodgings with Amélia and S. Joaneira, 'with good food, a soft comfortable bed, and the soothing company of women' (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 94). For Amaro, henceforward, the perfect woman will always need to combine in herself those lost childhood mothers as well as the desired Virgin of his puberty. She must be simultaneously virgin, whore and mother. Amélia represents this conflation, standing in as she does for the Virgin upon whom she models herself and in whose cloak he wraps her, the object of desire who supplies him with illicit sex, the mother who administers home comforts to him and later (albeit more problematically), the mother of his own son. She is therefore the woman who grants him the possibility of satisfying various fantasies concerning both the nature of the ideal woman and his own status, the latter requiring the synthesis of the three mutually exclusive images of himself to which he subscribes: God (or husband) to the Virgin; lover (or man of the world) to his object of desire; and little boy (or son) to the mother figure who however will be punished with death when she betrays him by conceiving a rival child, namely his own son.

Amélia, the parishioner and spiritual daughter whom in moments of passion he calls 'filha', (literally 'daughter' in Portuguese but translatable into English as a term of endearment such as 'baby'), is therefore the mother, the daughter, the lover and the Virgin. In all these roles however his agency upon her is a sullyng one: sullyng towards the spiritual daughter whose weakness he abuses, the mother he incestuously desires, the lover he kills through a lethal pregnancy and the Virgin Mother he deflowers, kisses, makes love to or uses as an aid to masturbation. Thus in the scene in the sacristy depicted in *The Ambassador of Jesus* (fig. 3.4), a series of religious, social and blood taboos are simultaneously broken. The desecration is emphasized in two ways: in the backdrop to the profane event we discern scenes alluding first to the domesticity (the woman peeling vegetables) into which Amaro was made welcome by S. Joaneira (another mother or motherly woman whom he betrays by seducing her daughter); and second to the innocence Amélia once possessed but later loses under his influence (as epitomized by the little girl on the chair playing with a doll).

Be that as it may, this picture presents us first and foremost with the moment in which Amaro, the representative (ambassador) upon Earth of God-the-Father and God-the-Son, in polluting the daughter (child), the bride (as represented by the white dress worn by Amélia here), and the mother (symbolized by the Holy Mother's blue cloak), encounters not paradisiacal pleasure but rejection. The sexual bliss that would have been the prize in exchange for which he sells his soul, is replaced by denial, as indicated by the outstretched arm (*vade retro*) with which Amélia keeps him at a distance. In the novel, the aftermath of Amélia's horror at the outrage they have jointly perpetrated against the Virgin's sanctity is her refusal to make love on that day, thus denying her despotic father-lover his sexual fulfilment, and the little boy his Oedipal wish. In Rego's picture the reaction to the paternal or priestly hand on her forehead and the libidinous one on her thigh (echoes of *The Policeman's Daughter's* raping/ministering hands, fig. 2.13) goes one step beyond sexual rejection. Her posture mirrors that of the triumphant angel or Fury above her head (which prefigures that in *Angel*, fig. 3.27, also in this series) and acts as an implied exorcism. As regards the man of God, here and in the novel, the reaction from his daughter/lover/parishioner is 'get thee behind me, Satan'.

In Rego's vision, then, the transgression against God-the-Father implied in the attempted snatching of his bride and mother by a priest who reneged upon his vows, does not even gain the filial/Oedipal/sexual pay-off for which it would have been worthwhile risking damnation. And the mirror into which Amaro cannot or forgets to look, therefore, reflects back at us — if not at him — the regressive image of the motherless and mother-loving child who will never find compensation for that earlier maternal loss: not through narcissism and self-love (he does not look in the mirror and can never truly love himself); nor through the abandonment of the mother in favour of a wholehearted identification with the father (or Father: he is a disobedient priest); nor by rebelling for good and all against that father and resigning from masculinity in favour of an Oedipal return to the maternal feminine which in this picture, in any case, rejects him.

For Amaro, a repressed man and reluctant priest, women in general and Amélia in particular will remain problematic in perpetuity: the mother who died and left him, the godmother who castrated him by

making him a priest, the women servants who both loved and taunted him, and, most of all, Amélia who loves yet rejects him, and who moreover brings the wheel full circle by dying like his own mother.

Problematic though the female sex proves to be, however, the murder of the child whose birth kills Amélia, explicit in the novel and implicit in pictures such as *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig. 3.14), to be discussed presently, reinstates the Freudian scenario of inimical fathers and sons. In killing the son who is a man's passport to immortality Amaro destroys both himself and arguably the deity whose representative on Earth he is. This emphasis, both in the novel and in the pictures, ultimately emphasizes the fragility of a patriarchal order whose endurance surely depends on the Darwinian will for continuity and on the solidarity of males — both divine and secular — united within the status quo. Instead, Amaro burns his boats behind him and severs his ties with God by breaking his celibacy vows, but also kills the child who would have been his passport to potent masculinity.

In the next picture to be considered, *Girl with Gladioli and Religious Figures*, the woman (or women) for whose sake he breaks his vows — Amélia in her various guises as mother, daughter, Virgin and lover — metamorphoses into something unfathomable and possibly dangerous.

Paula Rego described this picture as a depiction of Amélia (standing in the foreground wearing white bloomers) as a living shrine or reliquary, incarnating in her bosom, to which her left hand points, the relics and redemptory potential of other unspecified saints. This artist's excursions into sainthood and hagiography, most famously in the mural *Crivelli's Garden* (fig. 3.6) in the restaurant of the National Gallery in London and in the cycle of images on the life of the Virgin Mary (chapter 7, figs. 7.1; 7.3; 7.9; 7.10; 7.11; 7.12; 7.19; 7.20), disclose an idiosyncratic approach to received wisdom, not only as to what are seen to be the significant events and standard interpretations of various Biblical figures, but more disturbingly as to exactly who or what constitutes a saint or saintliness, or warrants classification as such.

Thus in *Crivelli's Garden*, which ostensibly presents us with a gallery of female saints, side by side with the uncontroversial figures of Mary, Elizabeth and Saint Catherine there appear the figures of women who might be more immediately associated with examples of female evil as



Fig. 3.5 Paula Rego, *Girl with Gladioli and Religious Figures* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 160 x 120 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

decried by Holy Church Fathers since time immemorial. We notice, for example, the figures of two prostitutes (albeit ones who became saints: Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt).

Although these redeemed sinners in themselves are not controversial, in an interview about these panels Rego emphasized their less orthodox facets, such as for example the tale of Mary of Egypt having been swallowed by the Devil and later bursting out of his stomach, thus becoming the patron saint of women in labour. The choice of emphasis on a semi-demonic eruption rather than a virgin birth as the role model for prospective mothers is at the very least unexpected. Nonetheless, Mary



Fig. 3.6 Paula Rego, *Crivelli's Garden* (left-hand panel) (1990–1991). Acrylic on paper on canvas, left panel, 190 x 240 cm. Sainsbury Wing (brasserie), National Gallery, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, respectively a prostitute who became a saint and a prostitute who became a saint who became an iconic mother (and who, confusingly, then befriends the Devil that swallowed her), are outdone in hagiographic eccentricity by the remaining figures of Judith, the killer of Holofernes, and Delilah, the betrayer of Samson, both notable examples of female violence and therefore improbable saints.¹² Against the background of such idiosyncratic interpretations of sainthood, Amélia as a reliquary enshrined in living flesh can be understood as a vehicle of Rego-style alterity. In her case, as in that possibly of Judith and certainly of Delilah, the definition of sainthood must be seen to be seriously askew: the woman who in Amaro's rogue perception is the representative of Mary, is a Virgin who allows herself to be penetrated and impregnated by a man, and a mother who is unable to save her child from infanticide. In being such she undermines both the untouchability of the Marian ideal and the omnipotence of God-the-Father, so that the son born in this instance, albeit begotten by his priestly envoy on earth, is shown to differ from the original Holy Child in two crucial ways: he is tainted by both original sin (due to the circumstances of his conception) and mortal sin (since he dies without the option of baptism or resurrection: after delivering him to

12 It is worth noting, however, that there is a rich history of Judith being celebrated in religious festivals, art and music as a holy figure.

the murderous nanny Amaro changes his mind and tries to rescue him, but he is already dead). Tainted birth and eternal damnation — or at best perpetuity in limbo — are of course characteristics that could never be associated with Christ.

In *Girl with Gladioli and Religious Figures* (fig. 3.5) the dark figure seated beside Amélia, described by Rego as an assistant, seems to be presenting her to the viewer — behold the handmaid of the Lord — but in this deviant *fiat* the envoy of God is transformed through her clothing and facial expression into an Angel of Darkness. In the background we see an enigmatic tableau involving a saint (as indicated by her halo) floating in the air, and a little girl who may be either bearing her aloft or dragging her down to earth: in other words, either propelling her into oxymoronic sorcerous sainthood (since it is usually witches, not saints, who fly through the air), or holding her down in a secular, earthly dimension that blocks her ascension to Heaven (the same satanic/holy ambivalence will be apparent in *Assumption*, fig. 7.20, to be discussed in chapter 7). Either scenario is problematic from the point of view of Gospel truth, and the disquiet is emphasized by another aspect of the composition: the little girl's posture has the effect of appearing to cut off the aerial figure's feet, an effect that in itself introduces ambiguity: on the one hand we have the lopping off of inconvenient clay feet as a means of safeguarding the hallowed status of the saintly/satanic woman; and on the other hand a female rendition (with advantage again to the woman) of decapitations such as those of Holofernes and Saint John the Baptist by Judith and Salome respectively.

In addition, the child who tackles the saint in a wrestler's grip wears on her head the blue mantle of the Virgin. In the lexicon of religious iconography the traditional wearer of blue veils is Mary, but here she appears as a Madonna run amok, engaged in ambiguous behaviour which, other interpretations aside, might also appear as that Woolfian act of killing angels referred in the previous chapter. The image thus reconfigures the notion of a Holy Mother propelled back into the anarchic world of childhood, which is always dangerous terrain in Rego's pictorial universe. In this context the figures in the upper-left-hand corner lie partly outside the picture plane and frame, a compositional decision that suggests the leakage of pictorial anarchy into the outside world and its established order. The final blow delivered by this powerful picture,

with regard to which the artist used the terms ‘true and false angels’, is the positioning in the foreground of a pot of flowers: not the lilies habitually associated with Marian iconography, but rather gladioli. In themselves gladioli would not be an unusual choice of iconography in a religious setting, given that they are the flowers commonly used to adorn the altars of Portuguese churches. In the context of this visual narrative, however, the red flowers appear suspiciously akin to flames. And if they are the flames of hell, their representation here depicts them as enlisted in the service of this coven of suspect women who barely trouble to masquerade as saints. One of Paula Rego’s favoured ploys in the game of cat and mouse she repeatedly plays with her viewers can once again be seen to be underway here: we know that she knows that we know they are not what they pretend to be.

This image of Amélia as a living reliquary represents the moment of rupture, the turning point that opens the way to a series of new possibilities with a gender agenda. These will be explored in the five pictures that follow, beginning with *Lying*.

This picture does not refer to any specific moment in the novel itself but it might be linked to a vignette that takes place shortly after Amaro moves into his lodgings in Amélia’s home. The instant attraction each feels for the other reaches fever pitch every night when Amaro, in his downstairs room, is aroused by the sounds of Amélia undressing and dropping her heavy skirts on the floor in the bedroom above. This sexual excitement, brought about by the fantasy of a woman who at that point is still an unattainable virgin, links back to the depiction of Amaro in *The Cell* (fig. 3.2) masturbating over the image of that other virgin who is Amélia’s patron saint and was her predecessor in his desire. The special relationship between Amélia and the Virgin, linking them in a maternal/filial bond, introduces once again the dimension of incest into the relationship between Amaro and Mary/Amélia. He lusts after the Virgin’s pet daughter, as he had once lusted after her (and his) Holy Mother. While Amaro longs silently for Amélia undressing in the upstairs room, she, in her turn, makes secret visits to his downstairs quarters when he is out, kisses his pillow, collects the hairs from his comb and fantasizes about a confused relationship in the course of which she imagines herself kneeling at his feet in the confessional and embracing him as a lover. In the novel their unspoken love is brought into the open on an afternoon



Fig. 3.7 Paula Rego, *Lying* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 100 x 80 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

when Amaro meets Amélia while out for a walk and kisses her. Amélia runs away overcome by emotion and later, reliving the many times when, alone in her room, she had despaired of his love, kneels by her bed and sends a profane prayer up to heaven: 'Oh, Our Lady of Sorrows, my Godmother, make him love me' (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 128).

Paula Rego has said more than once in referring to this picture that it is a depiction of Amélia as a liar.¹³ A liar, or perhaps a hypocrite, but in any case controversial, since if the above reference to the novel is correct, it depicts one virgin begging from another the fulfilment of sacrilegious desire for the man of the cloth who in due course will relieve her of that virginity. The paradox is reproduced by the model's pose and appearance: Amélia prays by her rumbled bed for the consummation of her desires. Her posture is both genuflectory and

13 *The Sin of Father Amaro* (London: Dulwich Gallery catalogue, 17 June-19 July 1998).

sexually inviting, the open legs contradicting the semiotics of the hands united in prayer. Her dress, the bridal gown of a virgin who wishes to cease being so, is the same as that worn in *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1) by one of the servants who are surrogate (but not real) mothers to Amaro, and in *The Ambassador of Jesus* (fig. 3.4) by Amélia, who is the understudy for the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, the dress is offset by the butch boots she wears on her feet, which bring into question the former's maidenly symbology. The boots trample on the standard expectations of femininity that the virginal white dress had sought to sustain. Thus the semiotic significance of this dress worn by servants (handmaidens), virgin brides and Holy Mothers is invalidated, and these three permitted faces of womanhood are transfigured by the aggressive footwear, reviving instead the agency of the servants who un-manned Amaro, the mother who abandoned him, the godmother who castrated him, and the beloved who pushed him away. Amélia's open-legged posture beside the bed with the dress immodestly pulled over her thighs links this picture to the image of Totó, open-legged on her bed and not wearing a dress at all, in *Girl with Chickens*.

In the novel Totó is the daughter of the sexton in whose house Amaro and Amélia meet to have sex. Totó, who is in the last stages of tuberculosis, is the pretext offered to the world for Amélia's visits, which are ostensibly intended to teach the sick girl the catechism and thence the path to salvation before she dies. Hilariously, we are told that the visits are planned to number seven a month, in reference to the Virgin Mary's seven lessons.¹⁴

The Seven Sorrows of Our Lady

Today it is the Seven Sorrows, sheaf of swords.
I dreamed that my heart had turned to serpent:
I dragged it by the belly down long roads
To the world, non-sentient.

She, vibrant with steel, my Mother,
Raised it vertically from the soot
And clearsighted with tears
Holds it tenderly underfoot.

14 *The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary*, <http://www.catholictradition.org/Mary/7sorrows.htm#7>. See also Introduction, footnote 11.



Fig. 3.8 Paula Rego, *Girl with Chickens* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 120 x 80 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Thus perhaps the crushed snake
 Embodies my poisoned thoughts:
 And the pure remain, rose incarnate
 Under her radical, detached foot.

Seven thunderbolts of love to the Untarnished: seven,
 Like the branches of the candleholder
 In the night, alive to evil undertaken
 Impelling the executioner.

You, heraldic shield, conceal
 This poem, or sorrow amid the constellations,
 The eighth arrow on the timeless snowy breast
 For God's contemplation. (Nemésio, 1989, 287).

Amélia's routine with Totó, performed with increasing perfunctoriness, involves hurriedly placing a volume of *The Lives of the Saints* in her hands, prior to sneaking upstairs to the bedroom with Amaro. The differences and similarities between Amélia and Totó, in the novel and in these pictures respectively, are revealing as regards Paula Rego's extensive rethinking of source scripts, and her observation of their moral contradictions. In the novel, intentionally or not, Eça contrasts Amélia's blooming, splendid health and buxom body with Totó's repulsive emaciation. One lies on the bed downstairs dying while the other lies on the bed upstairs being pleased by her lover. Female representations by male authors in the Western literary canon tend to divide women into two broad categories: angel, and monster or whore.¹⁵ The angel-woman is modelled upon the cultural icon of the Virgin Mary: she is the dispenser of salvation to others but has no story of her own to tell. She is selfless and pure, self-sacrificial and chaste, self-effacing and silent. She is the daughter, mother, wife and sister of men, spirit rather than flesh, but as such is also a living-dead. If alive she is fragile, sick or dying. If dead, she is lyrically mourned.

The monster-woman, madwoman or whore is the counterpoint of the angel woman: she encapsulates all that the angel woman cannot do or be, and also, conveniently, all the female danger that must be brought under control by patriarchy through consignment into a containing category. She personifies sexuality, the rule of self, autonomy and voice, independence, rebellion and self-affirmation.

The monster woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay 'his' anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained 'place' and thus generates a story that 'gets away' from its author. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, 28)

As the Other, woman comes to represent the contingency of life, life that is made to be destroyed. 'It is the horror of his own carnal contingency [...] which man projects upon [woman]'. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, 34)

15 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

The tidy compartmentalization of women into reassuring either/or categories, however, frequently gives way in writing and in art of male authorship to the uneasy suspicion that in fact, behind every idealised façade, there might lurk a monster woman waiting to escape. It is the slippage between categories, therefore, rather than anything inherent in either category itself, that emerges as the real threat to be either confronted, undone, or, if you are Paula Rego, nurtured to its full wicked potential.

In *Girl with Chickens* the implied counterpoint to the supposedly tubercular Totó is Amélia, a strapping girl to whom the former is linked as dark avatar. In fact, in the picture though not necessarily in the novel, Amélia acts *in absentia* as Totó's partner in crime, enjoying the illicit sexual pleasure they both crave; and together they unsettle the stability of either/or definitions. The model chosen to pose for Totó was a dancer, and the healthy musculature one associates with that physically demanding profession is reproduced here, in the depiction of a character whose essence in the original text was one of consumptive wastage, both physical and moral. Paula Rego thus dissolves the boundaries that separate the emaciation of disease from the leanness of energetic bodily exertion, and in so doing radically alters what Totó stands for in Eça's tortuous vision. In the novel Totó is an object of compassion, but a repulsive one too, pitiful yet loathsome. She is both the cover-up for Amaro's and Amélia's meetings and the person who denounces their affair to Canon Dias. She operates both as the unwilling enabler of their passion's consummation and the obstacle to its unalloyed delight, terrifying Amélia as she does by calling her a bitch and snarling at her as the latter slips upstairs into her lover's arms. Furthermore, as the person who discloses the real purpose of Amélia's visits in an attempt to put an end to the liaison, Totó arguably becomes the guardian of social, sexual and religious morality; but as the woman who herself desires Amaro — when he comes near her she sniffs at him with the animal heat of which she accuses Amélia — and as the acolyte of the lascivious Dias, she becomes associated not with morality but with a simulacrum of it, as upheld by the clerics and pious women of the community.

Furthermore, both in herself, as depicted in this picture, and through the supposed contrast (but in fact unsettling resemblance) she bears to

Amélia within the novel (both women desire Amaro), she dissolves a series of angel-whore boundaries that under normal conditions shore up the definitions of good and evil pertaining to gender.

In Rego's rendering, Totó, previously imprinted on our minds by Eça as a repulsive consumptive nose-diving into an ugly death, emerges as a solid, potentially desirable young woman: naked, nubile, available and ready, she sits rather than lying on the bed, not because she is sick but because she is not. The disagreeable instrument of hypocritical morality in the novel (she denounces a sin she wishes she could commit herself, to a priest — Dias — as corrupt as Amaro himself), she is here translated into the visual icon of that (im)morality. She appears also as the image of an in-your-face female sexuality that society traditionally abhors but into which it has willy-nilly metamorphosed, in the person of its agent, Totó. Thus, because she is the novel's Totó, she exposes Amaro's and Amélia's lust (which in any case exactly mirrors hers), but because she is the modified Totó of this picture, she reclaims the terrain *of* and proclaims the right *to* her own sexual desire.

In Rego's interpretation, the tubercular Totó becomes the diametric opposite of her blueprint sister-in-suffering, Camille Gautier, the Lady of the Camelias. While the latter is spiritualized by illness from sexy prostitute into asexual angel, Totó, whether lying feverishly in her literary bed or sexily in its visual representation here, becomes obsessed with carnal passion and with Amaro as the oxymoronic sacerdotal embodiment of desirability:

The priest waited at the door, with his hands in his pockets, bored, embarrassed by the feverished eyes of the invalid, which never left him, penetrating him, running over his body, with passion and wonder, brighter in her sallow face, so sunken that her jaw bones stood out. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 352)

In the novel, therefore, Totó contravenes the acceptable parameters of angelic suffering beauty, being neither beautiful nor angelic. And in the picture Rego pushes the boundaries of outrage in the opposite direction by making her not sick but sexy. In Eça's text Totó and Amélia are both antithetical and obscurely akin: the former is repulsive while technically conforming to established tenets of female acceptability, since she is a dying virgin. The latter is attractive while deviating from the orthodoxy of these tenets, since she is healthy and sexually active

outside marriage. If we probe the details of this difference, however, the boundary that separates each from the other appears more precarious than Eça himself might have cared to acknowledge. Each woman in different ways is lustful, unchaste, sinful and fingered for a premature death. In terms both of moral essence and destiny, they are sisters under the skin, and only circumstantially different from one another: Totó, is sick while Amélia is healthy, but the latter not for long; Totó is ugly while Amélia, is beautiful, but also not for long. When she clambers onto her deathbed at the end, damp with the colossal strain of childbirth and lies 'motionless, with her arms rigid by her side, her hands purple and clenched and her face stiff and flushed', (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 475) her looks replicate the dying Totó's, 'prostrated with fever, under sheets soaked with perspiration'. Each, furthermore, in her juxtaposition to the other, illustrates the uncomfortable truth that the only thing that separates Totó, the sick virgin, from Amélia, the healthy slut, is not virtue, or lack of it, but only the fact that whilst both desire the same man, one is desired by him while the other is not. And in the end, in any case, both are abandoned by him. Each, as she lies in death, no longer distinguishable as either angel or whore, dissolves into the figure of the alter ego who shares her plight.

In Eça's novel both women end up ugly (in other words Platonically indicted, since, according to this formula, surface disfigurement signals inner sinfulness), and, subsequently, dead. In an audacious countermove, however, Rego lays claim to an artistic license that becomes tantamount to a declaration of power over life and death, and resuscitates both women. It is the un-Christ-like and un-Christian Totó ('she died unrepentant', Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 271), and the avenging, indomitable Amélia of subsequent pictures, rather than their dead textual precursors, who dominate this series of images. They appear here newly endowed with looks and sex appeal, as well as the power that these entail. And a sex appeal, moreover, which in the case of Totó is all the more perturbing for its androgynous allure, since this ready and willing Totó, displaying herself on the bed to elicit passion rather than compassion, could conceivably seduce a variety of appetites including a lesbianism reminiscent of the boot-wearing, dykish Amélia in *Lyng*, from whom no boundaries now separate her. Like with like, since birds of a feather, after all, do sometimes stick together.



Fig. 3.9 Paula Rego, *Looking Out* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 180 x 130 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Moving on to *Looking Out*, this picture refers to a specific event in the novel. Before seducing Amélia for the first time, Amaro disposes of her fiancé, João Eduardo, a good if dull young man whom Amélia had previously strung along for want of a better suitor. João Eduardo is discredited by Amaro and his fellow priests in complicated circumstances and is driven out of Leiria, leaving Amaro in possession of the field. When Amélia becomes pregnant, Amaro and Dias hastily try to find and bring him back with a view to patching up the projected marriage and casting the mantle of marital respectability over the pregnancy ('he who is the husband is the father'). João Eduardo however is nowhere to be found, requiring the fall-back plan to be put into motion. Amélia is

dispatched to the remote country house of Ricoça with her censorious godmother, who plagues her with recriminations for the remainder of the pregnancy. Her only consolation resides in the ministrations of Abbott Ferrão, the only honourable priest in the novel. The latter attempts to steer her gradually away from her sexual obsession with Amaro and into more godly ways while nonetheless taking into account her ardent disposition:

He saw that poor little Amélia had a beautiful, weak flesh; it would be unwise to frighten her with the idea of lofty sacrifices. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 437)

Ferrão understands Amélia's ardent temperament, knows that for her any possibility of future respectability must include the pleasures of the flesh within a lawful union and plans to attempt a *rapprochement* with João Eduardo, now back in Leiria and resident in the neighbourhood of Ricoça. At various earlier points in the unfolding of events Amélia had entertained the possibility of marrying João Eduardo while continuing the affair with Amaro. There is some evidence that this scenario might still be on her mind after she gives her approval to Ferrão's plan, since she has sex with Amaro on at least one occasion after the possibility of reconciliation with João Eduardo has been discussed with the abbot. In the novel, in any case, Ferrão's well-meaning plan comes to nothing, since Amélia dies after giving birth. In the weeks prior to her death and by then heavily pregnant, however, she finds solace from her godmother's recriminations by standing at the window waiting for the newly-prosperous João Eduardo to ride by on his mare. *Looking Out* refers to the spectacle of Amélia done up to the nines from the waist up but slovenly and scruffy from the waist down ('Whenever she could manage it, she stood by the window, well dressed from the waist up, which was what could be seen from the outside, dishevelled from the waist down', Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 457). As usual in Paula Rego, however, the image is characterized by reversals of expectation of both a compositional and a thematic nature. In earlier paintings the female figures are characterized by exaggerated secondary sexual characteristics, such as the female artist's huge child-bearing hips in *Joseph's Dream* (1990), and the figure in *Lying* (fig. 3.7).



Fig. 3.10 Paula Rego, *Joseph's Dream* (1990). Acrylic on paper on canvas, 183 x 122 cm. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Whether what is in question here is the begetting of a painting or a child, the large buttocks are further accentuated by ample skirts in paintings such as *The Fitting* (fig. 1.3) and *The Ambassador of Jesus* (fig. 3.4), and evoke a female engendering power which however, through the areas of unorthodoxy raised elsewhere in these paintings, does not necessarily support their interpretation as straightforward exaltations of hallowed maternity. Womanly curves and flowing garments of various kinds lead instead from the Virgin in Rego's earlier painting of the *Apparition* (1959) through many images of the female body and dress along the years, to the sullied Amélia of *Looking Out*. Significantly, in the series on abortion (chapter 4) that immediately followed *The Sin of Father Amaro* cycle, the models, women who by definition will *not* be mothers because they abort their children, are generally narrow-hipped.

Anatomy, however, and clothing, are not the only link between works such as *Looking Out*, *Joseph's Dream*, or *Nativity* (figs. 3.9, 3.10 and 7.3), the latter to be discussed in chapter 7. In *Joseph's Dream* the artist's wide hips symbolize her fertility as a metaphor for artistic production, while the feminine duty of maternity is confined to the theme of her painting (an Annunciation), on a canvas which will also entrap the image of the slumbering (outwitted) Joseph. In this painting, therefore, control over creation (the life of a child, the composition of an image), is neither man's (he sleeps, is old), nor God's (except within the irrelevant because unreal realm of the picture within the picture). Instead, the monopoly over the act of creation, both artistic and possibly biological, falls to the female artist alone, as the possessor of capacious childbearing hips and an indomitable creative streak. Similarly, in *Looking Out* (fig. 3.9) Amélia's wide-hipped figure, indicative of fertility and easy birthing, might be said to compensate for her doomed maternity in the novel, whilst the direction of her gaze signals her capacity to conjure up a soothing mind-picture (future married respectability), achieved through the contemplation of yet another male object (model): in this case not the impotent, sleeping Joseph of *Joseph's Dream* (fig. 3.10) but the equally oblivious João Eduardo riding by her window on his horse.

In both images the traditional assumption of a voyeuristic male gaze is destabilized by the female characters. Each in a different way is a woman who not only controls the prerogative of looking but moreover transforms visual fact into artefact, and into a prospect hyperdetermined by her own requirements. In both pictures it is the woman's gaze that controls first what we see (the painting in *Joseph's Dream*); second what we are not allowed to see (the view from the window in *Looking Out*, fig. 3.9, which Amélia's can enjoy whilst being concealed from us); and third what will be selected and recorded for posterity (the artist's painting; Amélia's imagined socially acceptable future life as a respectable married woman).

In *Looking Out*, moreover, the play of power and powerlessness involved in gazing or being gazed at (which here reverses the habitual gender parameters of male spectator and female object) entails further complexities. Amélia's project for social redemption — marriage to João Eduardo for the sake of appearances, which might be described as the aesthetic solution to the problem (literally making things look good) — does not in fact come to fruition in the novel, since she dies

before it can become a reality. However, the moment captured in this picture radically rewrites the textual reality of Eça's plot, by casting the invisible João Eduardo as the puppet of the scheming Amélia, just as the fat old Joseph and the moment of Annunciation by masculine (divine) decree became putty in the hands of the controlling female demiurge.

The classic arrangement of beautiful female model and empowered male artist in command of both the image he produces and the woman he reproduces is consciously reversed by Paula Rego in both these works. With regard to *Joseph's Dream* (fig. 3.10), the artist had observed in the past that she had always 'wanted to do a girl drawing a man very much, because this role reversal is interesting. She's getting power from doing this' (Rego, 1998). The paint that issues from the female artist's brush, like the fantasy of opportunistic marriage without love entertained by Amélia, become analogous because they are equally empowering and subversive. Each in a different way rewrites reality and usurps the traditional male claim to choice and voice.

Returning to the question of gaze and view, in Rego's picture Amélia not only sees what we do not (the view from the window), but she also controls what everyone else sees. In other words, she sets the stage or composes the picture (like an artist) and imposes it, or her interpretation of it, upon her viewers. These include the implied audience within the picture: first, João Eduardo, according to the novel riding by the window, himself excluded from the image and unable to see Amélia's pregnant body, only her dressed-up torso; second, whoever might be in the room with her, presented with a view of her backside; and third ourselves, the implied viewers. The latter two categories of viewer do not signify, as indicated by the fact that neither we nor they warrant a glance from her, nor the trouble of dressing up for either our benefit or theirs. Thus João Eduardo may be deceived both in the short and long term (respectively by what he is permitted to see now, as he rides by, and by the marriage he may be drawn into in the future). But the implications of this picture as regards the remaining viewers also carry a radical impact that extends well beyond the parameters of the composition being explored here. Both the visual (as opposed to textual) Amélia and her creator appear here to be in cahoots to flaunt in the face of the onlookers (Amaro who visits her; God who sees everything; the viewers who cherish the illusion of sharing that divine prerogative; the art canon that has enshrined gender conflict at the heart of traditional

rules of composition; and the patriarchal status quo upon which that canon is anchored) her metaphorically and concretely dishevelled, accusatory bottom half. Accusatory because the latter, of course, is among other things the locus of her illicitly fruitful womb and of the genitalia in whose perdition they (Amaro, God, the patriarchy, the status quo) and we (students, producers and consumers of art) become jointly complicit. The attribution of moral blame in the context of viewer participation will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, with reference to the abortion pastels. Here, its diversion away from Amélia who might be said to emerge as the accuser of a series of defendants that include us, leads us away from matters of composition and perception and into the consideration of further aspects arising from the subject matter, in a picture that clearly also carries a significant sexual-political and theological dimension.

Amélia transgresses against social dictates (female morality, incest) and religious interdictions, when, as an unmarried girl she has sex with the priest who in that capacity represents also God the Father and her own spiritual father. As if this were not bad enough in the taboo stakes, in the novel Amélia mentally rejects Amaro, God's delegate on earth, for the calmer envisaged delights of wedded orthodoxy, and in the picture turns her slovenly back on him. In this way she proposes to cuckold her lover-priest-father-God with the Saint Joseph figure of the faithful João Eduardo, who, in true Josephian manner, as hoped by her and Ferrão, might agree to foster another man's (priest's or God's) child. Both Amaro, whom she therefore betrays in her heart, and João Eduardo, whose restricted view — in all senses of the word — she masterminds, are thus disempowered by her, as are God, whose earthly delegate Amaro is, and the patriarchal order, which João Eduardo represents as hypothetical husband-to-be. When Amélia proposes to reverse the Gospel plot by cuckolding God (Amaro) with Saint Joseph while still saddling the latter with the former's son, she defies literally both Heaven and Earth, God and Man, biblical and societal codes. And it is this defiance, for which — in the novel, but nowhere discernibly in Paula Rego's work — she pays with death, that is foregrounded in the likely next move of this figure who at any moment might lift up her rumped skirt (or leg: *Bad Dog*, fig. 6.14) and moon at/urinate upon them and us.

It is the absence of punishment for Amélia, in this and every other of Rego's *Father Amaro* series, in particular *The Coop* (fig. 3.12), to be discussed next, which prompts an investigation of the reversal of moral stakes that separates the image from the text.

Paula Rego is sometimes said to be a woman's painter. The thesis defended here and in greater depth in the next chapter is that, in fact, an important aspect of her work involves a trap sprung on male viewers lured by and then castigated in the compositions she deploys as part of a one-woman battle of the sexes. *Looking Out* (fig. 3.9), a prime example of this process, foregrounds the artist's manipulation of her viewers (for which here read male viewers) as being both acknowledged by and implicated in, yet paradoxically disenfranchised from the pictorial narrative. Traditionally, as argued above, female bodies in pictures presuppose a male viewer and his pleasure. The target male spectator of this particular picture, however, finds himself trapped by the surface pleasures of the image, a process exaggerated in the pictures to be discussed in chapter 4. In fact, he is caught between the worst of both worlds, in the dubiously moral position of the Peeping Tom, from whom, however, all titillation value is brutally snatched. Just as the conventional pleasure of the gaze appears set to get underway, the female protagonist gains control of viewer perception and redefines the rules of the game. In *Looking Out*, she alone inhabits a room with a view. The spectator is restricted to viewing that which is habitually concealed or overlooked: we see not a face looking out of a window — which is the usual pictorial arrangement of any number of canonical paintings (Murillo, *Two Women at a Window*, fig. 3.11) — but rather the backside and nether parts which that face implies, but which we tend to forget are also there.

Instead, both here and in *The Coop* (fig. 3.12), what we view is what customarily takes place out of sight, in un-visited rooms. Like Bluebeard's wife, we are allowed entry, up to a point, into forbidden spaces (figs 6.12; 6.13; e-fig 16). What remains unclear having done so, however, are the terms according to which we are allowed to retain control of the situation and participate in the dangerous cacophony of this artist's unholy mirth.



Fig. 3.11 Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Two Women at a Window* (c. 1655–1660). Oil on canvas, 125.1 x 103.5 cm. Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bartolom%C3%A9_Esteban_Perez_Murillo_014.jpg

In a discussion of *The Coop* Paula Rego stated that she saw a link between it and a long-standing tradition of iconography on the subject of Saint Anne and the birth of the Virgin Mary.

If there is such a link between this work and that sacral theme, the thread must surely be as tenuous as that between the standard beatific Annunciations of any number of paintings in the last nine or ten centuries and Paula's own of 1981 (*Annunciation*, e-fig. 10),¹⁶ in which, according to John McEwen she emphasizes Mary's panic upon being told the glad tidings by the archangel (McEwen, 1997, 99).

¹⁶ e-fig. 10 Paula Rego, *Annunciation* (1981). Collage and acrylic on canvas, 200 x 250 cm. Posted by *Cave to Canvases*, <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/4a/de/b4/4adeb42a69e4a06df9ca617140898be1.jpg>



Fig. 3.12 Paula Rego, *The Coop* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 150 x 150 cm. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 3.13 Francesco Solimena, *The Birth of the Virgin* (c. 1690). Oil on canvas, 203.5 x 170.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Birth_of_the_Virgin_MET_DT11676.jpg

The scene in *The Coop* (fig. 3.12) depicts the episode in the novel in the course of which Amélia gives birth and dies, although in the novel the only other people present are the midwife, the doctor, and, at the very end, the priest who administers the last rites to her. In a discussion of this piece Rego said it represented a symbolic hen coop within which all the females are pregnant. A collective pregnancy can arguably be read in two by no means mutually exclusive ways: first, the mimetic pregnancies of the other women may be interpreted as being in solidarity with Amélia's, here repeating the notion in *Crivelli's Garden* (fig. 3.6) of a coven of women (saints, witches or whores) bonded by a common pursuit. And second, it might be interpreted as an act of purposeful heresy: the birth of the Son of God to a Virgin has been theologically held to be a unique and unrepeatable event, miraculous and therefore impossible to replicate (Rotman, 1987, 57–98). In both Eça and Rego, on the other hand, Amélia's enthronement by Amaro as a Marian substitute, on the occasion when he robbed her in the cloak of the Virgin and declared her to be an improvement on the original ('lovelier than Our Lady', Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 345) had already lent itself to interpretation as an act of usurpation of Mary's exalted status. And Amélia's impregnation by God's representative on Earth (his 'ambassador'), compounds the offence by further contesting the claim to Mary's role as mother of the one true God. The conflation in these pictures of Amélia and Mary — one is the other, Amélia in Mary's clothing, one lapsed and one eternal virgin — now moves into another dimension in *The Coop* (fig. 3.12), through the impact of the notion of these multiple pregnancies as the echo of Amélia's already blasphemous pseudo-Marian motherhood. All together they must be seen to render the original miracle commonplace through facile multiple (and therefore heretical) imitations, in the context of what the author describes in the catalogue text as 'a women's mafia' (Rego, 1998).

And just as the coven of gestating females can be said to gesture back to the female reliquary of saints in *Girl with Gladioli and Religious Figures* (fig. 3.5), as well as to their gathering in *Crivelli's Garden* (fig. 3.6), so too the disturbing otherness of the nature of sainthood put forward by those two works is here taken up again and made more explicit. Thus, deviant sainthood in the *Gladioli* picture here topples over into unabashed voodoo, as represented by the hung chicken, and the doll (the latter the inanimate representation of either a dead baby or an aborted foetus)

on the lap of the midwife. The voodoo cockerel is both linked to and separate from the two hyper-Christian animals in this image, namely the lamb (Paschal symbol) and the dove (the incarnation of the Holy Ghost). What links them is their connection to resurrections of various sorts (eternal bliss in the hereafter in the case of the lamb and the dove, or a return as the living dead, in the case of the voodoo cockerel). But whilst, within the orthodoxy of Christianity, resurrection (life after death) heralds the promise of ecstatic continuity, the walking dead of voodoo tales are the stuff of horror, signalling everlasting restlessness. In the game of blurred boundaries between life and death, what's sauce for the goose is not necessarily sauce for the gander. On the other hand, the unrest of the living dead might be said in one interpretation to be akin to the state of Limbo which is where the unbaptized aborted fetuses and the stillborn or murdered children of Christianity become suspended *ad infinitum*. Worrying differences, therefore, give way to even more worrying affinities, between positions that would be expected to be antithetical. *The Coop* (fig. 3.12) rewrites Eça's novel in many ways, including the salient fact of omitting any hint of impending death for Amélia, in an echo of the thriving Totó in *Girl With Chickens* (fig. 3.8), Paula Rego's previously suggested unwillingness to portray women as victims results very literally in pictures of health, portraits of women who are, in the most concrete sense, fighting fit, with all the threat that implies. These are very much unorthodox resurrections within an eccentric universe in which dead angel women surrender space to their more resilient avatars, and voodoo beasts overshadow in stature their Christ-like counterparts, within a profane cosmogony.

The heretical elements in this picture are numerous. First, the reference to mysticisms and religious practices (voodoo) generally seen to be variously threatening (because different, 'other' and uncontrolled), here opens up glimpses into paths of faith other than a Christianity whose symbols (the dove and the lamb) are in this picture given not exclusive but merely comparable status in relation to voodoo magic (the dead chicken and the aborted foetus). Second, because the imagery deployed gestures to a series of profane possibilities: the stillborn foetus on the midwife's lap (a step further in outrage from Amélia's — and because of their twinned status Mary's — dead child in the novel) in Paula Rego's vision does not even achieve the fruition of the live birth in the precursor text. As such, and even more

blatantly than in *Eça*, this aborted foetus gestures towards a heretical void, and to the absence of the Father and his Son in a world where the all-abounding plenitude of God — as incarnated in his human offspring — is replaced by a miscarriage or induced abortion, brought about by a Satanic runaway Virgin. This counterfeit Madonna gestures back to the dubious saints of *Crivelli's Garden* (fig. 3.6). And her miscarrying deed opens the way for the abortion theme of the works that followed the following year. Be that as it may, back in *The Coop* (fig. 3.12) it becomes significant that what we do not see in this birthing room is the living fruit of the birth in question (son of Amaro, Son of God). What we do see, instead, is an ostentatiously contrasting scene: a surviving mother against the backdrop of a heretical voodoo practice, within a room full of happy women, in which God, His Son, and His priestly delegate are conspicuous by their absence. In this context it is also interesting to speculate that what is depicted in Rego's picture is what imaginatively (in a female world) goes on in a situation such as childbirth, when the men — priests, doctors and authors — are not present.¹⁷ In *Eça's* novel neither the reader nor the author is granted entry into the labour room. Even the priest is reluctant to venture (and to allow God, as symbolized by the holy sacraments) into a space where the female drama of childbirth is being played out. In the novel Abbot Ferrão argues that as a priest, he may only enter the room of a woman about to give birth in order to help her die. This stricture acquires particular force in the case of a woman about to give birth to the child of another priest who, as God's stand-in on earth, seduced her whilst dressing her in the guise and clothing of the Virgin Mary, thus casting her in the untenable dual role of mother of the Son of God and lover of God's supposedly celibate priest. Whereas in the novel Ferrão and God at the last are permitted to approach Amélia's deathbed, however, in Paula Rego's much cosier hen party, their entry is barred, but more to the point unnecessary, since Amélia will not die, and the former are narratively obliterated. Furthermore, what is also foregrounded by this absence and this presence — the absence of God and of the wholesome Saviour child; the presence of the latter's cursed (by voodoo) foetal avatar — is what in the novel

17 Under Roman Catholic rules a priest is only allowed to approach a woman in childbirth to administer the last rites to her.

emerges as the appalling paradox of a moral imperative: that which leads Amaro to the infanticide of his son in order not to offend social decorum and clerical respectability. The aborted foetus or murdered newborn of the Rego picture alludes to possibilities that, in the novel, are ostentatiously rejected, but nonetheless are brought into play by the very fact of that denial: namely, the possibility touched upon but swiftly brushed aside by the two priests (paladins, it is to be assumed, of the rights of the unborn child) of giving Amélia a drug to induce a convenient abortion:

‘Surely you are not thinking of giving the girl a drug that might destroy her’.

Amaro shrugged his shoulders impatiently at such an absurd idea. The good Canon was talking nonsense. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 366)

More chilling, in light of the events that follow, is the comment made by Amaro: ‘the best thing would be if the child were born dead’, and Dias’ reply, which can be seen with hindsight to foretell the advent of the murderous nanny (weaver of angels): ‘it would be one more little angel for the Lord!’ (268). Ironically and tragically, what must be seen as the lesser crime of abortion — the ‘absurd idea’ that Amaro apparently would not contemplate — opens the way to the aggravated crime of infanticide, that macabre ‘weaving’ of an angel for God. An angel, or a tapestry, or a picture: this picture, now created as the indictment of a series of fathers, heavenly or otherwise, here tried *in absentia*. Paula Rego called this piece a room full of witches: in her universe, witches from Leiria in Portugal, Pendle in Lancashire (in 1996, the year before the Amaro series, see e-fig. 11)¹⁸ or elsewhere. In the remaining pictures in the Amaro series, their malevolence may prove sufficient to exact vengeance for a variety of crimes both individual and collective, self-evident and obscure, covered up by the establishment but here exposed through anarchy.

18 e-fig. 11 Paula Rego, *Pendle Witches* (1996). Etching and aquatint on paper, 35.7 x 29.7 cm. Tate, London, all rights reserved, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rego-pendle-witches-p77906>

In 1996, just one year before *The Crime of Father Amaro* series, Rego created nine illustrations for poems by Blake Morrison, whose work has repeatedly inspired her (for example her series on the *Pendle Witches*, inspired by the famous witch trials in Lancashire in 1612, in which twelve women were tried for witchcraft).

All at Sea

I will proceed now to that moment, that ever preoccupies Paula Rego's work when the move from the individual towards the collective acquires national and institutional specificity. The focus of my reading of the remaining images in the current series links them closely to some of the works of the previous decades through the continuity of historical and political motifs. Beginning with *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (fig. 3.14) and following the exegetic opportunity extended by the title of the picture, we learn from the Gospels that the Holy Family were forced to escape from Judea to avoid the wrath of King Herod, who had commanded the massacre of the innocents in order to thwart the prophecy of a new king of the Jews (Matthew 2:13–15).



Fig. 3.14 Paula Rego, *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 170 x 150 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

This picture's connection to the Gospel does not exclude further semantic ramifications, such as a link to the originating novel, as refracted through the cast — Amaro, Amélia and the child (doll) — and may preserve thematic continuity. Compositionally and in terms of casting, the image speaks volumes not due to what it makes possible but due to what it makes clear never was. In a family-driven, church-bound, father-revering, godly nation, there cannot be much greater blasphemy than the multiple attributions surrounding the figure of the man in this picture. Its import extends further, so that, in a move which by then had become a calling-card of this artist, the reverberations of the ancient Judean setting extend as far as twentieth century Portugal. Let us see.

In the earlier discussion of *The Cell* (fig. 3.2) it was argued that although the act of masturbation desecrated the figure of the mother, whether Holy or otherwise, it struck even more deeply against paternal and patriarchal insecurity in the face of recidivist Oedipal sons who persisted in preferring the mother to the father. *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig. 3.14) provides another twist to this tale. Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, whose work has been previously discussed, argued that in fascist regimes the leader represented a potent pope, and in that guise figured the unconscious sexual imagery that encouraged women to 'invest some of their desires in fascism' (Macciocchi, 1976, 128) With reference to Macciocchi's work, Jane Caplan writes as follows:

It's crucial to her conception of the close identity between left and feminist revolutionary politics that Macciocchi interprets this role of the fascist Leader as sexually exploitative of both women and men: the Leader symbolically castrates all men, in the act of expropriating the sexual capacity of women. [...] 'On the sexual plane, as I have frequently stressed, fascism is not just the castration of women, but the castration of men: in fascism, sexuality like wealth belongs to an oligarchy of the powerful. The masses are expropriated'. (Caplan, 1979, 62)

In Eça's novel, indeed, the antagonism between clerical and non-clerical males — namely Amaro and Amélia's rejected fiancé, João Eduardo — is couched in terms of a sexual rivalry that involves both priest and God in cahoots against secular man. Thus Amaro justifies to himself his persecution of João Eduardo in the following soliloquy:

'Get thee behind me, you scoundrel! This morsel belongs to God!' [...] And that, Lord help him, was not a scheme for taking her away from her fiancé: his motives (and he said it out loud to convince himself) were very

honest, very lofty: it was a holy mission, to save her from perdition: he didn't want her for himself, he wanted her for God. As it happened, yes, his interests as lover coincided with his duty as priest, but even had she been cross-eyed, ugly and stupid, he would still have gone to Misericórdia Street, in the service of Heaven, to denounce João Eduardo, slanderer and atheist that he was! And reassured by this logic, he went to bed in peace. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 210–11)

Be that as it may, in *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig. 3.14) Paula Rego's insinuation of grounds for masculine disquiet in the face of a filial enemy (an unwanted child) within the ranks goes further even than the spectacle of males locking horns over a desirable female, and turns into the detection of a deeper self-destructive impetus at the heart of the status quo.

The title of this complex picture refers to a Gospel tradition that has been taken up by several artists throughout the centuries, including Fra Bartolomeo (fig. 3.15), Orazio Gentileschi (fig. 3.16) and Nicolas Poussin (fig. 3.17).



Fig. 3.15 Fra Bartolomeo, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (c. 1509). Oil on panel, 129.5 x 106.7 cm. J. P. Getty Centre, Los Angeles. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fra_Bartolomeo_-_The_Rest_on_the_Flight_into_Egypt_with_St._John_the_Baptist_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg



Fig. 3.16 Orazio Gentileschi, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (c. 1625–1626). Oil on canvas, 137.1 x 215.9 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Orazio_Gentileschi_-_Rest_on_the_Flight_to_Egypt.JPG



Fig. 3.17 Nicolas Poussin, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (c. 1627). Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 62.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Rest_on_the_Flight_into_Egypt_MET_DT4169.jpg

But if it refers also to Eça's novel, the man in Rego's image is not João Eduardo (the unwilling adoptive father to someone else's — God's — son) but Amaro (the model in the other pictures in this series). Amaro as a Catholic priest under vows of celibacy is supposed to be spiritual father to all but biological father to none. His tragedy as man and priest is to be condemned never to hold his own son in his arms, which however he does, both in this picture and in the novel, as the sinful priest that he is. In his capacity as biological father, moreover, he is not supposed to murder that son (which however the novel tells us he is about to do, shortly after that first and only moment in which he holds him after the birth). Fathers — whether as representatives of a paternal God, or as morally and legally conditioned social beings, or as patriarchal defenders of their bloodline, or as Darwinian creatures driven by the imperatives of selfish genes, or as followers of the fourth commandment — ought not to extinguish their progeny, but in the novel, Amaro, most unnaturally, will do so. Furthermore, if the picture refers to the Gospel story of the flight into Egypt, Amaro here represents Saint Joseph, in Catholic hagiography the patron saint of fathers, whose calendar day is celebrated also in Portugal as Fathers' Day. That abnegated loving father of the New Testament, however, is overshadowed here by his alter ego, Amaro, in the novel not a loving and holy father but an infanticidal progenitor from hell. And in the context of the flight into Egypt, infanticidal fathers trigger associations with Herod, and beyond him, with murderous rulers or fathers of their people, be they popes, kings, ministers (is there a faint, fortuitous resemblance between Rego's model and Salazar, fig. 3.18?) or even God himself, or all of them rolled into one.

In the first version of Eça's novel (1875) Amaro drowns his son with his own hands, a plot decision that was changed by the third version (1878), in which the murder was delegated to the killer nanny. In dramatic terms, the earlier version probably worked better, resulting as it did in the deed of a priest whose murder of his own son took the form of a grotesque simulacrum of the baptism ceremony he had been anointed to perform. On the other hand, the fact that in the third version of the novel his hands are technically clean of the crime, while his guilt remains nonetheless unquestionable, emphasizes the reality of indirect blame, which means that if Amaro is guilty of infanticide, so too, by



Fig. 3.18 Manuel Anastácio, *António de Oliveira Salazar* (n.d.). Drawing. Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ant%C3%B3nio_de_Oliveira_Salazar,_drawing.jpg

association, are the massed powers of the various institutions that he represents, and which support him, cover up for him, endow him with authority and turn a blind eye to nannies whose charges invariably die the day they are handed to them (“What do the authorities do about it, Dionísia?” Good old Dionísia shrugged silently’, Eça de Queirós (a), 448). Both the man and the establishment whose creature he is, thus become tarred with the same brush. In Rego’s image the figure of the priest, disproportionately large in relation to the kneeling girl and the baby in his arms, seems to reinstate the first version’s option of hands-on murder by the father, accentuating the guilt of kin-slaying. That same scale, moreover, suggests that what we view here is not merely a man but an emblem, a human being who synecdochically represents a greater institutional whole (patriarchy: Amaro-the-lover-and-father; the church: Amaro-the-man-of-God; and the state: Herod-the-King/Salazar-the-ruler).

The more cryptic imagistic and compositional aspects of the picture potentially also give rise to heterodoxy. I refer here to the nature and size of the baby on man's lap and the doll in the background, whose implications require the consideration of aspects of Catholic orthodoxy that these figures contravene in two ways: first, the picture depicts a scene forbidden under Catholicism, namely, a happy family life for a priest in reality vowed to celibacy; the second point refers to the problem presented by the concept of ghosts. Ghosts are not admitted in Catholic doctrine. After death one's soul conventionally goes either to heaven or to hell, or, in the case of an unbaptized child, to Limbo. In the novel, Amaro and Amélia never hold their child in their arms together. Amaro briefly fantasizes about it, before handing his son over to death. In reality, however, the child is taken from his mother's arms immediately after the birth and delivered by Amaro to his killer. Amaro and Amélia also never see one another again after the baby's birth, since Amélia herself dies immediately afterwards. This picture, therefore, depicting as it does the tender threesome of a family that never was is both cruel and variously contumacious.

And if this family tableau not only has no referent in reality but moreover does not take place in the novel, the pictorial alternative it represents here must be either a dream or a ghost story (involving the spectral return of Amélia and the infant, both dead). But ghosts conventionally only return to haunt those that murdered them. And if this picture refers not only to a murderous (Father) Amaro but also to that Holy Father — the pope whom Amaro dreamt becoming in the future — and beyond him to Joseph, patron saint of fathers, Salazar and Herod, fathers of their peoples, and God, father of them all, these male figures — both human and divine — stand indicted together under the same charge of collusion in each others' crimes. As suggested before, the association between Amaro (the ambassador of Jesus), the pope (God's Vicar on Earth), Joseph (the saint), Herod (the king), Salazar (the statesman) and God himself (the deity), would also explain Amaro's colossal stature in Rego's picture, out of proportion to the scale of the other human figures: namely Amélia (here seen kneeling, possibly in unsuccessful plea to God and Earthly rulers for her child's life); the baby itself; and the enigmatic Barbie-doll-like angel in the background. The doll conjures up a further association with the voodoo doll in *The Coop*,

symbol of another infant death on yet another ungentle lap. And that fact introduces the final paradox that this picture brings to light.

The artist who in 1960 offered us *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland* (fig. 1.1) here charts the self-defeating *modus operandi* of a covenant of deities, patriarchs, fathers, priests and statesmen, the counterproductive consequence of whose deeds is the rupture of their own blood-lineage. In a country and in a theology where fathers, rulers, priests and gods loom so large and their sons (and daughters) so small, the outcome, not surprisingly, is a deconstructive contingency: namely the death of the Sacred Son at the hands of a short-sighted father, who thereby cancels his own bid for blood continuity and his ticket to immortality. In the next picture to be discussed, symbolic figures of power are transposed onto the wider representation of the nation itself.

In *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1) Paula Rego had rehearsed the plot of a man who fell prey to narcissism and lost his soul. In *Mother* (fig. 3.19) she recasts the plight of a nation with the same problem. The man is denied salvation because he is a bad priest, citizen, son and father. And the nation, because it carved out a sea-borne empire but lost its way.

In *Mother*, man and nation are linked since Amaro is a man who regressively longs for a return to the watery, aquatic cosiness of the maternal womb (Horney, 1973; Chodorow, 1979; Dinnerstein, 1987) just as the nation he represents longs to resurrect those maritime adventures that, with the collusion of the church (new worlds to proselytize) had once gained an empire. In either case, what Paula Rego seems to be driving home with some relish is that you can't go home again.

Throughout the centuries, anti-imperial warnings were issued by some of Portugal's most reputed writers, artists and historians. Figures such as Gil Vicente, Luís de Camões, Alexandre Herculano, Almeida Garrett, Oliveira Martins, Fernando Pessoa, Miguel Torga and Eça de Queirós himself argued with varying degrees of bitterness of the dangers of failing to construct a solid economic infrastructure at home independent of revenue from the imperial possessions abroad. For all the reverence in which they are held culturally, however, they remained curiously unheeded politically. Rego's onslaughts against Atlantic expansionism fall within a time-honoured tradition in Portuguese



Fig. 3.19 Paula Rego, *Mother* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 180 x 130 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

cultural life. Like Eça de Queirós, her inspiration for this series, therefore, she belongs to a distinguished body of Portuguese intellectuals who, over the centuries, have strongly condemned Portugal's colonial policy and advocated instead the desirability of a non-expansionist economic strategy of internal domestic development independent of colonial revenues. The link between *Mother*, Eça's novel, and wider cultural and historical preoccupations, therefore, may be somewhat tortuous but is nonetheless valid. The shared *leitmotif* is the condemnation of empire and the attempted revival of the merits of staying home rather than going out to sea. *Mother* (fig. 3.19) contributes to a corpus of art works that are inscribed within that cultural tradition of dissenting (anti-imperial,

anti-religion, anti-nationalistic) feeling, and, of all the pictures in the *Father Amaro* series, it speaks most eloquently to these concerns.

At the emotional, as well as geometric centre of the image sits a large white conch that Paula Rego has said represents Portugal, the motherland. It is indeed altogether proper that the icon chosen to represent a nation that, for five centuries defined itself, first realistically and then nostalgically, as a sea-borne empire, should be represented by a sea-shell. As ever in Paula Rego, however, twisted perversity underlies apparently straightforward symbolism. Shells, though beautiful, are in fact part of the detritus that is left behind on the beach when the sea — or empire — has come and gone. They are what is left of certain crustaceans when the living organism has died and disappeared. The shell, therefore becomes the clever turning of the knife in the perennial wound of this beached post-colonial motherland, as grounded as the tiny boat whose minute scale emphasizes that to which it has been reduced: a knick-knack forgotten on a chair, rather than the unstoppable fifteenth-century *caravela* (ship) of the Portuguese maritime discoveries, forging a route, in Camões' famous words, 'through seas none had sailed before' (Camões, 1572). The theme of vessels and sailors forced into early retirement carries echoes of a similar admonition in *Time: Past and Present* (fig. 1.8). Both share the undertone of cruelty with which the plight of former heroes and conquerors is depicted in these images. In *Mother* (fig. 3.19), the shell in question is a prickly one, a motherland possibly offended and poised to retaliate against her mismanaging sons and the policies deployed in her name to such disastrous historical effect. In this image the punishment, and its form, are rather toothsome: Amaro, half-naked man but also disrobed priest, represents the secular and spiritual concerns that in Portugal joined in unholy alliance what ought to have remained separate spheres of influence (family, church and state). He is surrounded by three women who may represent some of the reaches of the former Portuguese territories: a black woman in the centre, possibly representing the African possessions that Portugal occupied first and held onto the longest; an Indian woman on the left, representing the territories in the East Indies, the first to be lost,¹⁹ and a white woman kneeling on the right, representing perhaps Portugal itself, brought to its knees by the ruinous aftermath of its maritime

19 See chapter 5, footnote 1.

adventures. Brazil, which famously, if inaccurately has folkloric pride of place in the popular imagination as the happy utopian racial synthesis of all three (black, white and Indian — albeit here American Indian: in Portuguese ‘*índio*’ rather than East Indian ‘*indiano*’), is significantly absent from this configuration. And at the centre of this worrying trinity stands Amaro, naked from the waist up, wearing a skirt from the waist down, and being dressed by the women. The implications of men being groomed by women in circumstances that thoroughly emasculate them have already been rehearsed, as we have seen, in paintings such as the *Girl and Dog* series (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9), *The Policeman’s Daughter* (fig. 2.13) and *The Family* (fig. 2.14). The skirt Amaro wears here is the same garment he wore in *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1), in which the grown man, as we remember, stands in for the maternally-arrested little boy, and vice-versa. As in the former picture, here too, an important role is played by the mirror. Amaro dresses in what resembles a eunuch’s outfit, but is unable to look into the mirror or to find — in his manifold capacities as man, boy, priest and state dignitary — either his lost self or the image of the prickly, angry motherland.

Art theory, in ways analogous to film theory, has suggested that the male nude in the Western aesthetic tradition is usually depicted in ways that emphasize the man’s control over his own body (for example through focusing on it while in action rather than in repose, and on its purposefully built-up musculature). The female nude, in contrast, is generally offered as the object of voyeuristic, presumed-male contemplation. Here, however, Amaro is himself the object of a fivefold gaze: ours, of course, those of the three women, and, more perversely, that of the mirror into which he himself does not look, but which reflects him. In the image in the mirror, moreover, he appears completely naked, since even the effeminizing skirt is not visible. The overall effect is that of a round-shouldered, bowed down, exposed Amaro. The mirror, site of a Freudian narcissistic love that seeks to substitute the self for the lost mother, and which here, like the camera, does not lie, is that into which one looks when one is caught up in the maelstrom of the self, narcissistically inwardly directed, rather than able to look outward, onward and forward (for example overseas). What it reflects back at the viewer is the plight of the man but also of the nation, through the

metonymical agency of that pathetic little boat on the chair, against the backdrop of a window that ought to have a view out to sea, but does not. Here, then, is played out the comeuppance of those against whom the betrayed, wrathful motherland (and, shadowing her, numerous sidelined human mothers) raise their prickly hackles.

The other image featuring a half-dressed Amaro is *Perch* (fig. 3.20). This picture, like *The Company of Women* (fig. 3.1) and *Mother* (fig. 3.19), not related to any specific episode in the novel, depicts Amaro barefoot and wearing a dressing gown, perched on an armchair. The pose is unnatural; the model, alone in the room, is possibly unstable and likely to fall, with all the metaphorical (Biblical, social or postural) associations of such an occurrence. There are many ways for men to fall, and women, as it turns out, whether in the Garden of Eden or in the artist's studio, may after all be only partly responsible.



Fig. 3.20 Paula Rego, *Perch* (1997). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 120 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The final three pictures I wish to discuss rework national and religious motifs somewhat more obliquely. Paula Rego has suggested that *Amélia's Dream* (fig. 3.21) was inspired by a flashback in the novel, describing Amélia's adolescent passion for a young man, Agostinho, whom she meets on a seaside holiday and by whom she narrowly misses being seduced in a pine forest by the sea. At the end of the holiday Agostinho moves on and later marries into money, leaving Amélia temporarily broken-hearted. In the catalogue to the exhibition in Dulwich Picture Gallery in 1998 Paula Rego writes that 'in a pine forest by the sea, Amélia comes upon two women disembowelling a dog. They release a vulture. She does not want to join' (Rego, 1998).



Fig. 3.21 Paula Rego, *Amélia's Dream* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 162 x 150 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

This picture, one of the last in this series, is one of Rego's most self-referential works, reflecting back upon formal as well as thematic propositions earlier in the artist's career. Thus the dog being matter-of-factly eviscerated is clearly the unhappy descendant of the endangered animals in the *Girl and Dog* series of a decade earlier (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), and is disconnected from the self-assured Dog Women of the mid-nineties, with whom the former clearly contrasted (fig. 1.12; fig. 6.14).

The ballet tutus of the butchering damsels of *Amélia's Dream* were themselves salvaged from earlier sketches for the *Dancing Ostriches* series of the mid-nineties (fig. 3.22).



Fig. 3.22 Paula Rego, *Dancing Ostriches from Disney's 'Fantasia III'* (1995). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium. Triptych right panel 150 x 150 cm. Saatchi Collection, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The metaphorical dance in question here, it would appear, takes place on the grave of the dog. The symbolism of the vulture that erupts from his ripped-up insides is cryptic. A vulture is a carrion beast that feeds off dead (possibly murdered) bodies, and therefore stands as the signpost for that murder, as well as the metaphor for its confession. Here the dog is at first glance the victim of a slaughter perpetrated by the two ostrich women. But the vulture that bursts out of gut may be the testimony to an earlier crime (his), whose secret the dog had harboured. A deathbed confession? A confession extracted under torture? Neither would be inappropriate, in the context of a set of pictures such as these, haunted by the dark manoeuvring of organized religion and their visual demolition. And if this reading is correct, the nature of the crime can be easily conjectured, both from the foregone narratives and in light of this animal's habitual position in Rego's private bestiary, being, as it is, the representative of a masculinity upon which female figures insistently wreak revenge.

The women themselves, moreover, performing as they do the dual role of confessors and executioners, allude to the proclivities of the Inquisition in earlier times. Disturbingly, however, they simultaneously reverse the gender roles that more habitually cast men as the witch-hunters and women as the hunted. The link to a broader historical framework is here strengthened by the accompanying catalogue text and by the phantasmagorical backdrop. 'In a pine forest by the sea' carries an echo of national beginnings that lead vertiginously from this picture to the dysphoric end of empire discussed with reference to *Mother* (fig. 3.19). Pine forests are linked in the Portuguese imagination to the thirteenth-century king, Don Dinis, who greatly developed Portugal's economic capabilities in the Middle Ages through agricultural policies that included establishing vast pine tree plantations in central and northern Portugal. Don Dinis, whose cognomen was 'The Farmer King', has been famously described as 'the planter of future ships' (Pessoa, 1992, 31). His forestation policy produced the timber from which two centuries later the ships of the navigators — the *caravelas* — would be built. Those trees, however, the rustle of whose needles 'is the present sound of that future sea' (Pessoa, 1992, 31), in Paula's composition are as attenuated as the invisible sea at whose edge, according to her, they grow, and to which historically they reach out. Both sea and trees,

therefore, as the objective correlatives of the maritime adventure, here become figments of a female imagination whose only concession to their existence paradoxically aims at emphasizing their insignificance. As author of her own catalogue text, we take the artist's word for it that the trees figure in the picture. But their presence in reality appears to be confined to that text, with all the implications which that entails, bearing in mind the liberties this artist is prone to take with textual precursors, including possibly those of her own authorship.

In the background of the picture, instead of the pine trees and sea, which are the caretaker symbols of the imperial adventure (and the site of Amélia's near-seduction by Agostinho, Amaro's precursor in love and desertion), we glimpse two spectral figures. They are two voices from the artist's past, two belated ostrich women, just discernible in their trademark black tutus, the chorus in a picture of bacchantes making merry on the ruins of a variety of erased male dreams. In this picture, as in *Departure* (fig. 2.8), *The Cadet and His Sister* (fig. 2.9) and *The Soldier's Daughter* (fig. 2.11), it is clearly no longer the case that men must work while women must weep. And towering above the overall composition stands the figure of an Amélia in childish dress and hair ribbon but with aggressively clenched fists, who, we are told 'does not want to join in' but looks on nonetheless. Just looking? Just following orders?

The next picture, *In the Wilderness* (fig. 3.23) offers us another seascape populated not by conquering heroic males but instead by a solitary woman.

The title suggests that she is usurping the role of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is both Everyman and like no other man. The female figure is Amélia, who, according to the catalogue write-up, is praying for help. The title of the picture refers us to the passage in the Gospels in which we read that Jesus, having been recognized by God as his son ('this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17) is 'led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil' (Matthew 4:1). He emerges triumphant from his forty-day ordeal to be acclaimed as the Son of God but also as the Son of Man.

Aside from the implications of a gender-swap sacrilegious in its own right, and more emphatically even than in pictures such as *Time: Past and Present* (fig. 1.8) and *Mother* (fig. 3.19), this picture deploys a wild, untamed sea, disencumbered of men and ships. The only splash



Fig. 3.23 Paula Rego, *In the Wilderness* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 180 x 130 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

of colour stems from the incongruous little pink pig lost in a greyness of overcast dreams. In a Portuguese context, the misty seascapes recollect Don Sebastião, Portugal's version of the myth of the once and future king, outlined in the Prologue. In the nation's imagination, misty seaside dawns are first and foremost the metonymical trigger for nostalgia, recalling the disappearance of the king at Alcácer Quibir, the ensuing period of Spanish rule and the hope of the monarch's return on a misty morning, to rescue the homeland and restore it to its former greatness.

In Paula Rego's foggy seascape, however, the emptiness is absolute and does not bode well for pseudo-messianic returns. The nineteenth-century period dress of the kneeling woman also invites comment. Portugal's imperial dreams, deflated in 1578 by the death of Don Sebastião, were revived in the 1870s in what became known as the project of the *Pink Map* (fig. 3.24). This referred to intended expansion in Southern Africa, aiming at bringing under Portuguese control all the land (coloured in pink in

world maps) linking the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique in the East and Angola in the West. These territorial ambitions led Portugal into conflict with Great Britain, in what became that century's scramble for Africa. In 1890 Britain issued Portugal with an ultimatum. The outcome, predictably in view of the former's industrialized wealth and proportional war machine, was a climb-down on the part of the Portuguese, international humiliation abroad and an escalation of resentment against a weakened monarchy at home. The medium-term effect was severe popular discontent, arguably leading to the assassination of the king and heir to the throne in 1908 and the implantation of the Republic two years later. Following the Ultimatum, Portugal's imperial ambitions were put on the back-burner for the following four decades, until revived by Salazar in the context of the political events discussed previously.



Fig. 3.24 The Portuguese project of *Pink Map* ('Mapa Cor-de-Rosa') (1886).
 Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mapa_Cor-de-Rosa.svg

In *In the Wilderness* (fig. 3.23) the recumbent Amélia prays before a seascape that, for the Portuguese in the long term, proved to be an empty dream, and from which, in this image, (white) men and pink maps (but not satirical pink pigs) are excluded. Speculation regarding that farcical little animal is cut short by the artist who, in conversation, claimed she included it because 'it just happened to be lying around in the studio'. Quite so, and Sigmund Freud aside, for those wary of over-interpretation, a cigar sometimes is just a cigar. Nonetheless I will venture that for all its incidental meaninglessness, the pig here, as in *The*

Maids (fig. 1.4) invites association with that animal's generic function as avatar of the artist and mouthpiece of authorial judgement. 'People have to work out their own story' (Rego, quoted in Lambirth, 1998, 10).

Returning to the title of this picture, from the Gospels we know that after Christ's forty days in the wilderness, 'the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him' (Matthew 4:11). In the Father Amaro series, *Angel*, one of Paula Rego's most powerful works to date is, in her own words, 'both guardian angel and avenging angel. Her mission is to protect and to avenge. She carries the symbols of the Passion, the sword and the sponge. She has appeared and she has taken form and we don't know what comes next' (Rego, 1998). What indeed? What we do know is that according to Rego, this particular angel is definitely female, unlike those traditional beings (Michael, Gabriel) who, notwithstanding their dresses, are male.²⁰



Fig. 3.25 Gaspar Dias, *The Appearance of the Angel to St. Roch* (c. 1584). Oil on panel, 350 x 300 cm. Church of St. Roque, Lisbon. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apari%C3%A7%C3%A3o_do_Anjo_a_S%C3%A3o_Roque_Gaspar_Dias.jpg

²⁰ Interestingly in English the expression denoting a matter so uninteresting as to warrant no discussion is 'how many angels can dance on the head of a pin' but in the equivalent in Portuguese refers to speculation on 'the sex of angels'.



Fig. 3.26 *The Archangel Gabriel (Power of God)* (1729). Marble. Chiesa dei Gesuiti, Venice. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Interior_of_Chiesa_dei_Gesuiti_\(Venice\)_-_Center_of_the_transept_-_Archangel_Gabriel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Interior_of_Chiesa_dei_Gesuiti_(Venice)_-_Center_of_the_transept_-_Archangel_Gabriel.jpg)



Fig. 3.27 Paula Rego, *Angel* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 180 x 130 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In conversation with Paula Rego at a stage when this picture was only sketched and destined to undergo considerable modifications, she intended to call it *Amélia's Revenge*. It is perhaps typical of this artist that an image of retaliation should be translated into the deceptive vocabulary of angelology, while in fact retaining all the menace of the original concept. The danger is twofold. First, gender antagonism (love turned to hatred, in an echo of the artist's unsettling admission of perplexity faced with the Amélia of the novel: 'I find that curious: a woman who can love a man until the very end' (Rego, quoted in Rodrigues da Silva, 1998, 10). And second, a threat to Catholic orthodoxy, since the ambiguously-sexed angel of convention is here categorically depicted as female but simultaneously linked, via the sword and the sponge, with Christ at the moment of the Passion, which is the moment of his greatest divinity and greatest humanity. In that earlier conversation Paula Rego suggested that this figure represents both Amélia herself and the angel that appears in her room after she dies. The angel bears the *Arma Christi* (weapons of Christ or instruments of the Passion), the phallic sword or lance that wounds and the sponge dipped in vinegar from which he drank on the cross.

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. [...] But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. (John 19:28-34)

In Rego the symbolism is both secular (Amélia) and celestial (angelic), both lacerating (the sword) and soothing (the sponge). During Christ's crucifixion, tradition tells us, the sponge was dipped in vinegar. Vinegar may be drunk, but if used to wipe wounds it both disinfects and stings. The Portuguese version of 'being cruel to be kind' translates as 'burning before healing' (*arder para curar*). The angel bearing sword and sponge epitomizes that requirement of being cruel in order to be kind. On the other hand, not inconceivably in the case of this artist, and as was the case with those earlier ministering girls and suffering dogs, cause and effect may be reversed, with apparent kindness masking intended cruelty. In this good-cop-bad-cop universe, angels have Janus faces, and

may after all, modified titles notwithstanding, symbolize any number of unspecified retributions. If so, the impetus for Amélia's revenge might lie in the provocation instigated by a religion, Judaeo-Christianity, which from its inception has always readily blamed the female of the species ('the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate', Genesis 3: 12). And the agent of that revenge, altogether properly, turns out to be a combination of a Fallen Angel (Lucifer, son of the morning)²¹ and (because this is Rego) an unequivocally female one.

Post-imperial Portugal is a nation in the grip of enduring contradictions: mariological reverence side by side with enduring chauvinism; pro-European modernism hand in hand with Atlantic imperial nostalgia; nouveau-democracy in the face of ingrained civic discrimination. The latter allegation requires some elaboration. The Portuguese fixation upon its lost empire, in the aftermath of the independence of its remaining colonies at the end of the twentieth century, has coexisted with ongoing resentment against the last generation of empire builders, who in 1975 descended upon the European motherland to what at best was a chilly welcome from those who had stayed home. The economic difficulties resulting from the loss of colonial revenue in 1975 were compounded by the arrival in the space of less than two years of one million Portuguese citizens from the erstwhile African colonies, as well as a few rare black holders of Portuguese passports. The longing for the lost empire — which endures to this day in Portugal, with considerable lack of historical self-reflection and proportionate political incorrectness regarding the moral implications of imperialism — goes hand in hand with two social phenomena: institutional racism against the scarce black incomers from those former Portuguese 'provinces',²² and a persistent resentment against the white so-called *retornados* (returnees) who had been the keepers of the imperial goose with the golden eggs. To a greater or lesser degree — largely depending on skin colour and more or less obvious hallmarks of difference — almost half a century later, both groups continue to suffer from discrimination in their land of

21 In Isaiah, 14:12, nonetheless, Lucifer is definitely a male angel: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!'

22 In the 1950s it was decided that the term 'colonies', with its inflammatory potential, should be officially changed to 'overseas provinces' (*províncias do ultramar*).

origin or post-colonial adoption. The lack of self-knowledge evinced by a longing for empire that runs in parallel with a hatred of empire-builders (white colonials) and empire-fodder (colonized black people) is aggravated in the case of a country such as Portugal, whose dominant religion has always been wary of gnosis. The self-insight that Paula Rego seeks to impose upon her fellow countrymen through her art, therefore, may be interpreted as a case of administering to the nation a taste of foreign (pagan) medicine as preached by the oracle at Delphi: 'know thyself'.

4. An Interesting Condition: The Abortion Pastels

*Renoir [...] is supposed to have said that
he painted his paintings with his prick.*

Bridget Riley, 'The Hermaphrodite'

*Thus I learned to battle the canvas, to come to know it as a being
resisting my wish (dream), and to bend it forcibly to this wish. At first
it stands there like a pure chaste virgin... and then comes the wilful
brush which first here, then there, gradually conquers it with all the
energy peculiar to it, like a European colonist.*

Wassily Kandinsky

*Mignonne, allon voir si la rose
Qui ce matin avoit declose
Sa robe de pourpre au soleil,
A point perdu cette vesprée,
Les plis de sa robe pourprée,
Et son teint au vostre pareil.*

Pierre de Ronsard

Christmas by Any Other Name

In James Cameron's film of 1984, *The Terminator*, we are treated to a futuristic rendition of the Nativity with assorted complications. A cyborg travels from the future to the diegetic present to kill Sarah

Connor, a woman who, at an unspecified but prophesied date, will give birth to a child at that point still to be conceived. The child, John Connor (a good Irish-American Catholic name, which furthermore shares the same initials as Jesus Christ's), will live to be the saviour of humanity against the cyborgs that in the near future are due to take over the planet. Hot in pursuit of the cyborg is Kyle Reese (a name which is a near homophone of the ancient Greek liturgic call '*kyrie eleison*': God have mercy), an envoy of those future humans and a friend of Connor's, who is dispatched to prevent the murder, and to ensure that the would-be mother survives and brings forth the necessary saviour. He does more than that, and in fact impregnates her with the foretold child. The film develops into a straightforward plot of quest and struggle, pitting brains against brute force, orderly civilization against the unbridled techno-elemental, good against evil. In the course of the film, the search for the woman to be slaughtered becomes merely a pretext for the real business of males — human and otherwise — killing each other in the name of prioritizing their respective lineages. Good achieves an open-ended victory (the cyborg is defeated but there are plenty more — and several film sequels — where he came from), albeit, in true Gospel fashion, only at the price of a sacrificial male death. Reese, whose persona — beyond the figure of knight in shining armour in aid of damsels in distress — had adumbrated the triple role of God (father of a Saviour), guardian angel (of unborn children) and Saint Joseph (his son will bear his mother's rather than his father's surname, and therefore paternity appears to be a by-proxy affair), dies, leaving us with one surviving heroine and the promise of a living hero in the future. There is of course an important difference between these two. A bird in the hand is always better than two in the bush, and the survival chances of the two sexes at the end look unequal: on the one hand a resilient heroine who at the very last ceases to rely upon ineffectual defenders and takes it upon herself to finish the job of destroying the cyborg. And on the other hand, a dead hero and a promising but yet unborn son.

This scenario encompasses much that is relevant to the themes of male death, female survival and self-destructive male lineages discussed in previous chapters. In *The Terminator*, in a reversal of the *Father Amaro* series (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21;

3.23; 3.27) and indeed of the Gospel texts, a son sends his future father to his death in order to save himself/his interests, and males engage in mutual destruction (man against cyborg in a cross-species echo of clergymen against secular masculinity — Amaro versus João Eduardo in *The Sin of Father Amaro*). The results are not dissimilar, tending towards the effect of gender disloyalty among males and mutually-forsaking relatives: God and his son on the cross, Connor and his sacrificed father in different time dimensions, humanity against the cyborgs that we presume were its highest-tech offspring. *The Terminator's* themes of nativity and infanticide, or salvation and perdition, are akin to the central considerations of the images that will now be discussed: namely the inclusion of intertextual allusion (to prior traditions — whether theological or aesthetic) and terror. And at the heart of both film and images lies the patriarchal/theological determination to control female reproduction (the birthing of babies) in the name of male perpetuity.

I shall now consider a series of ten pastels produced by Paula Rego from fourteen sketches over a period of approximately six months, between July 1998 and February 1999. As so often in Rego's work, only more directly so in this case, her images are rooted in a pre-existing context whose nuances inform the resulting pictures, and are central to their meaning. The motivation behind these particular works was a political event in Portugal, namely the referendum on a law just then approved by parliament, which liberalized the existing abortion regulations. Like many European countries, Portugal has a strong constitution, and it is unconstitutional to hold a referendum on a law already approved by parliament. But a powerful lobby promoted largely by Roman Catholic interests brought sufficient pressure to lead the President of the Republic to approve an (unconstitutional) referendum. The referendum took place on 28 June 1998. Its result, details surrounding which will be outlined presently, was to bring about the suspension of the law, for the purpose of its subsequent re-submission to Parliament. This chapter will seek to place the pastels and sketches, which are almost unprecedented for this artist in remaining untitled, within the context of the political upheaval of events surrounding the controversy, as well as within the wider scenario of abortion debates worldwide.

In an interview given in the year these works were produced, and with reference to them, Paula Rego said that to her, death never signifies redemption. 'Death means you die. That is all' (Rego quoted in Marques Gastão, 1999, 44). Her work throughout the decades, as discussed previously in relation to works such as *The Maids* (fig. 1.4), *Girl with Chickens* (fig. 3.8) and *The Coop* (fig. 3.12), has repeatedly manifested the inability or unwillingness — idiosyncratic within the canon of Western art — to cast the woman as victim. This identifying hallmark becomes more noticeable in those cases in which she departs from an originating text (Genet's *The Maids*; Eça de Queirós's *The Crime of Father Amaro*) whose plot centres on a female death. It is curious that, having opted for such texts, Rego circumvents the primary narrative motivation: in *The Maids* (fig. 1.4) by casting a man in drag in the role of the female murder victim; and in *The Crime of Father Amaro* (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27), even more tortuously, by emphasizing survival and revenge where the original narrative had depicted the woman's defeat and death. In the abortion series to be discussed now (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49), her female protagonists come arguably closer than ever before to surrendering to adverse circumstances. The bloodshed of the abortion room appears to signpost their pain more intentionally even than it does the death of the foetus, which is nowhere to be seen. These images about abortion, then, focus exclusively on maternal suffering: a profane *mater dolorosa* prioritized over a dead son. In Rego's work the girls and women suffer, but none is actually dead, and the depicted trauma becomes itself the encoded script for a battle fought and won. A battle, as the subsequent argument will elaborate, whose contenders may not after all be the obvious ones of unwilling mother versus aborted foetus, but instead a gallery of women, girls and unborn children pitted against the customary enemies of church and state in Rego's unquiet universe.

What emerges from the abortion polemic that gave rise to these pictures is the fact of the Catholic Church's continued influence in national politics in Portugal, even following the establishment of democracy in 1974. I wish to begin by elaborating upon some points regarding the church's long-standing intervention in public affairs (specifically sexual politics) in general, and in Portugal in particular.

Infallible Fallacies

Referring to Machiavelli's principle of a form of morals without scruples, such that the basis for success is that might is right, Lloyd Cole contends that this concept accurately describes the impact of the Roman Catholic Church in countries where it exercises significant control over the population, and over its reproductive — including contraceptive — practices (Cole, 1992, 51). Janet Hadley gives a lucid account of how the abortion controversy has set the agenda of wider national politics at various points, or in some cases more or less perennially, in countries such as Ireland, Poland, Germany and the United States. In March 1993 a gynaecologist, David Gunn, was killed by anti-abortion activists¹ outside his Florida clinic, and since then the violence perpetrated by those who without irony call themselves 'pro-life' has escalated with further killings. Subsequent to this, and regardless of pressure from some sectors of the Catholic faithful who distanced themselves from the 'vengeful Old Testament mentality' of 'extremists who have hijacked the American pro-life movement' (Hadley, 1996, 153), in March 1995, two years after that first killing in the United States, Pope John Paul II issued his eleventh Encyclical, *Evangelium vitae* ('Gospel of life'). In it he urged all Catholics to consider themselves under a 'grave and clear obligation' to join non-violent anti-abortion protests. 'The pope's message came within inches of endorsing anti-abortion militancy as a religious duty and the mainstream lobbyists fretted that it would whip up the fanatics to further image-damaging antics' (Hadley, 1996, 154).

Not surprisingly, then, both before and after this papal encyclical, anti-abortion Catholic thought, as well as the extremist factions of the non-Catholic anti-abortion lobby, have continued to equate abortion with genocide and with the euthanasia practices of the Nazis against the physically and mentally handicapped. In this context, some writers have come to view the opposition to abortion as operating in tandem with an implicit declaration of wider sexual-political import (the claim of control by patriarchy, church and state over the bodies and roles of women), a declaration that furthermore entails a theological/doctrinal dimension. This refers primarily to the Christian/Roman Catholic view

1 Anti-abortion activism in the United States may include but does not necessarily entail a Catholic component. Other Christian interests are predominantly involved.

that the reproductive function is the paramount role of women, ordained as either a punishment (childbirth in pain as collective punishment of women for Eve's original sin)² or as a privilege (the emulation of the Virgin Mary as Holy Mother). In either case, motherhood emerges as neither a choice nor an option, but rather as a divinely ordained imposition.

In Genesis, God admonishes Eve that in retaliation for her disobedience 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee' (Genesis 3:16). In this passage, woman's criminality, her maternity, and her subjection to the male are neatly linked together and transmitted in perpetuity to all womankind. To all womankind, that is, until the advent of Mary, whose redemptory coming into being had the power if not fully to cleanse, at least to set a good example to her fellow women. Her all-embracing purity beautifies even Eve's sin, which it transforms it into a *felix culpa*, a Fall now blessed for having made Mary's own idolized existence necessary (Warner, 1985, 60–61). Childbirth, and more specifically the pain it entails, was the punishment for the woman's greater portion of blame in the scenario of original sin. Both the womb and the child in it were stained by that sin: 'Woman was womb and womb was evil' (Warner, 1985, 57), therefore woman was evil too. That syllogism endured until the advent of a Marian worship whose essence was likewise maternity, but now a hallowed, purifying and redemptory maternity to which other women could aspire, while however, paradoxically, being conscious that as sinners they could never fully replicate it.

Under Vatican doctrinal ruling, Mary stands to this day as the exception to the human and female plight in two respects: she is exempt from original sin and she achieved motherhood while retaining her virginity, or, as the well-loved hymn would have it, 'Mother and Maiden was never none but she,/Well may such a lady Godde's mother be'.³ At an abstract

2 For religious objections to pain relief in childbirth see William Camann, 'A History of Pain Relief During Childbirth' in Edmond I. Eger II, Lawrence J. Saidman and Rod N. Westhorpe (eds.), *The Wondrous Story of Anaesthesia* (New York: Springer, 2014), 847–58.

3 See Eamon Duffy, 'True and False Madonnas', *The Tablet* (6 February 1999), 169–71, for a discussion of the failure of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) to soften Mary's image from her function as an example to womankind (albeit an impossible one to emulate), to object of love by reason of being God's mother.

level, therefore, as suggested above, she represents a philosophically and emotionally insurmountable problem for women: she is held up as that which they ought to strive to be whilst being admonished that, being different from her in those two respects, they can never approximate her privileged status (Warner, 1985, 337). And at a more pragmatic level she has become the vehicle for the promotion of a series of political and ideological interests that relied upon the reproductive subjection of women as one of its central tenets:

In Catholic countries above all, from Italy to Latin America [...] women are subjugated to the ideal of maternity. [...]

The natural order for the female sex is ordained as motherhood and, through motherhood, domestic dominion. The idea that a woman might direct matters in her own right as an independent individual is not even entertained. In Catholic societies, such a state of affairs is general, and finds approval in the religion's chief female figure. (Warner, 1985, 284, 289)

The writer of the above lines goes on to elaborate upon how propaganda of this sort, and the conflicts it throws up, extend well outside the sphere of theological debate and into *real politik*:

In 1974 Pope Paul VI, sensitive to a new mood among Catholic women, attempted to represent [Mary] as the steely champion of the oppressed and a woman of action and resolve. She should not be thought of, he wrote, 'as a mother exclusively concerned with her own divine Son, but rather as a woman whose action helped to strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ'. (Warner, 1985, 338)

When Pope Paul VI held up Mary as the New Woman, the model for all Christians, he expressed this impossibly divided aim without irony, in the immemorial manner of his predecessors. The Virgin is to be emulated as 'the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city'. (Warner, 1985, 337)

Earlier dictates of this sort, as we have seen, were put to use in Portugal by the propaganda machinery of the *Estado Novo*. Their effect, however, outlasted the fall of the regime, as demonstrated by the nature of the polemic that came to surround the abortion referendum a quarter of a century later. Before moving onto this later period, it is useful to note

the analogies between, on the one hand, the censorship apparatus of dictatorship, as deployed in Salazar's Portugal and analogous regimes, and on the other, the older tradition of mono-vocal papal pronouncement. The latter dates back to the establishment by Pius IX of the dogma of papal infallibility in 1870, and has found confirmation in a series of subsequent Vatican utterances. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Pius X instigated a campaign that culminated in the enforcement of an anti-modernist oath imposed upon all Catholic ordinands. Its intention was to curtail intellectual attempts by theologians to reconcile Catholic beliefs with science, democracy and an objective account of history:

[The anti-modernist oath] involved assent to all papal teaching, both as to content and as to the 'sense' in which the Vatican meant it to be understood. Such internal assent went beyond anything dreamt up even by Stalin or the worst imaginings of George Orwell. The oath survives to this day in a new but similarly encompassing formula taken by Catholic ordinands, seminary teachers and Catholic university theologians. The pernicious result of Pius X's campaign was the shackling of free and imaginative Catholic thinking, discussion and writing for the next 50 years. (Cornwell, 1998, 23)

In the 1950s a number of attempts were made to break away from the crackdown implemented by Pius X, but Pius XII — 'Hitler's Pope' — consolidated both the policy of censorship and the nineteenth-century declaration of papal infallibility. In an encyclical entitled 'Of Human Nature' he decreed that once the pope has pronounced on a topic of faith or morals, all discussion must end among theologians. This dictate was subsequently reinforced by Pope John Paul II, who proclaimed that a papal utterance precluded all further discussion on that subject. This move debarred even future papal successors from re-opening the debates in question (Cornwell, 1998, 23). These, notoriously, included issues such as the ordination of women priests, contraception, and abortion, which were the subject of four papal encyclicals in recent years. 'Supported by this "spiritual" authority fascism and neo-fascism organized the reactionary mentality, not only of the individual, but of women, under the form of the authoritarian family. This leads to a definition of the character structure of the petit bourgeois social strata [...] which from the Italy of 1922, the Germany of 1933 to the Chile of Pinochet, draw out the potential of the

counter-revolution: in the Woman/mother, Woman/hearth, Woman/Fatherland' (Macciocchi, 1979, 74).

Portugal under Salazar's Concordat fully endorsed what Macciocchi, quoted earlier, called 'fascism's fertile mother' (Macciocchi quoted in Caplan, 1979, 62). Not surprisingly, therefore, it enforced one of the strictest abortion laws in the Western world. Abortion was illegal and punishable with a term of prison, decriminalization applying only in the case of proven danger to the life of the mother or severe malformation of the foetus, in which case a conference of medical practitioners might decide upon an illegal but non-prosecuted abortion. In 1984, ten years after the revolution that ushered in democracy, the law was changed to legalize abortion in three specific circumstances: up to twelve weeks (and in some cases with no established upper limit) in the case of danger to the life or irreversible damage to the health of the mother; up to sixteen weeks in the case of incurable illness or malformation of the foetus; and up to twelve weeks if the pregnancy was the result of rape. In every case the abortion was to be carried out by a doctor in a recognized medical establishment. The new law, like the old one, recognized a doctor's right to refuse to perform an abortion on grounds of conscience, and punished abortion in all other circumstances by two to eight years' imprisonment (*Comissão para a Igualdade e Para os Direitos das Mulheres/Presidência do Conselho de Ministros*, 1995, 146–47).

Some facts and figures may be pertinent here. In 1976 in Portugal, the incidence of maternal deaths per 100,000 of live births was 43.5 and the number of illegal abortions was roughly estimated at between 100,000 and 200,000 per year, abortion constituting the third most common cause of maternal deaths. By the beginning of the 90s the effects of the liberalizing abortion law of 1984 began to translate into a dramatic decrease in maternal deaths from 43.5 to 8.4 per 100,000 of live births. And in 1991 the numbers of illegal abortions were reduced from between 100,000–200,000 to between 20,000–22,000. The figures, however, continued to give cause for alarm in some quarters: in 1995 almost 8000 babies were born to teenage mothers while some figures suggested that only 30% of women of childbearing age attended family planning clinics and only 60% practiced contraception of any kind. For those seeking family planning advice in the late 1990s, waiting times could be as long as 8 months (Rosendo, 1998, 56–57).

An attempt at further liberalizing the law by introducing abortion on demand up to ten weeks was rejected by Parliament at the beginning of 1997, but a motion by the JS (Juventude Socialista or Socialist Youth) and the PCP (the Portuguese Communist Party) led to its inclusion in the agenda of the following year's Parliamentary debate. The proposed law was interpreted by many as being of an anti-punitive rather than liberalizing tendency (Ferreira, 1998, 11), and it was approved in 1998. The response on the part of the Catholic Church, centre-right factions and associated ant-abortion interests was vociferous: a referendum on the new law was immediately requested. Although under Portuguese law it is unconstitutional to hold a referendum on a law already approved by Parliament, the then Socialist government agreed to it.

The referendum was set to take place on 28 June 1998, and debate on the matter dominated press time and newspaper column inches in the succeeding months. Public, political and religious opinion was divided, and although clearly opposed to the new law, the Catholic Church itself was undecided on the issue of whether it was feasible to hold a referendum on the right to be born, as well as on the advice to be given to the faithful on the matter of voting. The country's bishops, for example, offered contradictory advice and injunctions that ranged from the opinion that it is impossible to hold a referendum on the right to be born, to advice on voting against the law but without the threat of excommunication, to the more extreme option of *ipso facto* excommunication for anyone who voted in favour of liberalization. Interestingly, Don José Policarpo, the Patriarch of Lisbon and therefore the highest prelate in the land, announced that he would not be offering advice on this matter to the faithful of his diocese. In an official pronouncement to be delivered to all parish priests, he stated that while 'abortion under any circumstances is an attempt against life [...] the stance of the Catholic Church does not incline towards criminalizing the woman' (Policarpo, 1998, 6). Maria José Mauperrin noted that in the Sunday preceding the referendum, the tone set in masses up and down the country was divided, running the full gamut from admonitions of hellfire to absolute silence on the matter (Mauperrin, 1998, 79). The overwhelming weight of Catholic authority nonetheless urged the faithful with greater or lesser force and greater or lesser threats to vote against liberalization in the referendum.

In the event the result was a deadlock. Only a disappointing 31.94% of the electorate voted (2,711,712 voters), a fact some opinion writers interpreted as signalling not lack of interest but instead a vestigial ('to be on the safe side') fear of excommunication on the part of would-be pro-liberalization Catholic voters. Of those who voted, 49.08% or 1,308,631 people voted in favour of liberalization. By the tiniest margin of just over one percent the no vote won, with 50.92% (1,357,914 votes) opting against the liberalizing option. In view of the inconclusiveness of the result, it was decided to suspend the law and re-submit it to Parliament for further consideration the following year. In effect this only happened nine years later. Following another referendum on 11 February 2007 the abortion law in Portugal was liberalized on 10 April 2007, allowing the procedure to be carried out on-demand up to ten weeks, with a mandatory three-day waiting period. Abortions at later stages are allowed for specific reasons, such as risk to woman's health, rape and other sexual crimes, or foetal malformation, with restrictions increasing gradually at twelve, sixteen and twenty-four weeks. At the instigation of the President, Aníbal Cavaco e Silva, the recommendation was enshrined in law that in all cases measures should be taken to ensure abortion was the last resort. Despite the liberalization of the laws, in practice, many doctors continue to refuse to perform abortions on grounds of conscience, which, in isolated communities where only a single doctor is available, can still make medical abortion unobtainable. One final fact may offer food for thought. In the debate leading up to the 1998 referendum, a survey of medical opinion found that a significant number of the doctors questioned indicated that even were the law to be supported by the referendum or otherwise upheld, they themselves would neither offer abortions in their hospitals or practices, nor commit funding to its implementation on demand, suggesting that considerable problems remain as regards making the law a practical reality for many Portuguese women (Rosendo, 1998, 58–64).

The Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 had reestablished democracy in Portugal, opening the way for massive and rapid changes in women's living and working conditions, and it specifically revised Salazar's 1940 Concordat with the Vatican, implementing laws that protect overall freedom of worship and forbid discrimination against

any religion.⁴ The events surrounding the referendum on abortion in 1998, however, made clear the extent to which, even a quarter of a century after the abolition of Roman Catholicism as the state religion, clerical influence and traditional attitudes concerning women and motherhood still endured in the national psyche. Politically and religiously enforced maternity was still a reality in Portugal, and Paula Rego's *Untitled* (silenced) works spoke loudly about attitudes that prevailed then, and to a lesser extent still do to this day.

Her attacks on the alliance of church and state and the undemocratic consequences of their collusion, both under Salazar and subsequently, found expression from early on. In 1981 she produced a cryptic collage and acrylic work called *Annunciation* (e-fig. 10) which, inasmuch as the abstract form permits interpretation, appears to depict Mary facing a mechanical set of iron pincers (either the Angel Gabriel or God himself) looming over her, ready to take possession of her consenting or non-consenting body. Religious themes returned on a regular basis in the decades that followed, including in 1997 (*The Crime of Father Amaro* series: figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27) discussed in the previous chapter) and in 2002, when she produced the group of works based on episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary, to be discussed in chapter 7. Her anger at organized religion, however, reached a pitch following the 1998 referendum, and found expression in the abortion pastels of 1998–1999 (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49). In these, more directly even than in previous or subsequent works, she addresses herself to the enduring power of Catholicism over lives, minds, and, more to the point, politics, in post-Salazar Portugal, under what was then a Socialist government. With appalling appropriateness, at the heart of this debate lies that issue of motherhood, which, as a shared linchpin, brought together two factions — Socialism and Catholicism — otherwise antithetical in any given area of debate. Rego, having had more than one illegal abortion while an art student in London in the 1950s, identifies with the plight of working-class women in Portugal during her childhood: 'I know what I

4 After the reinstatement of democracy in 1974 the Concordat was, if not officially abolished, in effect rendered non-operational, and Portugal now enjoys a *lei da liberdade religiosa* (law of religious freedom) safeguarding all citizens against discrimination on grounds of religion.

am talking about. I know about those things. I saw the wretchedness of the women of Ericeira [in Portugal, where Rego's family had a house]. [The pictures] are about things which we must continue to do in secret, as ever in Portugal. But it is better than not doing them!' (Rego, quoted in Pinharanda, 1999, 3).

Life, Death and Russian Roulette

Here is a conundrum. A gun holds six bullets. Playing Russian roulette with one bullet in the cartridge offers a one-in-six possibility of dying. Until antibiotics became widely available to combat infection in the second half of the twentieth century, an estimated one woman in every three or four, depending on the statistical source, died in childbirth. Sometimes it was worse: according to one source, for example, 'in the French province of Lombardy in one year no single woman survived childbirth' (Rich, 1992, 151). It follows that historically and until as recently as seventy years ago, it was safer to play Russian roulette (or to fight a war) than to give birth. And currently, given the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the odds have been shortened again.

MEDEA — And, they tell us, we at home
 Live free from danger, they go out to battle: fools!
 I'd rather stand three times in the front line than bear
 One child. (Euripedes, 1989, 24–25)

The implications of this for family dynamics were not negligible. Prior to the advent of contraceptives, antibiotics and routine medical hygiene, every time a woman had sex, she contemplated pregnancy and death. One woman in every three or four in the general population gestated inside her own body her potential involuntary killer; one man in every three or four lived out the larger part of his adulthood in the consciousness of having enjoyed sexual pleasure at the price of another's death. A significant proportion of the population lived in the awareness of having attained life at the price of that of another, and that other, their own mother. For a girl, the atonement for the involuntary matricide might lie in the subsequent surrender of life in her turn to a reproductive imperative patriarchal and patrilinear in many of its aspects. For a boy, the original unintended kin slaying became an additional factor

in a complex conglomeration of psychic phenomena which together constitute the male dread and guilt of being of woman-born.

In a text titled 'The Hermaphrodite' which is otherwise unsympathetic to the notion that feminism can contribute in any significant way to an understanding of female *auteurship* in art, Bridget Riley wrote that 'in the act of love, physical differentiation establishes polarities which when resolved, lead in principle to the birth of a child' (Riley, 1971, 82). Beginning from a premise whose implications almost diametrically oppose Riley's, in one of the essays in *Literature and Evil* Georges Bataille argued that sexuality and reproduction, entailing as they do the transformation of the single into the multiple and the giving of one's body to the making of an other, gesture not towards immortality but towards death as the loss of the self in its uniqueness (Bataille, 1985, 13–31). God may succeed in being both single and infinite but in the realm of the human the transition from one to many may signal dissolution (Schimmel, 1993, 13–14). Never more so, possibly, than in the multiplication act from one to two, or one to many, inherent at the heart of unwilling motherhood. By the same rationale, the patriarchal dictate of obligatory conjugal and maternal surrender to selflessness would make abortion a route (albeit a drastic one) towards the restoration of the self in its former whole(some)ness. A nineteenth-century report on 'Observations on Some of the Causes of Infanticide' quoted the following statement by an obstetrician:

I have known a married woman, a highly educated, and in other points of view most estimable person, when warned of the risk of miscarriage from the course of life she was pursuing, to make light of the danger, and even express the hope that such a result might follow. Every practitioner of obstetric medicine must have met with similar instances and will be prepared to believe that there is some foundation for the stories floating in society, of married ladies whenever they find themselves pregnant, habitually beginning to take exercise, on foot or on horseback, to an extent unusual at other times, and thus making themselves abort. The enormous frequency of abortions cannot be explained purely by natural causes. (Greaves, 1976, 160–61)

In the course of the analysis that follows of Paula Rego's abortion pastels, it may be worth bearing in mind the fact that the very choice of theme offends long-standing preferences in the tradition of the visual arts in the West.

Birth has almost everywhere been celebrated in painting. The Nativity has been a symbol of gladness, not only because of its sacral significance, but because of its human meaning — ‘joy that a man is born into the world’. Abortion, in contrast, has rarely been the subject of art. Unlike other forms of death, abortion has not been seen by painters as a release, a sacrifice, or a victory. Characteristically it has stood for sterility, futility, and absurdity. (Noonan, 1976, 135)

Abortion, then, stands not only in opposition to generic as well as specific love (for one’s sexual partner, for one’s unborn child), but in a theological — and therefore implicitly moral — sense as the exact antithesis of the initiatory and iconographic moments of the Annunciation (figs. 1.5, 4.42 and 7.2) and the Nativity (figs. 4.2, 7.3, 7.4).⁵

And whereas the latter much-depicted moment gestures towards a new beginning, a world without end, abortion declares untimely closure for the child if not for the mother (for whom it might signal either death or, alternatively, the possibility of a fresh start). Be that as it may, abortion, while being the act that contravenes the ‘joy that *a man* is born into the world’ (John 16:21),⁶ carries a significance that extends well beyond the stigma of sterility, futility or absurdity. At the secular level, the nipping in the bud of that specifically *male* birth interrupts the continuity of male lineages of blood, name, masculinity, property and power. And at the sacral level, it gestures towards the heresy of a contingency such that the culmination of a theological trajectory leading from God-the-Father to his divine and human progeny, is not a Sacred Son alive and immortal, but a dead foetus inside a bucketful of blood.

The rhetoric that has situated the debate on abortion in the biblical context of holy as well as secular births, and on the sanctity of life, must also be seen as the source of these pictures by Rego, the latter gesturing as they do to Catholic intervention in a secular legislative debate. As such, in the context of the pro-choice debate, some admittedly rare pieces of antique statuary (figs. 4.1, 7.16 and 7.17) and the abortion pictures in question here all evoke three concepts excised from any

5 I am grateful to Michael Brick for first suggesting this idea to me.

6 It is interesting to note that in the Gospel verse, in fact, even that joy is preceded by female suffering: ‘A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world’.

biblical wish-list of desirability. First, a reinstated emphasis on the post-lapsarian labour(ious) childbirth of Eve in place of the blessed one of Mary, which ideally overrode it. Second, in the abortion images, fruitless travail with no child at the end, rather than redemptory birth. Third, and associated to the latter, the issue (meaning here both offspring and outcome) of the abortion crime (blood and gore), rather than a sacred Issue (the pure fruit of divinely anointed loins, namely a Holy Child.



Fig. 4.1 Anonymous, Statue of a childbirth handicraft from Peru (2013). Photo by Peter van der Sluijs. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statue_of_a_childbirth_handicraft_Peru.jpg

Moreover, as discussed throughout the foregoing chapters, in a Catholic context, theological concerns invariably entail political ramifications. Let us look again at Macciocchi on the subject of another European politician whose views, like Hitler's, Salazar, found overall *simpatico*:

'Coffins and cradles' is not just one of the obsessions of Mussolini's prose, it is also the theme of his speeches and the slogans he addressed



Fig. 4.2 Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *The Nativity at Night* (c. 1490). Oil on oak panel, 34 x 25.3 cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Geertgen_tot_Sint_Jans,_The_Nativity_at_Night,_c_1490.jpg

to women. In the hysteria of an exaggerated birth-rate women were made to copulate, like rabbits, with the man-God. [...] It was [Mussolini] who first launched the demographic campaign and he who dictated the first of the ten female commandments: Give Birth: 'There is strength in numbers'. (Macciocchi, 1979, 70)

Macciocchi refers to 'the emotional plague of fascism' that spreads through 'an epidemic of familialism' and sees 'women crucified by continual procreation, as well as subjected to patriarchal authority in their capacity as mothers, wives or daughters' (Macciocchi,

1979, 73). She depicts the collusion of interests of state, church and patriarchy under fascism, and through the operations of what she calls 'the authoritarian family', to the effect that 'women belong to the community: the nation is identified with the mother, the mother with the family, and the state is an amassed heap of separate families' (Macciocchi, 1979, 73). For Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, the most imperative duty of men and women was to perpetuate the (racially pure) human species.

It is the nobility of this mission of the sexes which is the origin of the natural and specific gifts of providence. Our task is higher... the final goal of genuinely organic and logical evolution is the foundation of the family. It is the smallest unity, but also the most important structure of the state. (Hitler, quoted in Macciocchi, 1979, 73)⁷

Not surprisingly, then, Paula Rego herself, stepping into the fray both with her 1998 abortion pastels and in a public statement following the controversy in Portugal surrounding a famous abortion trial in 2002,⁸ links female pain associated with the problem of illegal abortion (and, by implication in view of the legal restraints on the procedure before 2007, contemporary democratic Portugal) to a dictatorial past, which after all, it would seem, was not yet overcome:

The [abortion] series was born from my indignation. [...] It is unbelievable that women who have an abortion should be considered criminals. It reminds me of the past. [...] I cannot abide the idea of blame in relation to this act. What each woman suffers in having to do it is enough. But all this stems from Portugal's totalitarian past, from women dressed up in aprons, baking cakes like good housewives. [...] [In democratic Portugal today] there is still a subtle form of oppression. [...] The question of

7 Macciocchi's quotations from Hitler are not referenced and have proved elusive. It has been suggested to me that they may be composite quotes, grafted from different passages and derived from an Italian translation of *Mein Kampf*.

8 See Duarte Vilar, 'Abortion: The Portuguese Case', *Reproductive Health Matters* 10:19 (2002), 156-61, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/S0968-8080%2802%2900025-3>; Giles Tremlett, 'Poverty, Ignorance and Why 17 Women Face Jail for Abortion', *The Guardian*, 18 January 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jan/18/gilestremlett>; Alison Roberts, 'Trial Reignites Portugal Abortion Debate', *BBC News*, 18 January 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1768438.stm>

abortion is part of all that violent context'. (Rego quoted in Marques Gastão, 2002, 40)⁹

The topic of abortion, therefore, sets off resonances so disturbing (and in some political contexts accusations so seditious) that they may explain the rarefaction of its translation into visual images in the history of art, past and present. When as in the images in question here, the subject is taken up and developed, its wider implications may open up other disruptive avenues of thought.

Look at Me Enjoying Myself

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes that 'men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. The surveyor of the woman in herself is male; the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object' (Berger, 1972, 47). As has been frequently been pointed out in existing scholarship, the term erotic tends to mean erotic for men, and 'the imagery of sexual delight or provocation has always been created *about* women for men's enjoyment, by men' (Nochlin, 1973, 9). By and for men, but also with a pedagogical intent whose target may be the other sex:

The nude in her passivity and impotence, is addressed to women as much as to men. Far from being merely an entertainment for males, the nude, as a genre, is one of many cultural phenomena that teaches women to see themselves through male eyes and in terms of dominating male interest. While it sanctions and reinforces in men the identification of virility with domination, it holds up to women self-images in which even sexual self-expression is prohibited. As ideology, the nude shapes our awareness of our deepest human instincts in terms of domination and submission so that the supremacy of the male 'I' prevails on that most fundamental level of experience. (Duncan, 1988, 62–63)

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In

9 Rego knows whereof she speaks: prior to her marriage to Victor Willing, Rego found herself pregnant and went through with a then-illegal abortion, and subsequently became pregnant but opted to go through with the pregnancy as an unmarried mother.

their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. (Mulvey, 1975, 11)

Laura Mulvey famously elaborated on these points, with reference to scopophilia, the arousal of pleasure in cinematic viewing, in what are by now canonical essays. These writers raise a series of issues that may be pertinent in relation to Rego's abortion pastels. First, in some of these images, as is so often the case with this artist, the import of the gaze projected out of the picture plane by its subject is equivocal. In some — though by no means all — of the images in this series, the protagonist's gaze, if not her body, is averted from the viewer. With reference to Rembrandt's *Bathsheba at her Bath* (1654, fig. 0.1), another compositionally ambiguous painting, Mieke Bal (1990, 515) maintains that the woman's unwillingness to communicate with the viewer problematizes the latter's moral position, as does the *fabula* or narrative alluded to by the picture's theme. In a contrary move, however, in several of the abortion pastels (*Untitled x*, fig. 4.3; *Untitled n. 5*, fig. 4.4; *Untitled Sketch n. 5*, fig. 4.5; and even more so in *Untitled Triptych b (centre panel)*, fig. 4.31; *Hand-coloured Sketch n. 1*, fig. 4.37 and *Untitled Triptych c (right panel)*, fig. 4.38) the female protagonist looks straight back at the viewer in a manner that can only be characterized as defiant: *Are you looking at me?!*

The confrontational pose, however, may echo the effect of the averted gaze in the other images in establishing the emotional rejection of the spectator. In these cases, the direct gaze emanating from the picture plane establishes a mood of active control of, rather than passive self-exposure to, the viewer. Whatever may be at stake here, viewer/voyeur pleasure is not part of the equation, or if it is, questions immediately arise regarding the moral position of the spectator as well as the possibility of sadistic pleasure. What kind of person would enjoy looking at images of abortion?

In either case, whether the object of contemplation rejects or confronts the viewer, neither option colludes with the audience. Instead, this declaration on the part of the protagonist of, at the very least, her awareness of a voyeuristic eye focused on her, can extend to an act of



Fig. 4.3 Paula Rego, *Untitled x* (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

defiance. This is all the more startling in view of the theme of the pictures, each of which depicts a woman either before, during or after having an abortion: in other words, a woman involved in an illegal act that ought to involve shame and guilt, but here does not. If, as Alice N. Benston would have it, viewers can be hostile to being placed in the position of the voyeur (Benston, 1988, 356), the decision to do so here neatly turns the tables as regards who has a guilty conscience and who knows it. Compositional decisions such as the posture or direction of the gaze on the part of the pictorial subject here feed into a sexual-political dimension in two ways: first, through the overturning of aesthetic conventions regarding the portrayal of gazed-upon but un-gazing female subjects, nude or not. No longer here, it would appear, are women to be seen but not seers. Second, as will be discussed at length presently, these compositional decisions



Fig. 4.4 Paula Rego, *Untitled n. 5* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

have an impact through their polemical debate against social, moral and legal arguments regarding the onus of guilt on a woman (or girl: age will become an issue in this argument) who is engaged in the act of abortion.

Berger's and Mulvey's essays open up a wealth of questions concerning the matter of pleasure in viewing, a debate over which much ink has been spilt since, resulting in a polarization of views as to whether or not the transformative qualities of art minimize or annul the work's ideological burden (in the case for example of female nudes, Elderfield, 1995, 7–51). At stake, among other issues, is the all-important question of a distinction, or lack of it, between high and low art, aestheticism and



Fig. 4.5 Paula Rego, *Untitled Sketch n. 5* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 60 x 42 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

titillation, pleasure and perversion. A joke in dubious taste but from a distinguished provenance (attributed to George Bernard Shaw) may illustrate this point: a man asks a woman at a party to have sex with him in exchange for payment of one million pounds. After some hesitation she accepts. He changes his offer and asks her to do it for one pound. Outraged, she asks him what he takes her for. His reply: 'Madam, we know what you are. We are just haggling about the price'. Other than the matter of market price, is there a fundamental difference between a men's magazine centrefold on the one hand (figs. 4.6 and 4.7), and Ingres's *La Source* (fig. 4.8) or Botticelli's *Venus* (fig. 4.9)?



Fig. 4.6 Female body. Photo by Xmm (2005). Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Female_body.jpg



Fig. 4.7 Alberto Magliozzi, *Manuela Arcuri* (1994). Published in *Playboy*, special issue (2000). Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manuela_Arcuri_\(1994\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manuela_Arcuri_(1994).jpg)



Fig. 4.8 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Source* (1856). Oil on canvas, 163 x 80 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Auguste_Dominique_Ingres_-_The_Spring_-_Google_Art_Project_2.jpg



Fig. 4.9 Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus* (1483–1485). Tempera on panel, 278.5 x 171.5 cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sandro_Botticelli_-_La_nascita_di_Venere_-_Google_Art_Project_-_edited.jpg

From a different slant is there a significant difference between Renoir's pubescent girls and the standard and only slightly more titillating models of men's magazines?



Fig. 4.10 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Blonde Bather* (1881). Oil on canvas, 82 x 66 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, MA, USA. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre-Auguste_Renoir_-_Baigneuse_blonde.jpg



Fig. 4.11 Alberto Magliozzi, *Eva Henger Cleaning Boots* (2012). Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eva_Henger_cleaning_boots.jpg

And what distinguishes Gauguin's famous *Nevermore* or Boucher's *Portrait of Louise O'Murphy* from a Paula Rego uniformed school girl who happens to be in the throes of abortion pain?



Fig. 4.12 Paul Gauguin, *Nevermore* (1897). Oil on canvas, 50 x 116 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin_091.jpg



Fig. 4.13 François Boucher, *Portrait of Louise O'Murphy* (1752). Oil on canvas, 59 x 73 cm. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fran%C3%A7ois_Boucher,_Marie-Louise_O%27Murphy_de_Boisfaily.jpg



Fig. 4.14 Paula Rego, *Untitled n. 4* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

More to the point, what, if anything, differentiates the various target viewers of these images, or the nature of their pleasure? Clearly there is a difference. But there may also be a more worrying similarity, which refers to areas of ambiguous gratification, paedophilia not excluded:

The more pornographic writing [art] acquires the techniques of real literature, of real art, the more deeply subversive it is likely to be in that the more likely it is to affect the reader's perceptions of the world. [...]

A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of the current relations between the sexes. [...] Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of *the contempt for women that distorts our culture* [...]. (Carter, 1987, 19–20, italics added)



Fig. 4.15 Paula Rego, *Untitled n. 6* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Feminist art theory has drawn upon concepts developed in other branches of cultural theory to explore the ramifications of erotic interaction between the sexes in the visual arts. Lise Vogel, for example, uses as her starting point the well-established debate on duality in the portrayal of women in art (virgin versus whore, queen versus slave, Madonna versus Fury), which she takes to be ‘simple projections of “human” (i.e. male) fears and fantasies’ (Vogel, 1988, 46), while Carol Duncan argues along similar lines that ‘the modern art that we have learned to recognize and respond to as erotic is frequently about the power and supremacy of men over women’:

The erotic imaginations of modern male artists — the famous and the forgotten, the formal innovators and the followers — reenact in hundreds of particular variations *a remarkably limited set of fantasies*. Time and again, the male confronts the female nude as an adversary whose independent existence as a physical or spiritual being must be assimilated to male

needs, converted to abstractions, enfeebled, or destroyed. So often do such works invite fantasies of male conquest (or fantasies that justify male domination) that *the subjugation of the female will appear to be one of the primary motives of modern erotic art.*

[...] The equation of female sexual experience with surrender and victimization is so familiar in what our culture designates as erotic art and so sanctioned by both popular and high cultural traditions, that one hardly stops to think it odd. (Duncan, 1988, 59–60, italics added)

Griselda Pollock contends that

[a]rt is where the meeting of the social and the subjective is rhetorically represented to us. [...] What we are doing as feminists is naming those implicit connections between the most intimate and the most social, between power and the body, between sexuality and violence. Images of sexual intimidation are central to this problem and thus to a critique of canonical representation. (Pollock, 1999, 103)

And Paula Rego herself has argued that even apparently commonplace sexuality may include a dimension of violation (and therefore violence), and that in the sphere of sex ‘there are the bosses and those who obey’ (Rego quoted in Marques Gastão, 2002, 40). Following a rationale that will acquire particular relevance with regard to the abortion pastels, Duncan goes on to suggest that this project of domination includes the requirement of female pain as underwriting rather than contradicting the promise of male gratification. With reference to Michelangelo, Ingres, Courbet, Renoir, Matisse, Delacroix, Munch, Klimt, Moreau and many other old and new masters, she discusses the wealth in the visual arts of images of monstrous women, the dread of whom reflects projected male feelings of inferiority. More numerous even than these harridans, portrayed fearfully by male artists and — much less frequently, and, one suspects with different feelings — by woman artists (Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, fig. 4.16) are their antidotes: the multitudes of blessed madonnas (Raphael, *The Niccolini-Cowper Madonna*, fig. 4.17), *materes dolorosas* (Michelangelo, *Pietà*, fig. 4.18) or according to Duncan, and more to the point, the suffering heroines: ‘slaves, murder victims, women in terror, under attack, betrayed, in chains, abandoned or abducted’ (Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, fig. 4.19; Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, fig. 4.20; and Giambologna (Jean de Boulogne), *The Rape of the Sabines*, fig. 4.21).



Fig. 4.16 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1611–1612). Oil on canvas, 158.8 x 125.5 cm. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gentileschi_Artemisia_Judith_Beheading_Holofernes_Naples.jpg



Fig. 4.17 Raphael, *The Niccolini-Cowper Madonna* (1506). Oil on panel, 80.7 x 57.5 cm. Andrew Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grande_madonna_cowper.jpg



Fig. 4.18 Michelangelo, *Pietà* (1498–1499). Marble, 230.4 x 307.2 cm. St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo%27s_Pieta_5450_croprncleaned_edit.jpg



Fig. 4.19 Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia* (c. 1570). Oil on canvas, 188 x 145.1 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tizian_094.jpg



Fig. 4.20 Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (c. 1618). Oil on canvas, 224 x 210.5 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_-_The_Rape_of_the_Daughters_of_Leucippus.jpg



Fig. 4.21 Giambologna, *The Rape of the Sabines* (1583). Marble, 106.4 x 160 cm. Piazza della Signoria, Florence (south view). Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Firenze_-_Florence_-_Piazza_della_Signoria_-_View_South_on_The_Rape_of_the_Sabine_Women_1583_by_Giambologna.jpg

Their pain becomes the warranty of the ability of the opposite sex to subject them to control. I should wish to argue that the idealization of variously suffering women who are the victims, handmaidens or, more crucially, mothers of a series of lordly males is not devoid of complexity, since for a woman to be a mother she must either be the Virgin Mary or she must have had sex like Eve, and suffer for it. In other words she must be either not really a woman but rather 'young, her body hairless, her flesh buoyant, [devoid of] a sexual organ' (Greer, 1985, 57) — in short, both virginal and infantilized — or alternatively she must be a whore, and if so, both visible and punishable as such. And since, as we know, with one single exception women cannot be both virgins and mothers, a mother (Eve) must also by definition be always part-whore.

The Image as Problem Child

Other instances of the adumbration of what, technically, are mutually exclusive categories of representation, offer viewers-against-the-grain a welcoming foothold. Feminist art criticism has debated the conflation of, for example, the two separate genres of pregnancy and nudity by artists such as Paula Modersohn Becker and Käthe Kollwitz (Betterton, 1996). If, as Betterton would have it, '[f]or both artists, the "maternal nude" was one means by which they could address issues of their own sexual and creative identity at a time when the roles of artist and mother were viewed as irreconcilable' (Betterton, 1976, 175), an analogous process of counter-intuitive category pairings might be said to be at work in Paula Rego's gallery of fully-clothed, mock-erotic abortion girls. Trouble begins to arise in this neatly dichotomous painterly paradise of maidens and sluts when, as is the case with the Rego abortion pictures, the woman who clearly lapsed and sinned, and who moreover is about to compound that sin of fornication with the crime of abortion, carries not the accoutrements of the whore but rather all the hallmarks of the coltish or half-grown, newly-fledged girl-child (*n. 4*, fig. 4.14), sometimes still wearing her school uniform (*n. 6*, fig. 4.15).

Watching Him Watching Her: Everything Depends on the Eye of the Beholder

Susan Glaspell's now canonic short story, 'A Jury of Her Peers' (1917) offers us a tale about the different views of a crime scene when viewed by women and by men. Where the men see nothing of relevance in the house of a man found murdered, the women pick up the markers of conjugal cruelty that might have led the wife to kill her husband: the dilapidated house, the threadbare clothes, a piece of sewing in which the stitching suddenly becomes irregular, and above all the corpse of a song bird whose neck had been wrung.

Martha Hale sprang up, her hands tight together, looking at that other woman, with whom it rested. At first she could not see her eyes, for the sheriff's wife had not turned back since she turned away at that suggestion of being married to the law. But now Mrs. Hale made her turn back. Her eyes made her turn back. Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head until her eyes met the eyes of the other woman. There was a moment when they held each other in a steady, burning look in which there was no evasion or flinching. Then Martha Hale's eyes pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would make certain the conviction of the other woman—that woman who was not there and yet who had been there wit them all through that hour. (Glaspell, 1917, online)

If the production of art has traditionally presupposed the *presence* of a male viewer and the *requirement* of male gratification, Paula Rego turns the tables on that tradition in a variety of ways. For example, by addressing herself to an implied female audience, as much of her work has been supposed to do, she may be playing precisely on those two time-honoured assumptions: first, an implied male gaze, and second, one that, following Duncan, is gratified by these scenes of female pain. Speaking with a forked tongue, she may knowingly be tempting an unwary male appetite for the female body while exposing it to the eyes of women watching him watching them. The attempted resolution of these two matters gains complexity, furthermore, as one considers the nature, posture and identity of the female models. As regards posture, a cursory glance suggest that pictures such as for example *n. 3* (fig. 4.24), and *n. 7* (fig. 4.25) and the left-hand panel of the triptych (fig. 4.26) reproduce the standard reclining posture of any number of eroticized

female figures throughout centuries of visual art production (George Breitner, *Anne, Lying Naked on a Yellow Cloth*, fig. 4.22; Ingres, *Large Odalysque*, fig. 4.23; Gauguin, *Nevermore*, fig. 4.12).



Fig. 4.22 George Breitner, *Anne, Lying Naked on a Yellow Cloth* (c. 1888). Oil on canvas, 95 x 145 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Wikimedia, public domain https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Breitner_-_Reclining_Nude.jpg



Fig. 4.23 Pierre-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Grand Odalysque* (1814). Oil on canvas, 91 x 162 cm. The Louvre, Paris. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ingre,_Grande_Odalysque.jpg



Fig. 4.24 Paula Rego, *Untitled n. 3* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4.25 Paula Rego, *Untitled n. 7* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4.26 Paula Rego, *Untitled Triptych* (left-hand panel) (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In fact, however, a closer look renders this initial impression and the reflex of erotic response problematic: Rego's models are not necessarily women but rather sometimes girls (children); their posture is not one of sensual invitation but acute suffering and these are depictions not of pleasure but of pain. And who gets pleasure from the pain of another? Some do, of course. There is a name for that.

In the case of the abortion images, spectator gratification is partially blocked from the start by the absence of nudity. But more crucially, pleasure — the male viewer's — and pain — the girlish models' — (or, to put it differently, cause and effect) become dangerously indistinct, suggesting two things: first, the foregrounding of a fact that has habitually been a moral imperative, and that canonical art traditionally presupposes whilst euphemistically sweeping it under the carpet: namely that for women, sexual delight potentially carries a sting in the

tail and may have to be purchased at a high price; and second, the fact that for the male viewer, that pain may be part of the point and may underpin the pleasure. But again, who would admit to such tastes?

Nobody? As a matter of fact, a brief wander through any museum or art collection (not to mention the magazines on the top shelf in newsagents or, in the last few decades, the internet) suggests that plenty would and do indulge it, openly, for more or less money, and for a variety of reasons which may or may not include the pleasures of coercion and unrestrained power. The blurring of categories of pain and pleasure, both in Rego's pictures and in well-known images in the art canon (*n. 7*, fig. 4.25 and *sketch 3*, fig. 4.30 in relation to Modigliani, *Reclining Nude*, fig. 4.27), draws attention to potential ambivalences of other kinds, such as for example the process whereby the categories of childbirth (consecrated) and abortion (condemned) become indistinguishable (W. Gajir, fig. 4.28). So much so that it is no longer possible to draw a line between on the one hand the hallowed maternal anguish of *mater dolorosas* and *pietàs* regarding sons both born and unborn (Juan de Valdés Leal, *Pietà*, fig. 4.29) and on the other a crime atoned for with sorrow (*Untitled n. 4*, fig. 4.14; *Untitled n. 6*, fig. 4.15); between perpetuity (life) and closure (termination of life); or between fruitful and fruitless labour.



Fig. 4.27 Amedeo Modigliani, *Reclining Nude* (1917). Oil on canvas, 60.6 x 91.7 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wikimedia, CC BY 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1917_Modigliani_Reclining_nude_anagoria.JPG



Fig. 4.28 W. Gajir, *Sculpture of Childbirth* (n.d.), Mas, Bali. Photo by Kattiel. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bevalling_Bali.jpg



Fig. 4.29 Juan de Valdés Leal, *Pietà* (late 17th century). Drawing, 17.6 x 23.5 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Piedad_\(Vald%C3%A9s_Leal\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Piedad_(Vald%C3%A9s_Leal).jpg)



Fig. 4.30 Paula Rego, *Untitled Sketch n. 3* (1998). Pencil on paper, 31 x 42 cm. Artist's collection. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

I would argue that in these images such distinctions are kept deliberately ambivalent and therefore enduringly preoccupying. Were it not for the conspicuous absence of babies in Rego's abortion images, the referents for some of these pictures could be straightforward scenes of childbirth or somewhat graphic nativities (*Untitled Triptych b*, fig. 4.31; *Hand-Coloured Sketch*, fig. 4.37).

Alternatively, some might also be mistaken for representations of invitation to male penetration or self-pleasuring (*Untitled Sketch 3*, fig. 4.30).

Here, however, they refer instead to female anguish without fruit and possibly also to sexual coercion of various kinds (rape, abuse, incest, abusive sexual relations between grown men and young girls), all giving rise to unwanted pregnancies. They may signal, furthermore, male pleasure derived at the price of anguish (the sexual act that led to the pregnancy) as well as from the contemplation of the experience of anguish itself (as depicted in its visual representation). Angela Carter gave us the term 'moral pornography' for material that, albeit conventionally



Fig. 4.31 Paula Rego, *Untitled Triptych b* (centre panel) (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

pornographic, might, by its very nature, render explicit certain aspects of pleasure exacted at the price of pain within the arena of gender conflict:

The sexual act in pornography exists as a metaphor for what people do to one another, often in the cruellest sense [...]. And all such literature has the potential to force the reader to assess his relation to his own sexuality, which is to say to his own primary being, through the mediation of the image or the text. This is true for women also, perhaps especially so, as soon as we realize *the way pornography reinforces the archetypes of her negativity and that it does so simply because most pornography remains in the service of the status quo. [...] It is fair to say that, when pornography serves [...] to reinforce the prevailing system of values and ideas in a given society, it is tolerated; and when it does not, it is banned. [...] When pornography abandons its quality of existential solitude and moves out of the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy and into the real world, then it loses its function of safety valve. It begins to comment on real relations in the real*

world. [...] And that is because *sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations.* (Carter, 1987, 17–20, italics added)

Paula Rego's pictures, both in this series and previously, draw upon some of the concepts outlined by Carter above, by foregrounding the insidious aspect of pain at the heart of the pleasure principle, or the inextricability of the two, at stake in canonical art. And her sources, too, uneasily conflate love and desire with hate and anger, for example in *Moth* (fig. 4.32) based on Blake Morrison's poem of the same title, in which love-making turns into revenge sex.¹⁰

This chip of cedarwood
with the linsey-woolsey face
is furred like the ermine
it stole inside one Christmas
while she lay, splay-winged,
beneath my weight.

Our last hunt ball
before the child came!
She'd been a tease that night,
fluttering round Molphey
and the colonel: this curt fuck
was how I paid her back. (Morrison, 1987, 37–38)

Like Angela Carter, Blake Morrison, a poet admired by Paula Rego, understood the darkness that sometimes lies beneath seemingly orthodox relations between men and women. In another poem, 'Ballad of the Yorkshire Ripper', he speaks chillingly of a phenomenon that Joan Smith, a writer and journalist assigned to the case of Peter Sutcliffe's serial killings in the 1970s and 80s also ponders: the possibility that, as regarded their attitudes to women, the difference between Sutcliffe, the policemen who were trying to catch him and indeed the average man on the proverbial Clapham Bus, might have been negligible:

Ah've felt it in misen, like,
lkin ome part-fresh
Ower limestone outcrops

10 Morrison, Blake, *Ballad of the Yorkshire Ripper* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 23–36.

Like knuckles white through flesh:
 Ow men clap down on women
 T'old em there for good
 An soak up all their softness
 An launder em wi blood.
It's then I think on t'Ripper
An what e did an why,
An ow mi mates ate women,
An ow Pete med em die.
 I love em for misen, like,
 Their skimmerin lips an eyes,
 Their ankles light as jinnyspins,
 Their seggy whisps an sighs,
 Their braided locks like catkins,
 An t'curlies glashy black,
 The peepin o their linnet tongues,
 Their way o cheekin back.
 An ah look on em as equals.
 But mates all say they're not,
 That men must have t'owerance
 Or world will go to rot. (Morrison, 1987, 23–36, italics added)

In *The Sadeian Woman* Angela Carter argues that the violence that underpins pornography is quantitatively rather than qualitatively different to normal sexual relations, just as Vikki Bell maintains that paedophilia (for instance between an older man and his young relative) plays on a distortion of the view that the young should obey and feel love (*philia*) towards their elders. Corrupt family bonds will be discussed in the analysis of fairy tales and nursery rhymes in chapter 6. Regarding the series of abortion images under scrutiny here, likewise, what we face are travesties as well as sometimes simply straightforward exaggerations of a variety of standard iconographic poses and compositions (annunciations, nativities, reclining nudes, sexual frolics), which as such set off a tripartite reaction.

First, they lure the gaze into a mood of expectant gratification (as encouraged by the superficial similarity between these images and standard reclining lovelies such as Thomas Rowlandson's *Sleeping Woman Watched by a Man* (fig. 4.33), Ingres' *Large Odalysque* (fig. 4.23), Gauguin's *Nevermore* (fig. 4.12), Boucher's *Portrait of Louise O'Murphy* (fig. 4.13) or almost any renowned painter of the female figure down the centuries.



Fig. 4.32 Paula Rego, *Moth* (1994). Pastel on canvas, 160 x 120 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4.33 Thomas Rowlandson, *Sleeping Woman Watched by a Man* (n.d.). Watercolour with pen and grey ink on paper, 13.1 x 19.7 cm. Yale Centre for British Art. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Rowlandson_-_Sleeping_Woman_Watched_by_a_Man_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Second, and contrarily, the appeal becomes quickly mingled with the shock of realization that goes hand in hand with a dawning awareness of the subject matter involved. Together with this comes the awareness that without a title, an image depicting abortion is indistinguishable from one depicting the ecstasies of love (*Love*, fig. 4.34), or the delight of a bride (*Bride*, fig. 4.35).

Third, and perversely, it is possible that the afterthought of quasi-Aristotelian fear and pity that follows the understanding of what we are looking at (which technically ought to lead to the purification of catharsis, Aristotle, 1985, 49–51), in its turn may give way to the titillation and frisson of perverse and perverted pleasure originating in someone else's pain.

And finally, this pleasure in its turn may trigger the reflex moral questioning of one's viewer position, and of the nature of pleasure to be derived from much canonical art, an important component of which has traditionally been pain, and the master-slave relationship between male viewer and female object.



Fig. 4.34 Paula Rego, *Love* (1995). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 120 x 160 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4.35 Paula Rego, *Bride* (1994). Pastel on canvas, 120 x 160 cm. Tate, London. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

A Target of Indifference

Indifference to, or non-recognition of an established power structure, combined with careless provocation (sexual and otherwise), has always been an element that goes beyond irreverence in Paula Rego's art (*Target*, fig. 4.36). Do it to me if you dare.

In *Target*, obliviousness or provocation in the face of danger to self, or bravado regarding the desecration of the established rules of others (as illustrated by the unwillingness to communicate with the viewer, discussed earlier) carries further implications. In the abortion pastels, what is largely at stake on the part of the girl protagonists appears to be an unsettling awareness of, yet indifference and/or hostility to, the viewer (*n. 1 sketch n. 1*, fig. 4.37, *tryptich c*, fig. 4.38).



Fig. 4.36 Paula Rego, *Target* (1995). Pastel on canvas, 160 x 120 cm. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4.37 Paula Rego, *Hand-Coloured Sketch n. 1* (1998). Pencil on paper mounted on aluminium, 31 x 42 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4.38 Paula Rego, *Untitled Triptych c* (right panel) (1998). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In another context Alice N. Benston identifies an intent on the part of certain artists to appeal 'to male anxiety, since any insistently female world implies the avoidance or even the need for a male presence' (Benston, 1988, 356) It is a commonplace of human relations that indifference may be more unsettling than enmity. And therefore the absence of a child (through expulsion from the womb) acquires further relevance in the context of male anxieties about masculine dispensability. According to Freud the child represented a substitute phallus that soothed a woman's penis envy and castration complex. If so, it follows

that the voluntary termination of pregnancy conveys a lack of interest in or refusal to acknowledge the significance of the male organ and its symbolic association with gender power. Thus, the act that refuses the male his progeny contests also the former's existential relevance. Some of Paula Rego's protagonists, by virtue of their deliberate indifference (looking at the viewer without seemingly registering *his* presence as being in any way significant), may work to create the effect identified by Benston: namely hostility on the part of the male viewer at being put in the voyeur's position; and anxiety, 'since this insistently female world implies the avoidance or even the irrelevance of a male presence' (Benston, 1988, 356). The Holy Ghost (the über-impregnator and intangible representative of all fathers in the masculinist master narrative of engendering) now becomes the inconsequential — literally ghostly — spectator of these rogue nativities. Even if, while being treated as negligible, it and men in general remain simultaneously and paradoxically implicated in the sin or crime at hand. More of this later.

Be that as it may, the effect of Paula Rego's pictures is to foreground the process whereby what draws the implied male gaze is also that which places its owner (and the art tradition from which he hails, and which has trained him in that gaze), morally in a very dubious position. This is so because it may be true that the difference between the languid but fully-grown beauties or even the winsome and playful children of the art canon on the one hand, and its raped damsels or these Regoesque little girls in pain on the other, is quantitative rather than qualitative.

Clearly there is nothing more innocent (or is there?) than the pleasure given and received from the contemplation of a Renoir child or a Heyerdahl picture of childish innocence (figs. 4.39, Renoir, *Girl with Hoop* and 4.40, Heyerdahl, *Little Girl on the Beach*).

Less clearly, what kind of man or citizen or moral being would be the implied male viewer sexually and aesthetically gratified by the pain of pregnant school-age girls forced into clandestine abortions? A sadist? A paedophile? An alter ego of the impregnator of pre-age-of-consent school girls such as those featured in *Untitled n. 4* (fig. 4.14) or *Untitled n. 6* (fig. 4.15)?

The implied threat of female sexuality, let alone a deviant one (because, as here, infantine), is therefore overshadowed in the pictures by two other factors: first, the implications of male sexual behaviour



Fig. 4.39 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Girl with Hoop* (1885). Oil on canvas, 125.7 x 76.6 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Girl_with_a_hoop.jpg

that results in the pregnancies of little girls and adolescents; and second, the moral ramifications of a viewing behaviour that delights in the contemplation of these disturbing child-brides¹¹ and does not acknowledge responsibility for the bloody aftermath of their seduction. In Rego's abortion images there is no man present to lend support. The father is as invisible as any ghost, Holy or otherwise.

11 It may be interesting to bear in mind, in this context, that if the term 'virgin' means, as some scholars have argued, either a very young girl who is however deemed to be marriageable, or a girl who becomes fertile and pregnant before her first menstruation actually occurs, in other words before she is officially a woman to the naked eye, the youthful Virgin Mary who has inspired so many painters, possibly impregnated before her pubescent state could be biologically ascertained, was herself therefore still a child.



Fig. 4.40 Hans Olaf Heyerdahl, *Little Girl on the Beach* (n.d.). Oil on canvas, 60 x 45 cm. Private collection, Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Olaf_Heyerdahl_-_Little_girl_on_the_beach.jpg

Child Brides

In its early formulations, feminist art theory trod much the same path as other areas of feminist cultural theory. For Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, for example, 'a radical feminist art would include an understanding of how women are constituted through social practices in culture':

Once it is understood how women are consumed in this society it would be possible to create an aesthetics designed to subvert the consumption of women, thus avoiding the pitfalls of a politically progressive art which depicts women in the same forms as the dominant culture. (Barry and Flitterman-Lewis, 1988, 88)

In a deconstructive move, such art would seek to ‘play on the contradictions that inform patriarchy itself’ so that the images of women arising from it would not be ‘accepted as an already produced given’ but would rather be ‘constructed in and through the work itself’ (Barry and Flitterman-Lewis, 1988, 94). Where abortion is concerned, this demarcation between what has been and what might be imaginatively possible, and the tracing of the dividing line between the two positions, which is also the dividing line between the old orthodoxy and an emerging space of aesthetic feminist dissent, instigates a neat comparison between Rego’s abortion pictures and other images on the same theme that stem from a radically different position. A representative specimen of the latter would be for example footage from Bernard Nathanson’s notorious film, *The Silent Scream*,¹² which purported to show what an abortion is like from the twelve-week old foetus’s position. In a move that clearly highlights the aim, in anti-abortion discourse, of shifting attention and concern from the woman to the foetus, the film is designed and speeded up to suggest pain and avoidance of the aborting cannula on the part of a foetus which in fact, at twelve weeks, has no cerebral cortex and therefore no neurological apparatus with which to experience pain. The accompanying voice-over, in which, in Susan Faludi’s words, ‘the truly silent cast member is the mother’, describes the foetus as a child ‘in intrauterine exile’, who is ‘bricked in, as it were, behind what seemed an impenetrable wall of flesh, muscle, bone and blood’ (Faludi, 1991, 459). The pregnant woman is described as the foetus’s ‘place of residence’, and after abortion as ‘a bombed-out shell’, ‘a haunted house where the tragic death of a child took place’ (Faludi, 1991, 459). ‘The aim is to talk up the foetus. [...] As they say in Hollywood, accuracy is not the point; it is the atmosphere that counts’ (Hadley, 1996, 149). The result is the locking of the mother and her unborn child into a deadly conflict of interests. Hadley comments that the power of imagery to make a point has been much more successfully deployed by anti-abortion campaigners than by pro-choice activists:

Defenders of abortion rights — with little other than the bloody coat-hanger image to remind us of the bad old days of illegal abortions — are

12 Nathanson, Bernard, *The Silent Scream* (1984), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Hb3DFELq4Y>

utterly routed by the tiny feet or the manipulated trembling of the *Silent Scream* foetus. [...] Ours is a culture of pictures. Seeing is believing. Every newspaper editor and television news producer knows that however powerful words may be — recalling the grisly squalor of illegal abortion and its links with every kind of racketeering — it is to pictures, and above all to images that move, that people respond. No words are needed to accompany pictures of little mangled legs, hacked arms, crushed skulls. Award-winning commercials director Tony Kaye shot graphic footage of foetuses for a feature film about abortion and commented: ‘When you see those foetuses, it is pretty much game, set and match as far as I am concerned’. (Hadley, 1996, 150)

In light of this, where do Paula Rego’s abortion pictures fit in? At one level, they fit into an agenda of blurred boundaries, since each of her solitary female subjects, ostentatiously alone in an empty room and presumably cut adrift by her abortion from a world of moral certainties, is not in fact a woman, but, with some exceptions, a child (figs. 4.14 and 4.15) or adolescent/debutante-style young woman (*Untitled n. 3*, fig. 4.24; *Untitled n. 7*, fig. 4.25). The exception is *n. 9* (fig. 4.41), who, bearing in mind her apparent age is probably not the girl undergoing the abortion but the abortionist.

For the sake of short-hand classification, the different categories shall be referred to as the school girl, the debutante, the servant girl and the abortionist. The categories are loosely based on the impression of their age and their social status deduced from their clothing. The name of the game for the first three, however, is alienation from power. The sex and age of the school girl and the debutante position them as by default disenfranchised from power; and so does the social status of the servant girl. The latter is that economically-deprived girl whom the pro-choice literature describes as being forced to resort to cheap, illegal and therefore unsafe abortions, rather than expensive, illegal but safe ones (Kenny, 1986, 298). The same label of disempowerment can be applied to the school girl (*n. 4*, fig. 4.14; *n. 6*, fig. 4.15; and *tryptich c (right-hand panel)*, fig. 4.38), whose childish status is reinforced by the wearing of a school uniform that classifies her as being under the power of others (adults in general, but specifically parents, step-parents or teachers, and, more to the point, her impregnator, who might in fact have been a parent, step-parent or teacher).

All these models, therefore, represent figures whose lives as women, for different reasons, have yet to begin (much as is the case



Fig. 4.41 Paula Rego, *Untitled n. 9* (1998–1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

with the foetus, for whom life, too, had not quite begun). Some are either unequivocally children (the schoolgirl), or narrowly miss that status (the servant girl — because she is a bit too old, but more to the point, too poor to go to school — and the debutante — only recent graduated from school). All of them, including the older girls, remain uncomfortably close to a recently discarded childhood. And because these women are not in fact women but girls, perturbingly, they fail to hold up their end of the binary which, were they in fact fully-grown, would, according to the dictates of the anti-abortion lobby, cast them on the criminal side of the equation, as adults with power over the life or death of the foetus. On the other side of the equation would be that absolutely vulnerable and fragile foetus, doomed to termination at the hands of its bad, omnipotent mother. These pictorial protagonists tell instead a story that disturbingly escapes that facile casting, since while undeniably having abortions they are also simultaneously

children, or as good as children, whose condition gestures to a more equivocal world of adult power, and to the possible abuse (or at least lack of protection) that culminated in those underage pregnancies. Categorization, therefore, becomes multi-layered rather than abrupt (from one discrete stage to another). They suggest that the transition from child to woman, from servant to mistress, from Earth (Eve) to Heaven (Mary), is always a moveable feast. All these stages, and the seamless shift from one to another, however, are vulnerable and can either be cut short or brought forward by the decision to abort, since an abortion may variously kill (the mother, as well as the foetus), maim, induce barrenness, make possible a future marriage and legitimate offspring, help prolong a childhood otherwise interrupted by premature maternity, enforce untimely adulthood through life-changing trauma, dispose of the consequences of an embarrassing sexual lapse, criminalize that lapse, safeguard or disrupt psychiatric wellbeing, facilitate continued social respectability through disposal of a socially unacceptable conception, provoke social ostracism through the discovery of the abortion, safeguard respectability or ensure moral (religious) damnation.

In the context of the confusion between the categories of child and woman the buckets that feature in several of the pictures may gesture to the issue of the abortion but what they also establish is not the separation (enmity) of would-be mother and aborted child, but instead the eerily companionable isolation of the two: isolation *in* rooms that contain only them, and *from* the rest of the world, which has opted out. The only foetuses actually visible, tellingly, are the girls themselves, curled in foetal self-protection in several of the images (*n. 4*, fig. 4.14; *triptych a* (left-hand panel), fig. 4.26). And if so, what is depicted here, is not after all a series of juxtapositions of bad mothers and offspring whose potential lives the former nipped in the bud, but instead repeated presentations of the theme of two lonely children: one unborn, the other unready to bear it.

The pictures also disrupt other expectations. The opponents of abortion — as made clear for example in the notorious 1994 case of the Irish fourteen-year-old child X, prevented from travelling to England to obtain an abortion for a pregnancy that was the outcome of rape — seldom seem prepared for the implications of criminalizing

abortion in cases as clear-cut as that, with regard to the assignation of blame and innocence (Hadley, 1996, 15–23). The stereotype of the abortion-seeking woman that fits more easily into the requirements of the anti-abortion agenda is the feckless, reckless, promiscuous and immoral, unmarried or adulterous but in any case always *adult* woman (Kenny, 1986, 14). The anti-abortion faction assimilates less easily the dilemmas of severely deformed fetuses, endangered mothers, abused child-women, victims of rape or incest or (and this is the group that most often seeks an abortion), respectable married mothers of several children, who cannot afford another one.¹³ What Paula Rego appears to do in these images is to home in precisely on that unresolved impasse, by depicting little girls and adolescents, females on the brink of their own lives who here, willingly or unwillingly become embroiled in the creation and destruction of someone else's. They are patriarchy's spoilt virgins, but what remains unclear is who exactly is guilty of the spoiling. Given the age of some of them, the blame, it is to be supposed, may lie elsewhere than in their own post-lapsarian concupiscence.

The Mother's Dilemma

Returning to a biblical theme with a twist, in the habitual composition of canonical Annunciation paintings (figs. 1.5, 4.42, and 7.2), Mary usually figures alone apart from the unearthly presence of the messenger angel who delivers her destiny to her. Her solitude or separateness (difference) underlines the exclusivity of her always-sinless and now newly-holy status, 'alone of all her sex',¹⁴ as the chosen mother of God's son.¹⁵ The cloistered or gated setting of the standard Annunciation composition reinforces her separateness through allusion to her similarly un-breached hymen (fig. 4.42).

13 Sophia Chae, Sheila Desai, Marjorie Crowell, and Gilda Sedgh, 'Reasons why women have induced abortions: a synthesis of findings from 14 countries', *Contraception* 96:4 (2007), 233–41, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5957082/>

14 Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, op. cit.

15 In the Gospels rendering of the Annunciation, as quoted below, Mary tellingly evinces initial reluctance to accept her fate (Luke 1:26–38), a reaction perhaps the less surprising bearing in mind what is known historically about the severity of the penalty (stoning) associated with crimes of female fornication and extra marital pregnancy. And Joseph, too, experiences doubts about this event (Matthew 1:19).



Fig. 4.42 Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation* (1486). Egg and oil on canvas, 207 x 147 cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crivelli_Carlo,_Annunciation.jpg

Her distinctiveness from the rest of womankind has been traditionally interpreted as a privilege ('blessed art thou among women'), and understood, as the prayer would have it, to arise out of her bond to the holy fruit of her loins (Jesus). If abortion represents the brutal separation of the child from its mother's body — an echo of the expulsion of human sons from Eden and from the body of the Divine Father — the official Marian version reinstates the emotional and spiritual unity of a reverse pairing: human mother and Divine Son, united in blissful symbiosis.

Or does it? The Portuguese writer Almeida Faria refers to the uneasy musings of Saint John the Evangelist and other patristic fathers, on

the subject of the likely discomforts suffered by Jesus in the cramped conditions of his mother's womb:

In the text which he pondered until death, [the Augustinian hermit] meditated upon the discomfort and the cramped conditions of the womb in which Christ, like any other mortal, remained for nine months. He has recourse to the authority of St. John the Evangelist, according to whom the Creator was in full possession of his understanding the entire time in which he awaited birth, and evokes the humility of the King of Kings in subjecting himself to the humidity, the darkness and the noise of the Virgin's entrails'. (Almeida Faria, 1990, 70–71)



Fig. 4.43 Master of Erfurt, *The Virgin Weaving* (c. 1400). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Master_of_Erfurt,_The_Virgin_Weaving,_Upper_Rhine,_ca_1400_\(Berlin\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Master_of_Erfurt,_The_Virgin_Weaving,_Upper_Rhine,_ca_1400_(Berlin).jpg)

This unease, probably an echo of the old panic of being 'of woman born', lends another aspect to the Mary-Jesus pairing, eliciting as it does an impression of alienation or even rejection on the part of a Son whose mother, for him, never signified more than a non-participatory empty vessel.¹⁶ And if so, the lonely Mary of the Annunciation may be blessed but is arguably not blissful.

Rego's images offer a profane simulacrum (and contestation) of Mary's difference from all other females (let alone ones such as these). They feature girls who, like Mary (and like Leda before her (fig. 2.12), also impregnated by a winged stranger (fig. 7.3) are unwillingly pregnant ('How can this be since I know not a man? Luke 1:34), but, unlike Leda or Mary, they are absolutely on their own, in spaces stripped equally of objects, fellow human beings, angels or swans. The pictures bear further affinities to the Marian condition of lofty isolation. In *Untitled n. 5* (fig. 4.4), for example, the girl is positioned on a table whose cloth renders it somewhat akin to a hospital stretcher but also to an altar. Her legs are supported by two stirrup-like chairs reminiscent of the foot holds used in gynaecological examinations, but whose effect is also to immobilize her in the manner of a piece of church statuary.

These abortion damsels, therefore, both echo and elaborate upon the solitude of Mary in traditional Annunciation and church iconography. Each figure appears alone but not blissfully so, an ambivalence which in fact unaccustomedly but accurately echoes that of Mary (and Joseph) in the Gospels.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. *And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. [...] How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* (Luke 1:26–34, italics mine)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being just a man,

16 During the marriage at Canaan Mary approaches Jesus who brushes her aside: 'Jesus said to her, Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come' (John 2:4).

and not willing to make her a public example, *was minded to put her away privily*. (Matthew 1:18–19, italics mine)¹⁷

What if Mary hadn't believed the angel? More to the point, what if Joseph had not? The standard punishment for an unmarried woman who became pregnant two thousand years ago in Palestine was death by stoning. Abortion might have been a more appealing option. Self-induced abortions pre-date coat-hangers, let alone drugs.¹⁸ In Mary's case, in the end, as we know, all was well, but if the Holy Family lends itself after all to interpretation as a scenario of needs-must rather than beatific acceptance, Rego's aborting girls may be only a few steps further along in their refusal of unsought motherhood. Each one lies or sits without doctor or nurse, father or mother, but more to the point without her lover to accompany her in an abortion possibly but not necessarily self-induced. The onus of guilt in these pictures remains equally arguable, since each of these Portuguese (and therefore, in view of the law at the time, criminal) recusants carries a complex message that does not lend itself to straightforward decoding. Men (and God) may be present in the making of children, but women, it is implied, are alone in that equally God-like (albeit anti-demiurgic) act of unmaking them. At first glance this situation implies a usurping and even heretic move on the part of the female, since it refers to a universe where God/man may have the power over life, but the would-be demonic woman yields at least some control over death. There are however other implications inherent in the absence of the male beyond the act of impregnation. If, as Joanna Frueh succinctly argues, 'the penis stands out, the vagina does not' (Frueh, 1988, 161), the penises implicated in these particular pregnancies, as well as being conspicuous for their absence, become also culpable for both the former and the latter, i.e. for both the pregnancies and their abortion. And the masculine impact (the power to fertilize the female), particularly in view of the self-evidently non-demonic status

17 However, with reference to the earlier *Joseph's Dream*, Agustina Bessa-Luís remarks upon the exclusion of the sleeping male from the real business being enacted between Mary and the Annunciatory angel in the picture within the picture, and to which Joseph possibly prefers to remain oblivious. Rego and Bessa-Luís (2001, 12).

18 See G. Devereux, 'A typological study of abortion in 350 primitive, ancient, and pre-industrial societies', in Harold Rosen (ed.), *Abortion In America: Medical, Psychiatric, Legal, Anthropological, and Religious Considerations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967); John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

of the girls in question, may serve as the proclamation of a male right or achievement (perpetuity of blood and lineage), but becomes also the fact that makes possible the indictment of both. In a countermove to the anti-abortion propaganda that in Janet Hadley's words aimed either to neglect or demonize the mother in order to 'talk up the foetus', these images may be said to talk up the guilt, or at least the responsibility, of the man who scored and ran.

The otherness of motherhood as implied in these pictures grows in importance as one continues to ponder the theme. Maternity, whether of a religious or secular kind, as discussed with regard to Mary's isolation in the context of the Annunciation, is one of the most enduring themes in traditional iconography, and it is ongoing in contemporary figurative art by both male and female artists, whether working within radical revisionist approaches, or in more or less traditional form (Mary Cassatt, fig. 4.44; Paula Modersohn-Becker; Käthe Kollwitz, fig. 4.45; Barbara Hepworth; Dorothea Tanning; Mary Kelly; Juanita McNeely and Frieda Kahlo).



Fig. 4.44 Mary Cassatt, *The Child's Bath* (1893). Oil on canvas, 100.3×66 cm. Art Institute of Chicago. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mary_Cassatt_-_The_Child%27s_Bath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg



Fig. 4.45 Käthe Kollwitz, *Mother with Twins* (1932–1936). Bronze. Käthe-Kollwitz-Museum, Berlin-Charlottenburg. Wikimedia, CC BY, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaethe_Kollwitz_-_Mutter_mit_Zwillingen-2.jpg

The traditional art history establishment has alternatively sacralized the theme of maternity, applauded its practitioners, and patronized or castigated its revisionist thinkers.¹⁹ In contrast, Paula Rego's *Abortion Series*, as already suggested, makes the role of mothers problematic, since most of her models are not adults but girls, in a country where the age of consent was and is fourteen, but access to contraception and

19 In Mary Cassatt's case, for example, 'her childlessness was pointed to by patriarchal explicators as the reason for her choice of theme. Implicit in this interpretation was the notion that she was compensating for not having fulfilled her "natural destiny" as wife and mother by painting a wished-for reality. This sort of insinuation, like the spectre of the lesbian, is meant to warn more "natural" women [against] following such examples' (Langer, 1988, 124).

termination was and up to a point remains not straightforward. More to the point however, these works are not about becoming or being a mother, but about *not* becoming one. Their theme is an act socially and sometimes legislatively defined as the unnatural and premature termination of the life-cycle, and as such stands coterminous with other forms of aggression such as castration, infanticide and murder.

I will digress here to refer to a piece of the Apocrypha that altogether appropriately ushers in an unseemly third element to the binary of Eve-Mary. In the Jewish Apocrypha Adam, repeatedly unlucky in his wives (did God not like him very much or was He simply not in favour of marriage as an institution? His beloved Son, for example, never married) had a first wife, before Eve, who went by the name of Lilith. Lilith refused God's injunction that she submit to Adam and be his helpmate, and as a consequence of her mutiny was banished to the edge of the Dead Sea, where she dwells in a cave to this day, consorting with demons and devouring her male offspring in recidivist insurrection against her husband and his Creator (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, 35; Kristeva, 1986, 140). In religious art, moreover, Lilith sometimes metamorphoses into the serpent that triggered the Fall (fig. 4.46).

The second spouse, as we know, hardly fared better, and whilst in Genesis both Adam and Eve underwent punishments as a consequence of the latter's misdemeanour, Eve, and all her female successors, suffered a further few tailored to the female arch-culprit. These included menstruation, visible pregnancy, childbirth in pain and breast-feeding, all of course preconditions or consequences of motherhood (but all specifically not applying to Mary, Warner, 1985). If Lilith was guilty of hands-on infanticide, Eve was to blame for robbing her descendants of eternal life. The reinstatement of the Apocryphal version transforms the binary Eve-Mary into a sacrilegious trinity weighted in favour of sinfulness (two against one, Lilith and Eve in juxtaposition to Mary). And the maternal condition, as discussed already, had to wait for the advent of the mother of God in order to acquire a measure of redemption which however, is confined to the Holy Virgin herself, excluding the rest of womankind: daughters one and all of Eve and implicitly of Lilith.

In the anti-abortion agenda, criminalized abortion stands parallel to and indistinguishable from infanticide, both being condemned as acts of murder but also, implicitly, as acts of *lése-majesté* against the patriarchal imperative of male reproduction. When a foetus is aborted, it is not



Fig. 4.46 Raphael, *Temptation of Adam and Eve* (1508). Fresco, 120 x 105 cm. Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffael_052.jpg

just the son of man but potentially the Son of God whose lifeblood is wantonly (and I use the term advisedly) spilt. Abortion is the wrecking of the possibility of life. Castration is the wrecking of the possibility of pleasure. And murder (with infanticide as its most unnatural and abhorrent rendition), is the wrecking of the possibility of ongoing life or immortality. But all of them are merely *premature* wreckages, untimely anticipations of the death that in any case is inherent in the moment when, in the aftermath of Eve's disobedience, the mother, in giving life, bestows it as the qualified gift of *finite* life without the promise of perpetuity, eternity or immortality. A life, in short, that is poisoned, initiated by a birth quantitatively but not qualitatively different from

its deformed avatars of abortion, castration and murder, to which it is linked by the common denominator of inescapable dissolution. And at the origin of this horrible truth, whether she be murderous or simply maternal, we find the ambivalently-loved mother. That mother may be the three-faced originator — Lilith, Eve and Mary — or the female parent whom psychoanalysis has presented as being dichotomously good and bad: both loved and loathed, but in any case perennially present, albeit hurriedly discarded by post-Oedipal sons, both frightened and desirous. Whatever the case, she is always dangerous.

The Counter-Purification of Categories

For Cassandra L. Sanger, feminist revisionism in art must involve forms explicitly conscious of women's oppression due to gender, an art that 'understands that women exist for the patriarchy: to propagate, to carry on the male name, and to assure a legitimate passage of the father's property and wealth to a designated heir' (Langer, 1988, 111). In art tradition, the dangerous, infanticidal mother finds expression more commonly through the metamorphosed (and therefore to some extent side-stepping) device of reference to biblical *belles dames sans merci*: Judith, Salome, Delilah (figs. 4.16; 4.47, 4.48) who are not necessarily or primarily mothers, i.e. who are not principally feared in their maternal/annihilating capacities.

Hasty refuge from the nightmare of murderous mothers is also sought with greater success in the omnipresent, enduring and *numerous* (safety in numbers) depictions of the Virgin Mother and Child throughout the centuries of Western iconography. The sheer numerical balance of pictures painted under the themes respectively of virgin and whore vastly (and reassuringly) favours good over bad mothers, with beatific madonnas and their earthly sidekicks (the wives and mothers of traditional portraiture) easily outnumbering all the other faces of womankind put together. Be that as it may, the timeless and distinct categories of Mary and Eve, Virgin and Whore, Mother and Killer are each in their own way reassuring, precisely because they remain clearly compartmentalized: complementary yet distinct, commensurate but absolutely separate, meaningfully antithetical. Because they *are* different and mutually exclusive, they enable the viewer to know what's



Fig. 4.47 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Salome with the Head of St. John the Baptist* (1610–1615). Oil on canvas, 84 x 92 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salome_with_the_Head_of_Saint_John_the_Baptist_by_Artemisia_Gentileschi_ca._1610-1615.jpg



Fig. 4.48 Peter Paul Rubens, *Samson and Delilah* (1609–1610). Oil on panel, 185 x 205 cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Samson_and_Delilah_by_Rubens.jpg

what morally, and to cope with evil whilst enjoying goodness. It is the dissolution of the demarcating boundaries between the two opposites, and the ensuing possibility of a fusion of categories that poses the real threat to a status quo that depends on the continuing security of generally

accepted definitions of black and white. Gentileschi's murderesses are disturbingly homely: her Judith might have been chopping vegetables for the family meal and Salome could have been sizing up a juicy melon. And it is the threat of uncertainty that underpins the narrative processes Paula Rego puts in motion in this series of pictures.

The triptych format, for example, traditionally narrates a biblical story, more specifically scenes from the birth and life of Jesus. The tripartite picture included in this Abortion Series (*Triptych*, figs. 4.26; 4.31; 4.38), however, other than the provocation represented by the theme of abortion within a genre that conventionally refers to the life of an immortal son, introduces another event — child pregnancy — which is morally unspeakable and almost unutterable (whilst also being the fate that possibly befell the reluctant Mary (Luke 1: 28–34):²⁰ something words hardly *can* but these images *do* convey. More unconventionally, even, in Paula Rego they direct the viewer's compassion primarily to the mother aborting the child. In doing so, they compromise obedience to a conservative morality, namely the understanding that abortion is a crime/sin on the part of the mother, and that she ought to suffer for it. The effect undermines conformity to definitions of what constitutes a crime warranting punishment, as well as the identification of who is deemed guilty of it.

Abortion may be the thematic antithesis of blessed motherhood, but in itself it need not pose a serious threat to an orthodoxy that after all has coped with equanimity, and indeed wallowed pictorially and at length, in the representation of any number of biblical and historical murderesses. Paula Rego's pictures, however, as well as complicating the linear attribution of immorality to the girls themselves, issue further complexities within the debate in question. These surface in the only picture in this cycle whose subject is not an aborting girl (*n.* 9, fig. 4.41).

In this image, the homely matron who has performed or is about to perform an abortion and currently wipes the basin presumably used for the containment of the foetus is a perfect representation, through her motherly physical presence and house-wifely attributes (mopping up, cleaning, wiping), of everything domestic and maternal socially

20 Apocryphal sources give Mary's age as having been between twelve and fourteen when Jesus was born. This bears relevance to the meaning of the word 'virgin' which might have meant either an unmarried woman or the narrow window when a girl might be already fertile but had not yet begun to menstruate.

condoned in women. She could be anybody's mother, aunt, granny, housekeeper, domestic servant: the very antithesis, in short, of the backstreet abortionist.²¹

Clearly, however, being the abortionist that she is (and in Portugal at the time necessarily a backstreet one), she contravenes all that is conventionally and socially acceptable. She does so first and most obviously by breaking the law. The implications of this transgression, however, reverberate further, since if she is the mother or mother-surrogate implicated in her daughter's abortion, parent and child here become bonded by a complicity that strengthens female familial attachments at the cost of interrupting the male generational entitlement. What kind of mother/granny/nanny would refuse a beloved girl help in such difficult circumstances?

Paradoxically, however, her actions also help to sweep under the carpet a disallowed pregnancy, and therefore collude in maintaining the fiction of a God-fearing nation in which, theoretically, girls did not become pregnant before they became wives. Abortion, therefore just like quasi-authorized infanticide in *The Crime of Father Amaro* — particularly if made possible by motherly figures such as this one — both defies and shores up the illusion of a state- and church-controlled female sexuality successfully contained within authorized boundaries. It defies it because it helps to cover up illicit sexual behaviour; but it promotes it by helping to dispose of the illegitimate children who would be the embarrassing living proof that, after all, in this, God's own country, all is not as it ought to be.

In *The Crime of Father Amaro*, Carlota, murderer of the baby whom Amélia in her mind had named 'Carlinhos' (Charlie), is (at least in the eyes of the church and of the anti-abortion faction who do not differentiate between abortion and infanticide) merely a precursor of Mike Leigh's motherly abortionist, Vera Drake.²² Like her and like the cosy woman in figure 4.41, *Untitled n. 9*, Carlota's homely appearance belies her calling (the disposal of unwanted babies, in the latter's case already born):

21 Paula Rego has referred in interview to a drawing painted several years prior to the abortion referendum, which depicts a midwife performing an abortion, and to which she gave the title *The Angel of Mercy* (Marques Gastão, 2002, 40).

22 For a cinematic version of this conundrum see Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake* (2004).

Amaro, to his surprise, saw a pleasant creature, nearing forty, bosomy and with wide-hips, white skin, wearing a pair of beautiful gold earrings, and with attractive dark eyes that reminded him of Amélia's or rather her mother's more soothing ones. (Eça de Queirós (a), s.d., 451)

In Rego's image, the figure in question represents a performance on the cusp between categories (good woman/bad woman, mother/abortionist, life giver/life taker, madonna/whore, *mater dolorosa*/fallen woman). Paula Rego herself has described her as 'a good woman, a figure of goodness, she does what she can to help women. This one isn't bad' (Rego quoted in Pinharanda, 1999, 3). Her actions simultaneously dissolve the boundary between prescribed and proscribed roles and behaviours (mother and abortionist, mother-hen or child-killer, mothering and murdering), and reaffirm it. They dissolve the boundary because the same figure simultaneously occupies both roles, thus denying their mutual exclusivity. And they reaffirm it because in Portugal, past and present, many mothers worth their salt must have been and to a lesser extent still must be occasionally forced to turn into unwilling accomplices to the backstreet abortions of their foetal grandchildren, in order to safeguard the respectability of their daughters, in a social context in which, until recently, almost the only label available for an unmarried girl who became a mother was that of whore. This complicity between mother and daughter, which helped to conceal and therefore granted immunity to the unauthorized sexual activities that led to the illicit pregnancy, paradoxically also colluded in perpetuating the fiction of a society in which girls were only ever *good* girls.

The motherly figure who goes along with, or even carries out the abortion, therefore, simultaneously collaborates with and threatens the status quo. She is the accomplice in a crime, which, however, upholds the rule of morality by conveniently concealing the evidence of sexual misdemeanours themselves more fundamentally threatening to the perpetuity of the established order. The action of the bivalent Janus-figure casts her in both roles simultaneously, and therefore literally kicks over the traces, thereby erasing the demarcating lines whose function is to keep each moral category (virgin versus whore) sealed off from the other. While erasing the boundary between the two, however, the mother/abortionist, paradoxically, also polices and preserves that moral line, which is the barrier that prevents her daughter's angel

status from slipping into the counterpart of the fallen woman, and becoming indistinguishable from it. The denial or cover-up of female transgression, therefore, appears after all to serve the interests of both the transgressor and the law transgressed, in a status quo that depended and still depends on believing — at its convenience, and sometimes refraining from conceding even the benefit of the doubt — that women may hail from the loins of Eve, but on the whole emulate the role model of Mary.

In Portuguese proverbial wisdom ‘a grandmother is a mother twofold’,²³ a saying that encodes the notion of cumulative maternal love down the generations. A woman’s grandchildren, according to this homely nugget, may be twice as beloved by her as her own child. If so, however, Paula Rego once again plays disruptive games with her Portuguese heritage of received wisdom, by presenting us with the figure of a mother or grandmother who is the palimpsest of generations of women caught up in the paradox of sacrificing a grandchild in order to protect a child. She is present by implication in several of the pictures: not only, although more obviously, in the matronly figure in *n. 9* (fig. 4.41) but more allusively in the shape of a variety of old-fashioned props, which are the domestic débris of older generations of women: the oldie-worldie china bowl in *Hand-coloured Sketch n. 1* (fig. 4.37); the armchair in *Untitled n. 7* (fig. 4.25) and *Triptych c (right-hand panel)* (fig. 4.38); the motherly shawl draped over another armchair as though over a pair of plump and cosy shoulders in *n. 6* (fig. 4.15).

Ultimately, however, it is through the casting, dressing and accessorizing of the girls having abortions that Rego plays her riskiest games. These children and adolescents ill-equipped to be mothers signal a maternity that, for them, ought to have been far in the future, but which they can only reject here and now. However, in rejecting that hallowed female role — in some socio-political contexts the only one available to a good woman — they do not lend themselves easily to being recast as the latter’s antithesis, namely the runaway madonna or fallen angel, demoness or hell hag. They are girls who ought not to become mothers because they are young enough themselves still to need a mother to take them to school in their uniform (*n. 4*, fig. 4.14; *n. 6*, fig. 4.15). It may be true that, of the many ways in which maternity has been

23 The saying in Portuguese is ‘*uma avó é duas vezes mãe*’.

portrayed in art, the image of idyllic (Marian) motherhood has endured most strongly. Paula Rego's recent work, whose referent is Salazar's and post-referendum Portugal's ostentatious matriolatry, contravenes this by raising the possibility of a series of would-be maternities ruptured by betrayal and void.

These images shirk sensationalism, and in doing so avoid the cheap thrills of heart-wrenching dead fetuses or even of blood. The latter either does not feature at all in these pictures or at most features discreetly: on a towel in *Untitled n. 3*, fig. 4.24; *in absentia*, having just been wiped away in *Untitled n. 9*, fig. 4.41; obliquely, via the bedspread akin to a river of blood, in *Untitled n. 7*, fig. 4.25; on the cloth on the couch in *Untitled n. 6*, fig. 4.15; on the apron in *Untitled n. 9*, fig. 4.41.

The strategy used here presents a countermove to the anti-abortion lobby's previously mentioned shock tactic of 'talking up the foetus' and instead refers our gaze, fear and pity back to a gallery of young girls clearly unprepared to be mothers. Curiously in this series, unlike in previous works, colour generally does not play a role in the agenda of violence. In fact the pencil sketches and etchings that preceded the pastels are arguably more harrowing and carry a much more brutal emotional load than the colour works.

The postures in the pencil studies are more accentuated, the poses more dramatic, and the content more explicit. The impact of colour in the pastels, therefore, is never allowed to override the compositional violence of the sketches. In this context, it may be interesting to note also that some of the sketches included in the catalogue (such as for example *Untitled Sketch 9*, fig. 4.49), relatively unambiguous as regards both the act of abortion in question and the pain involved in it, were never carried through into colour works, being left instead to speak for themselves. *Ne plus ultra*. To indulge in a semantic pun, the sketches that are the progenitors of the colour pastels, speak even more clearly than their offspring of a violence both share as victims and culprits.

The Wages of Sin

In a study of 7000 women between the ages of 31 and 35, Wardell B. Pomeroy found that of the women who had had premarital intercourse and got pregnant, 74% got married. He concluded that 'the wages of sin



Fig. 4.49 Paula Rego, *Untitled Sketch n. 9* (1998). Pencil on paper, 31 x 42 cm. Artist's collection. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

were marriage' (Pomeroy, 1970, 111), a point confirmed by Robert W. Laidlaw:

The prime leaders in religion in past times — and to a large degree up to the present — were those dedicated to a life of chastity. We have the statement from St. Paul that it is better to marry than to burn, giving the idea that the sexual life is something in a secondary category; and I wonder whether we should not, with a greater understanding of what man's sexuality in general, and medicine and psychiatry in particular, have given us, come to the point of saying in loud, resounding tones, '*Sex is good*', and build a morality on that basis. (Laidlaw, 1970, 111)

This idiosyncratically articulated but possibly not uncommon viewpoint may lend support to the following remarks by the Protestant minister, Joseph F. Fletcher on the subject of what the pro-choice term 'retrospective birth control':

Making babies is a good thing, but making love is too; [...] we may and should make love, even though no baby is intended; and [...] there ought to be no unintended and no unwanted babies. And the best way [...] to make love without babies is to prevent their conception; and the next best way is to prevent fertility itself; and the least desirable way is to end the pregnancy already begun. But any of these methods is good if the good to be gained by their use is great enough to justify the means. (Fletcher, 1970, 93)

Under the punitive brand of Catholicism that haunts Paula Rego, abortion and infanticide become one and the same crime, although, as illustrated in Eça de Queirós's *The Crime of Father Amaro*, while the former is steadfastly condemned, the latter may have historically benefited from a clerical and social blind eye. In the words of Mary Kenny, 'sex and babies have been separated' (Kenny, 1986, 25); recreation and procreation, as Hugh Hefner of *Playboy* fame would have it, are now accepted as two entirely different things. For Janet Hadley,

The contexts of abortion and of infanticide are totally different. 'Birth makes it possible for the infant to be granted equal basic rights without violating anyone else's basic rights'. Whereas inside a single human skin 'there is room for only one being with full and equal rights'. (Hadley, 1996, 62)

A measure of resolution may thus be thought to have been achieved by philosophy and theology, as well as in certain areas of medical science, as conveyed by the curiously poetic words of one scientist:

Looking through the microscope at the physical structure of embryonic man, I see no heaven-bound chariot of the soul, but only a frail congeries of animal cells, fraught indeed with promise beyond all other embryonic creatures, but of necessity bound to grow and to organize itself as an animal if it is to be a man. Humbly employing such vision as may be granted to an embryologist, I declare my conviction that the spirit of man — all that makes him more than a beast and carries him onward with hope and sacrifice — comes not as a highborn tenant from afar but as a latent potentiality of the body. [...] The spirit, with the body, must grow and differentiate, organizing its inner self as it grows, strengthening itself by contact with the world, winning its title to glory by struggle and achievement. (Corner, 1970, 14–15)

In the end, nonetheless, the battleground of moral difficulties that respectively surround claims for abortion-on-demand or its absolute

condemnation, may not soon nor easily be resolved by either side, in a debate whose theme is life but which paradoxically has sometimes been fought to the death. In the end, perhaps all that can be usefully achieved is the preservation of salutary uncertainty in an area where science, religion and ethics collide with more than habitual virulence. And it is that wary uncertainty which finds expression through Paula Rego's vision, in what perversely emerges as her most lyrical work to date, on the least lyrical of possible topics.

Annunciations, births, abortions, depositions:²⁴ ultimately these pictures — still lives (*nature morte*) — educate through confusion, by driving home the elusiveness of difference and the indistinctiveness of categories, including those of good and evil. In the end, the only clear truth is that of pain. 'Ecce Femina. Behold the violence of [the] passion' (Pires de Lima, 2001, 10). In abortion rooms throughout the world, there is always a death, and sometimes two. Returning to my point of departure and to Paula Rego herself, 'death means you die. That is all' (Rego quoted in Marques Gastão, 1999, 44). In the end, the artist's own words articulate most eloquently the impossibility of ethical closure: 'Those who resort to abortion can do no more. I am not a moralist. I draw attention to suffering' (Paula Rego quoted in Marques Gastão, 1999, 45).

24 Various writers have drawn attention to echoes of Christ's deposition in her work. See for example Waldemar Januszczak, 'The Ecstasy and the Agony', *Sunday Times, Culture*, 5 August 2001, 6–7.

5. Brave New Worlds: The Birthing of Nations in *First Mass in Brazil*

On Easter Sunday in the morning our captain decided to go to mass and preaching... and he ordered all the other captains to go on their boats and do likewise; and so it was done. He ordered that a [...] goodly altar be raised, and he caused a mass to be said to us all [...]. And there, beside the captain was the flag which he had brought with him from Belém, which had always been raised high together with the New Testament... Whilst we listened to mass and the preaching, as many people again came to the beach, with their bows and arrows, who, much at their ease and playfully and gazing at us, sat down.

Pêro Vaz de Caminha, Letter to His Majesty Don Manuel concerning the
discovery of Brazil

*How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in't!*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Unexpected Visitors

Nationality, nations, and Portugal specifically, are always at the heart of Paula Rego's work, sometimes indirectly but often directly. More often her works address her motherland's sea-borne imperial and colonial adventures in non-specific ways: *When We Used to Have a House in the Country*, fig. 1.2; *Departure*, fig. 2.8; *The Cadet and His Sister*, fig. 2.9; and *The Soldier's Daughter*, fig. 2.11, to name but a few. The work to be

discussed now, however, addresses one particular aspect of Portugal's imperial adventures: namely the discovery and colonization of Brazil in 1500, and the implications of this moment of contact for colonizer and colonized alike. And as one would expect from this artist, when addressing any matter of unconsenting possession, at the heart of her work we find a woman's plight.

Rego painted *First Mass in Brazil* in 1993 (fig. 5.2) one year after the fifth centenary of Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1491. The picture borrows both title and composition from the famous painting of 1861 by the Brazilian artist Vítor Meirelles (fig. 5.1).



Fig. 5.1 Vítor Meirelles, *First Mass in Brazil* (1860). Oil on canvas, 268 x 356 cm. Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro. Wikimedia, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meirelles-primeiramissa2.jpg>

Rego's painting features two different settings: an indoor scene inspired by the house of her nanny in Ericeira, in Portugal and an outdoors Brazilian setting depicted by what could be either a picture on the wall or a view from a window, offering a visual paraphrase of Meirelles' work. Meirelles picture, in turn, was inspired by Pêro Vaz de Caminha's letter



Fig. 5.2 Paula Rego, *First Mass in Brazil* (1993). Acrylic on paper laid on canvas, 130 x 180 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

of 1500 — a short passage from which is quoted above — addressed to Don Manuel I, King of Portugal, in which he chronicles his arrival on a Portuguese ship in a new land, first named *Terra de Vera Cruz* (Land of the True Cross) and subsequently Brazil, after an indigenous tree, *Pau Brasil* (now extinct). At the forefront in Rego's picture we see a pregnant woman lying on her side on a bed, surrounded by a turkey on one side with a woman in a blood-stained apron standing above it. Other items include two dead fish on a trunk at the head of the bed, a ceramic duck, a small statue and two dolls (or possibly one doll and one small, half-mummified body) lying on their backs on an overhanging shelf.

This painting marks a crucial stage in Rego's thematic trajectory over the decades that followed, heralding a growing preoccupation with the female body in scripts characterized by violence within a framework of personal, national and sexual politics. From the mid-nineteen nineties onwards, even more emphatically than previously, the bodies of women will acquire particular significance in this artist's work, whether in

animal/bestial form — the *Dog Women*, figs. 1.12 and 6.14) and *Dancing Ostriches* cycles (fig. 3.22) — or with a focus on love, sexuality, illness and pain (*Moth*, fig. 4.32; *Love*, fig. 4.34; *Bride*, fig. 4.35); or on reproduction, including childbirth and abortion (*First Mass in Brazil*, fig. 5.2; *The Crime of Father Amaro: The Coop*, fig. 3.12; *Untitled Abortion cycle*, figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49; and *Life of the Virgin Mary* series (figs. 7.1; 7.3; 7.9; 7.10; 7.11; 7.12; 7.19; 7.20).

The theme of maternity in Rego's work, seldom a happy one, will be the paradigm through which, in *First Mass in Brazil*, the nature of childbirth will be inscribed within the historical-political context of Pedro Álvares Cabral's discovery of Brazil in 1500. June Hahner has referred to Brazil as a 'country without a memory' (Hahner, 1990, xii) and in a detailed account of the struggle for women's rights in the period between 1950 and the 1980s she finds, at the centre of a struggle that proved to be highly complex, an obsession with the figure of the mother as the origin or creator of both self and country. The mother emerges as a complex figure in Portugal from its earliest beginnings as a nation — which involved a son's rebellion against his mother — and in Brazil, a country whose self-image as a miscegenated nation has involved the killing of a series of mothers, be they the black slave woman, the indigenous *índia*¹ or the white angel in the house.

1 It is worth noting that in Portuguese there are two words for 'Indian': '*indiano*' (a native of India) and '*índio*' (American Indian). Some historians have suggested that when Columbus arrived in the Caribbean in the belief that he had arrived in India, the Portuguese already knew that there was land there — discovered possibly fortuitously by a ship blown off course: 'an error that discovers a continent' — and they also knew that it was not India (land of the '*índianos*'), which they had earlier reached by sea via a route that followed the contours of Africa from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, the people of the Caribbean came to be called '*índios*'. As the narrative runs, the Portuguese already held extensive territories down the East and West coasts of Africa and around southern Asia all the way to India, and when land was discovered in what came to be known as Brazil, they were unable to extend their imperial ambitions across the Atlantic to the newly discovered continent. When Columbus announced the discovery of a new land the Spanish and Portuguese agreed to carve up the globe along a line on the map: everything found to the left of the line would be Spain's, everything to the right would be Portugal's. The Portuguese, so the story runs, pressed hard for the longitude points demarcating the line to be shifted further west, including what, at that point, appeared to be nothing but water. This was agreed at the Treaty of Tordesilhas in 1496. Six years later Pedro Álvares Cabral, a Portuguese navigator, announced that he had discovered new land. Under the line drawn at Tordesilhas, what became known as Brazil, encompassing the largest part of South America, fell under Portuguese control.

Thus, if the mother(land) to be invented anew under the guise of recuperating an imagined pre-existent reality prior to contact with European sailors was the America to be recovered by the Romantic drive to 'local colour', the finding of that mother (imagined as untouched, or virginal), was to be rendered possible only through the act of kinslaying: the Oresteian spilling of the blood of that other first, Eve-like European mother, now to be Oedipally discarded, whilst nonetheless, at times, of necessity resuscitated.

The origins of Brazil as an independent nation have a basis in two family romances worthy of both Sophocles and Freud. The first harks back to the birth of Portugal in the twelfth century as the outcome of a series of rebellions by a son against his Galician mother and his Leonese cousin; the second as the consequence of the insurrection of a Portuguese son against his royal father in the nineteenth century.

In the case of the first, events unfolded as follows:

Don Afonso Henriques, who would become the first king of the new nation of Portugal in 1143 was the son of Henry, Count of Burgundy and Teresa, the natural daughter of King Alfonso VI of León and Castile. He was probably born in 1109. Henrique and Teresa reigned jointly as count and countess of what was then the County of Portucale (*Condado Portucale*) until Henry's death on 22 May 1112 during the siege of Astorga, after which Teresa reigned alone. In an effort to pursue a larger share in the Leonese inheritance, Teresa joined forces with Fernando Pérez de Trava, a Galician count, but the idea of an alliance with Galicia was unpopular with a lot of the nobility of the *Condado Portucale* including its chief cleric, the Archbishop of Braga, who feared Portucale being absorbed under the Galician Archbishopry of Santiago de Compostela. In 1122, Afonso Henriques, aged fourteen, made himself a knight and in 1127 rebelled against his mother, sent her into exile in Galicia, and in 1128 took control of the county of Portucale. On 6 April 1129, Afonso Henriques proclaimed himself Prince of Portugal or Prince of the Portuguese. Following an overwhelming victory against the Moors in the battle of Ourique on 25 July 1139 he was proclaimed King of the Portuguese by his soldiers and in 1143 wrote to Pope Innocent II declaring himself King of Portugal. This is the date generally accepted as the date of independence, recognized as such by the King of León. Papal recognition, however, was only granted by papal bull by Pope Alexander III in 1179.

By the end of the fifteenth century Portugal had already claimed a vast empire that stretched down the eastern and western coasts of Africa, and along territories across southern Asia to India; across the Atlantic was the territory that became Brazil, discovered in 1500. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, following the interregnum of Spanish rule between 1580 and 1640 in the aftermath of the death without an heir of King Sebastião, Brazil's enormous wealth in gold, precious stones and agricultural resources constituted the basis of the Portuguese economy. When the Napoleonic armies, under Junot, invaded Portugal in 1807 and reached Lisbon on 30 November, they found that the royal family and the entire court had left the country and set up in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Following the defeat of Napoleon, the Portuguese king, Don João VI, returned to Portugal in July 1821, leaving his eldest son, Don Pedro as regent in Brazil. On 7 September 1822 Don Pedro rebelled against his father and declared Brazil independent, with himself as emperor.

This second turbulent family romance set the pattern for what to this day remains the ambivalent relationship between Portugal and Brazil. At its heart is a dilemma that has shaped the curious two-faced cultural and political phenomenon that, throughout the last two centuries, has driven a Brazilian search for national identity contradictorily shored up by a paraphernalia of imported European references. The latter included the country's purported endorsement of European (i.e. non-American) liberalism in the face of ongoing slavery, of continuing race and gender enmity, and its touted search for national heroes and heroines side by side with an enduring fixation on overseas (European/Portuguese) models of physical and spiritual worth.

A dilemma not unlike that embodied by this artist whose British title (*Dame Paula Rego*) and international themes notwithstanding) sees herself as being Portuguese to the core.

The narrative of Brazil as a miscegenated nation of harmoniously mingled indigenous native American and European (Portuguese) blood — from which blacks, brought from Africa as slaves, tended to be conveniently erased — is perfectly encapsulated in Brazil's foundation literature, for example the Indianist novels of José de Alencar, the most famous of which is *Iracema* of 1865 (fig. 5.3)

The novel is a fantasy of Amerindian-European miscegenation, offered as the fantasy foundation text of a new Brazil, born of blood-mingling, not bloodshed. *Iracema*, the eponymous heroine, whose



Fig. 5.3 J. Medeiros, *Iracema* (1884). Oil on canvas, 168.3 x 255 cm. Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro. Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iracema.jpg>

name, not insignificantly, is an anagram of America, is, in a replay of the paradigmatic European nostalgia for the Virgin Birth, the vestal priestess-mother of her tribe, the Tabajaras, and keeper of the secret of the magic potion, the *jurema*, which ensures her tribe victory in war against other tribes. Iracema, however, falls in love with Martim, a newly-arrived Portuguese soldier and sailor to whom she surrenders her virginity, her hieratic power and thus, too, the safety of the tribe. In due course Iracema, abandoned by Martim, gives birth alone to a son, Moacir (whose name means ‘child of suffering’) and, having obediently lent her womb to the patrilinear white imperative of generational continuity, she dies, leaving behind her a son who, with his father’s help, will become the exemplary specimen of an empire builder. Martim himself will remain exactly what he always was, the agent of a conquering European arrival whose presence is now doubly reaffirmed: first through the death of the American Iracema (and therefore, presumably, of an Iracema-like, native America); and second, in her absence, through the whitening of a racially amnesiac son with just enough indigenous blood in his veins to please the natives and sustain the novel’s status as a foundation text, but not enough viably to secure the continuity of the line that died with

his mother. Iracema, too, remains what she always was: sweet, fertile, destructible, and at last dead.

Whether or not Paula Rego was familiar with Alencar's novel, the theme of the female body commandeered by the interests of patriarchal and empire- or nation-building interests is one of the preoccupations that has informed her work from early on, as discussed elsewhere in chapters 3, 4 and 7. But never more so, as regards the indictment of masculine imperial endeavours, than in the image to be discussed now. Both Rego's *First Mass in Brazil* (fig. 5.2) and Vítor Meirelles' painting of 1861 to which it refers (fig. 5.1) echo the first moments of contact between Portuguese navigators and priests on the one hand and the indigenous peoples of the world newly encountered. Pero Vaz de Caminha was the official who accompanied the fleet of Pedro Álvares Cabral and was charged with providing an official report of the voyage, to be delivered to the Portuguese king. His *Carta (Letter)*, the inspiration for both Meirelles' and Rego's paintings, offers a narrative at least partly characterized by mutual wonder and initial good will:

This same day, at the hour of vespers we sighted land, that is to say, first a very high rounded mountain, then other lower ranges of hills to the south of it, and a plain covered with large trees. The admiral named the mountain Easter Mount and the country the Land of the True Cross. [The inhabitants] are of a dark brown, rather reddish colour. They have good well-made faces and noses. They go naked, with no sort of covering. They attach no more importance to covering up their private parts or leaving them uncovered than they do to showing their faces. They are very ingenious in that matter. For all that, one of them gazed at the admiral's collar and began to point towards the land and then at the collar as if he wished to tell us that there was gold in the country. And he also looked at a silver candlestick and pointed at the land in the same way, and at the candlestick, as if there was silver there, too. One of them saw the white beads of a rosary. He made a sign to be given them and was very pleased with them, and put them around his neck. Then he took them off and put them round his arm, pointing to the land, and again at the beads and at the captain's collar, as if he meant they would give gold for them. We took it in this sense, because we preferred to. If, however, he was trying to tell us that he would take the beads and the collar as well, we did not choose to understand him, because we were not going to give it to him. *They seem to be such innocent people that if we could understand their speech and they ours, they would immediately become Christians*, seeing that, by all appearances, they do not understand about

any faith ... May it please God to bring them to a knowledge of it, for truly these people are good and have a fine simplicity. Any stamp we wish may be easily printed on them, for the Lord has given them good bodies and good faces, like good men. I believe it was not without cause that He brought us here. Therefore, Your Majesty who so greatly wishes to spread the Holy Catholic faith may look for their salvation. Pray God it may be achieved with no great difficulty. (Caminha, 2010 [1500], 8–9, italics added)

Paula Rego's rendition of these foundational events, however, picks up the real tragedy of the European encounter with the indigenous peoples of Brazil, which both Caminha and Alencar view through a rose-tinted lens: a narrative of occupation, early enslavement and death brought about by war but even more so by disease (infection by agents such as measles, influenza and the common cold, never previously encountered by native Brazilians and therefore often lethal to them). Mutual goodwill — at least initially — notwithstanding, death came to Brazil on the European ships of conquest: specifically, in *Iracema* and in Rego's work, translated into a universal language, namely the death of women in childbirth.

Little Strangers

In Rego's *First Mass*, the pregnant woman — or girl, since, as in the later abortion and Virgin Mary images (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49; figs. 7.1; 7.3; 7.9; 7.10; 7.11; 7.12; 7.19; 7.20) age, and age of consent are moot points — is overlooked by a turkey, the latter a European import from the Americas, itself framed by two lilies. The lily, as discussed in previous chapters, is a polyvalent symbol of phallic power, female fertility, pain relief in childbirth and funereal ceremony. It also denotes virginity as the flower brandished by the Angel Gabriel in standard depictions of the Annunciation, such as figures 2.2 (Lotto), 4.42 (Crivelli) and 7.2 (da Vinci). The turkey, in its turn, as well as alluding to the spoils of empire, has been variously associated, through rites of fertility in certain tribes throughout the Americas, with female fecundity and with male virility. The association between purity, sex, fertility, virility, childbirth and death is reinforced by the woman (midwife) in a blood-stained apron against the backdrop of the image of European disembarkations in new worlds. Together, all these may

allude to the birth of children and nations achieved through occupation and carrying a price tag of dead mothers. A man's progeny and empire may coincide with a woman's arrival at a dead-end. Not necessarily an outcome often envisaged by Paula Rego, who, as suggested earlier, whether by means of drag, narrative revisionism or fantasies of misandry, more frequently replaces narratives of female death with the alternative of male elimination. But even in her world, as suggested by *First Mass in Brazil* (fig. 5.2), women are sometimes defeated by the conjoined interests of war, religion, trade and territorial/phallic conquest (the Portuguese maritime discoveries), all neatly brought together in the tropical vision of deflowered, parturient mothers and the sons whom, in dying, they gave to foreign gods and empires.

In *First Mass* the pregnant woman lies with her head resting on a sailor's garment decorated with nautical symbols. At her head, as already mentioned, are two dead fish, aligned with a crucifix on the wall, beside what is either the view from a window or, more likely, a rendition of the Meirelles painting in which conquest and conversion are fused together. But even if the fish, an icon of the early crypto-Christians under Roman persecution — and here presented in dead form — being dead, signal the artist's resistance to theological and territorial triumph, other more problematic associations (problematic from the point of view of dying mothers) can also be seen to operate in this complex image. Thus, for example, the fish, a water creature, can also be associated with uterine concerns in an image concerned with the birth of sons and nations brought into being at the cost of pre-existing lands and mothers. And when it comes to it, both this indigenous mother and these Christian fish may end up dead — but as we all know, mothers are irreplaceable (in Portuguese *mães há só uma*: there is only ever one mother) whereas there are always plenty more fish in the sea, even if not of this original Brazilian breed, now as dead as that name-giving *Pau Brasil* tree.

Water is the habitat of fish, Christian and otherwise; it is that of humans, in the womb; it is the oceanic barrier between known and unknown worlds; and it is that with which hitherto unknown peoples can be baptized into the Christian faith, thus ceasing to be themselves. It is also the backdrop to the picture within this picture, in which, against a seascape crowded with the ships of the navigators and on a beach called *Porto Seguro* ('safe harbour'), the new territory of *Vera Cruz* (True Cross)

ousted what had been there before. In this new world, as depicted by Rego, white men and priests, observed by gathered natives, kneel at the foot of a gigantic cross and perform for the first time in this new world the ritual — the Christian Mass — in whose name they will lay claim to the bodies of the land and the woman, for the purpose of ensuring their own presence and continuity.

Goodbye and Thanks for All the Fish

As noted before, this image, uncharacteristically for Paula Rego, could be seen to record a woman's defeat at the hands of a variety of statuses quo and their interests: gender, religion, empire. All are neatly subsumed under the socio-political drive shared by both Portuguese and Brazilians alike (from their separate national beginnings to the present, through a variety of political set-ups, stretching from absolutist monarchies, via slavery and dictatorship, to supposed — but, both in terms of gender and race, still persistently unegalitarian — democracies²).

In Rego's work, however, in the end, there may be some room left for revenge: or, in the immortal words of Douglas Adams in the last of his *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* quartet, 'goodbye and thanks for all the fish'. In *First Mass*, the fish, Christian or otherwise, are dead, echoes of the macabre dolls displayed like tomb statuary on the shelf above, along with the picture supposedly depicting a metaphor for national birth. The latter, with all its associated interests (military, mercantile and missionary) in this image becomes overshadowed by intimations

2 Brazil was the last country in the Western hemisphere to abolish slavery, in 1888, and is still one of the most economically unequal countries in the world. A strong link persists between race and poverty. See, for example, Carlos Gradín's paper, 'Race and Income Distribution: Evidence from the US, Brazil and South Africa', presented to the World Paper Series of the Society for the Study of Economic Inequality (ECINEQ 2010-179), August 2010, <http://www.ecineq.org/milano/WP/ECINEQ2010-179.pdf>; Oxfam's report on the same topic, 'Brazil: Extreme Inequality in Numbers, n.d.', <https://oxf.am/2wRZL3p>; Statista's data on income inequality in Brazil: 'Gross income distribution of tax payers in Brazil in 2015, based on average monthly income (in Brazilian reals)', Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/751758/income-distribution-monthly-gross-income-brazil/>; and Claudini Pereira's paper, 'Ethno-racial poverty and income inequality in Brazil', Working Paper No. 60, November 2016, http://www.commitmentoequity.org/publications_files/Brazil/CEQ_WP60_Pereira_Nov23_2016.pdf

of an end foretold. The Portuguese first landed in Brazil on 22 April 1500: spring in Europe, but in the southern hemisphere the beginning of autumn with all its associations to nature's decline. 22 April is the end of the Zodiac month of Pisces: dead fish and waning constellations, together with the religion they represent, may not be the best of omens for an empire, the Portuguese, which, like all its predecessors and successors, had an ending imprinted into its very beginning. Or so it might be, if Rego's jinx took effect.

Also on a shelf, to the left of what appears to be a statue of a dancing native deity itself aligned with the figures of Indians in the overhanging painting, is a duck, a creature that also carries ambiguous associations: in some cultures a sacrificial animal, it can also signal conjugal harmony, but on the portals of churches it signifies unwelcome scandal-mongers.

What we have here, then, as in Alencar's *Iracema*, is a medley of good fortune and misery: on the one hand happy marriages and soon-to-be-born children; humans and their Creator; a returning sailor and his girl; Europe and America known to each other at last; but on the other hand the clash of religions and cultures; discord within individual creeds; abandoned brides and unborn children; colonial mothers rejected by their colonized offspring. In the case of Portugal, a nation that came into being when a son turned on both his metaphorical father (in fact his cousin, Alfonso VII, king of Léon and Castile) and on his biological mother (Dona Teresa, countess of Portucale), one might argue that what goes around comes around; and so Brazil as an independent nation in its turn came into being when Don Pedro, heir to Don João VI, king of Portugal, turned on his father and unilaterally declared independence from Portugal with himself as emperor.

What these various oedipal beginnings leave unclear, however, is the position of the mother as object, never agent, in polymorphous family and national romances. Traditional historiography and cultural narratives almost always sideline the mother without whom, however, nothing could have come into being. Where is the mother, both loved and rejected, unavoidable but forgotten, dangerous and therefore elided? It takes an imagination as uncompromising and iconoclastic as that of Paula Rego to offer alternative narratives to gainsay those enshrined in canonical renditions.

In Rego's painting the mother-to-be lies with her back to a picture, itself the *trompe l'oeil* of a window open onto the historical inaugural moment of a nation, Brazil, about to be born in European consciousness but in the future to be lost by Portugal. If a back turned on something signals rejection, the turkey, some of whose possible connotations have already been detailed, acquires a few additional ones. The turkey, a bird indigenous to the Americas and imported by Europe as one of the spoils of empires that purported to Christianize the new worlds, became itself the traditional fare in European Christmas celebrations. In the New Testament Nativity story, Mary's immaculate conception atones for Eve's, tainted by sin, and Christmas, the celebration of the birth of the Saviour, is celebrated by eating the provenance of empire. Mary, Holy Mother, did not experience childbirth in pain (although as a matter of fact, according to Paula Rego, as discussed in chapter 7, figure 7.3, she did). Be that as it may, in *First Mass in Brazil*, it would appear, the trope of childbirth in pain is reinstated. Eve's special punishment in Genesis at the origins of the human race is present here too, at the moment of the birth of a new nation, the motif for ambivalent maternity being a trope also found in other foundation narratives: Sophocles (Jocasta and Oedipus) as well as the rest of the Ancient Greeks (Homer and his Helen, Aeschylus and his Clytemnestra, Euripides and his Phaedra and his Medea), and also in Alencar's *Iracema*, already mentioned.

In that novel, as in Rego's image here, the animal metaphors replicate the power distribution in the colonial narrative: Poti, Martim's Indian friend, betrays his tribe for friendship, as Iracema had done for love, changes his name to António Camarão (Anthony being the patron saint of Lisbon and the prawn — *camarão* — an edible tropical crustacean) and converts to Christianity. Depending on the narrative, yesterday's ancestral bully (the swan that raped Leda, the carnivorous T-Rex that terrorized its Jurassic contemporaries) becomes today's comestible delicacy (modern day's chicken, turkey, or in royal banquets, swan). And in Rego's image, the blood on that good homemaker's apron may after all come not from parturition and its afterbirth but from nations that, in conquering and being conquered, sacrificed their women but in the process lost themselves.

In this painting by Rego, as in others before and after it, deception is the order of the day: what at first glance would appear to be a window, door or mirror (as in *Time: Past and Present*; *The Policeman's Daughter*; *The*

Company of Women — figs. 1.8, 2.13, 3.1) is more likely a picture. And one, moreover, which, while echoing Meirelles' prior work, distorts it with intent, since in Meirelles the sea barely figures and the navigators' ships not at all. In Meirelles, then, the foreign status of the priests and sailors is omitted — they might always have been there rather than being newly-arrived intruders — while in Rego it is emphasized. And centrally, in Rego, a mother quite unlike those dead or invisible ones in traditional foundation texts, here lies in a Portuguese (rather than Brazilian) context — the house of the artist's nanny in Ericeira, Portugal — against the backdrop of a landscape that isn't real but is simulated (a picture within a picture). The setting of *First Mass* was the house in Ericeira, Portugal, where, when the future artist was a child, a mother who was not her mother but a nanny stepped in, the real mother (Rego's) being not dead but absent, busy frying other, more interesting foreign fish. And this accumulation of semantic layers returns us to those dead fish but also to other symbols with similar sea-faring, imperial associations, discussed elsewhere (the colonies in *When We Used to Have a House in the Country*, fig. 1.2; the old sailor in *Time Past and Present*, fig. 1.8; the sea shell and the little boat in *Mother*, fig. 3.19).

Finally, this picture, both thematically and visually (notice the models' poses and the chromatic dominance of blood red) harks back to preoccupations of women's physical suffering broached directly and indirectly in other works (*Love*, fig. 4.34; *Bride*, fig. 4.35) and as a central theme in later ones (abuse of religious and sexual power in the Father Amaro series, figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27; *Nativity*, fig. 7.3 in the Virgin Mary cycle; the *Untitled Abortion Series*, figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49, in at least one of which (fig. 4.25) the rivers of blood of abortion echo those of traumatic childbirth in *First Mass*).

In Paula Rego, in any case, blood, like iconography, has unfathomable origins and multiple semantic possibilities, like the blood on the apron of the figure contemplating events from on high in Rego's picture here: good wife and mother readying the family's Christmas meal? Midwife ushering in the next generation of empire builders? Abortionist helping an unwilling mother cut short unwanted male lineages? Lamenting mother weeping for a sacrificial *mater dolorosa* or female Christ? Pagan priestess, arms stretched out in blessing or menace, engaged in a profane sacrifice that challenges the rituals of the Christian priests that

very moment disembarking in a new world? Is the blood that of a virgin miscarrying or aborting the Son of God?

In Alencar's novel, Iracema is the talismanic virgin of her tribe, whose virginity had guaranteed the protective power in war of the magic *jurema* potion, but she surrenders her virtue to Martim, the Portuguese warrior, condemns her own tribe to extinction, bears Martim a son and promptly dies. The new Brazil her son supposedly represents may be technically miscegenated but its Indian mothers are dead and the black slave labour upon which the nation was built was erased both in literature and art.³ Not unlike the hundreds of thousands of infanticides, illegal abortions and resulting maternal deaths which over the centuries helped preserve the illusion that sex is always consenting, takes place within marriage and produces children who are always wanted.

Alternatively, we have the dark scenarios of children (and nations) either born or sometimes unborn, to mothers who may or may not survive, possibly begotten without consent, sometimes upon what are no more than chubby-cheeked children — the girl in *First Mass*, the school children still in their school uniform in the abortion pictures (figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49) — by an assortment of conquering men and gods (figs. 4.19; 4.20; 4.21).

Paula Rego's picture introduces meaningful changes to Meirelles' original, the most salient being the introduction of the sea and ships, absent in the work of the Brazilian artist, who simply depicts large groups of Indians observing the activities of the priest in what appears to be an entirely unconcerned way. In Rego, in contrast, in the picture within the picture, a few figures of native Americans hide behind a tree and observe the proceedings of the newly disembarked arrivals. And within the space of the room depicted, the recumbent figures of a suffering woman, a lifeless doll, an unidentifiable body, two dead fish, an inanimate duck, a turkey possibly about to be slaughtered, and blood of unknown origin, add to a narrative that portends much, but almost certainly not a happy ending.

3 See for example David Brookshaw, *Paradise Betrayed: Brazilian Literature of the Indian* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1988); Ria Lemaire, 'Re-reading Iracema: The Problem of the Representation of Women in the Construction of a National Brazilian Identity', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 26.2 (Winter 1989), 59–72; Maria Manuel Lisboa, 'Admirável Mundo Novo? A Primeira Missa no Brasil de Paula Rego' in João César de Castro Rocha (ed.), *Nenhum Brasil existe: pequena enciclopédia* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks Editora, 2003), pp. 73–91.

6. I Am Coming to Your Kingdom, Prince Horrendous: Scary Stories for Baby, Perfect Stranger and Me

You use folk tales — children do and we do — we interpret the world through stories; the Bible ... this is it, stories, making sense of things — everybody makes in their own way sense of things, but if you have stories it helps.

Paula Rego

*'Is it dark down there, Prince Horrendous?
Dark down there with Betsy Skull?
Is it dark down there
Where the grass grows through the hair?
Is it dark in the under-land of Null?'*
*'There is light down here, Perfect Stranger,
Light that frolics round my throne,
Light down here,
Past the horror and the fear.
There is light in the ultimate bone' [...]*
*'I am coming to your kingdom, Prince Horrendous,
Coming late or soon to claim my own
Stolen bride, stolen bride.
I will snatch her from your side
By the red light that flickers in the bone' [...]*
*'I will overthrow your kingdom, Prince Horrendous,
I will seize upon the lady of my bliss.
I will make your darling mine
Where the bones in splendour shine,*

Though warned of doom by all the bells of Dis'.

Helen Adam, 'The Bells of Dis'¹

*Vices, sickness, epidemics, sores,
Surely fermented in the rubbish,
What decay in creatures so brutish,
And what moonlight on your pinafores.*

Cesário Verde, 'Childhood'

It's Fantastic

The genre of the fantastic is a broad church, which covers the areas of fantasy, the supernatural (including nursery rhymes, fairy tales, folk tales, horror), gothic literature, science fiction and the metaphysical (the latter including, of course, straightforward religion, which is the truth for believers and fantasy or horror for non-believers). In the abundant theoretical literature that has pondered the genre in its various permutations, a broad consensus prevails that sees the fantastic as a means of exploring the fearful, the forbidden, that which is censored, suppressed or elided from orthodoxy, social convention and the rules of the body politic. Thus for Frederic Jameson the fantastic involves 'the identification and naming of otherness [as] one of the litmus tests of a society's religious and political beliefs (Jameson, 1975, 52). Tzvetan Todorov sees the genre as masking forbidden and repressed desires (Todorov, 1977). For Jean-Paul Sartre (1947), the proper function of fantasy is to transform the world, *this* world, rather than to invent alternative ones. Maurice Lévy (1968) sees the fantastic as the compensation that man (*sic.*) provides for himself, at the level of the imagination, for what he has lost at the level of faith. And Rosemary Jackson (1981) argues that fantastic literature tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence.

Science fiction [is] the literary genre that embodies 'not only a reflecting of, but also *on* reality', a process [called] 'cognitive estrangement', such that the literary experience that links the author's and the reader's imaginations rests on elements common to the reality of both parties

1 I first came across a reference to this poem in Marina Warner, whose work is abundantly used in this chapter.

[...] distorted to make the familiar unfamiliar, thus introducing an observational distance that makes possible fresh insights into the present [...]. The Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky[’s term *ostranenie* [... indicates], ‘defamiliarization, a making strange... of object, a renewal of perception’, ‘a forcing us to notice’. (Krabbenhoft, 2001, 123–36)

And of course the forbidden, the illicit, the terrifying, the *unheimlich* are where Paula Rego feels most at home.

Prince? Frog? Or Worse?

In Helen Adam’s poem, *Prince Horrendous*, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, a hero worthy of a seat of honour in the Brothers Grimm’s imaginarium, may represent Death. In a paradise of misogynistic fantasies where women know their place and the loveliest kind of woman, as Edgar Allan Poe opined, was a dead one (Poe, 1951, 982), there may be many ways to skin a cat, and all are fine, as long as, like Betsy Shull, she/it remains dead. But what if Perfect Stranger turned out to be not a knight in shining armour arriving like Orpheus to snatch his beloved Eurydice from the Kingdom of the Dead, but, as in Gluck’s opera, a woman speaking in the male voice, and possibly out to rescue herself or a sister?²

Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Andrea Dworkin, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Elizabeth Bronfen, Nina Auerbach and Annette Kolodny, to name but a few, understood the need to expose the parameters that defined the kingdom of *Prince Horrendous*. Women writers and artists, from early pioneers like Artemisia Gentileschi³ to

2 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1B85UQT4AY>

3 Art recapitulates life and then does it again. Artemisia Gentileschi’s portrayals of bloody attacks on powerful men, for example (Holofernes, the Elders who defamed Susanna and endangered her life in the apocrypha to the Book of Daniel) may have been provoked by her rape in 1612 by Agostino Tassi. In the context of the Me Too movement, Fringe First and Total Theatre Award-winning theatre company Breach restaged Tassi’s trial for the rape, in a piece entitled *It’s True, It’s True, It’s True*. Nothing is ever really new under Heaven and on Earth. Interestingly, Gentileschi’s work offers us another link to Paula Rego: both women drew upon an image almost always claimed by male artists as their sex’s monopoly, namely an artists’ self-portraits in the act of practicing their art. Gentileschi’s *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (1638–1639, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemisia_Gentileschi#/media/File:Self-portrait_as_the_Allegory_of_Painting_\(La_Pittura\)_-_Artemisia_Gentileschi.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemisia_Gentileschi#/media/File:Self-portrait_as_the_Allegory_of_Painting_(La_Pittura)_-_Artemisia_Gentileschi.jpg)) finds an echo in Rego’s *Joseph’s Dream* of 1990 (fig. 3.10).

Paula Rego in our time, have focused not on skinned female cats but instead on those whose nine lives may be sufficient to enable the waging of bloody gender war in which significant victories can be won. The original Puss in Boots was female (Zipes, 2012), and it is high time for that stage light to be redirected back to where it belongs.

In the popular imagination the figure most readily identifiable with the idea of Prince Horrendous is surely that of Bluebeard, Perrault's arch-villain and serial wife-killer, so evil that although parents above a certain age know the story from childhood, their offspring will not find it now for sale in any bookshop. The real-life Bluebeard, however, unlike his dark facial hair, may not have been morally monochromatic: the infamous fifteenth-century nobleman who supposedly inspired the tale, Gilles, Baron de Rais, Lord of Brittany, Anjou and Poitou, is best known for two things: first, the murder between 1432 and 1440 of dozens or possibly hundreds of children; second, and more surprisingly, his alliance as joint military commander and comrade-in-arms of that great feminist icon, Joan of Arc. There is mad and there is mad: some of the voices in our heads sound worryingly like those in theirs. Or, as Hannibal Lecter famously said to FBI agent Clarice Starling, his nemesis, avatar and, in due course, lover, 'some of our stars are the same, Clarice' (Harris (a), 1991, 533). 'The reason you caught me is that we're *just alike*' (ibid., 53); 'It takes one to catch one' (ibid., 71). A worrisome notion, but unavoidable too, when considering the influence not just of fairy tales, nursery rhymes and canonical literature but also of historical and political realities in the work of Paula Rego: someone who, like other women artists and writers, have been known to lose their rag when faced with the status quo's version of Bluebeard in societies defined by misogyny, open or otherwise. Some bearded ladies cast aside their role as freaks, run away from the circus, dye their facial hair blue and proceed to wreak havoc upon the world. More power to their elbow/wrist/hand/pen/brush.

Paula Rego is possibly the most narrative artist of her time. In an endlessly repeated tag attached to her work, every picture tells a story. Over the years these stories have included social and political narratives, archives of gender and national conflict, biblical narratives, folk tales, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, newspaper articles and images drawing on literary works from Portugal, Great Britain, France, Spain

and Germany, to name but a few. This chapter will consider three different groups of such images. First, those drawn from children's fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Second, images drawn from five different literary sources: the three sister-texts by Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys and Polly Teale, namely *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *After Mrs. Rochester*; and two Portuguese texts: Alexandre Herculano's novella, *The Lady with the Cloven Hoof (A Dama Pé de Cabra)* and Hélia Correia's follow-on short story, 'Enchantment' ('Fascinação').⁴ And third, the picture *Inês de Castro*, based on a real-life historical event. Very different images from different periods, but all sharing the theme of violence in the name of love, and all casting a series of Princesses Horrendous.

Sweet Dreams, Scary Nightmares: Fairy Tales and Nursery Rhymes

In 'Nursery Rhymes: Mirrors of a Culture', Roberta Hawkins argues that 'careful reading [of nursery rhymes] will reveal that these nonsensical, ear-pleasing, seemingly innocent verses of childhood soberly reflect much of the world-view of a society and its unique features (Hawkins, 1971, 617) and that 'they can truly be said to mirror the culture that gave them life' (ibid., 620). Mirror it and help to survive it, as demonstrated by Robert Desnos' tales for children, *Chantefables* (Desnos, 2014), which outlived him following his arrest by the Gestapo in February 1944, and subsequently became standard fare for young readers in French Schools (Nunley, 2010). Desnos, an early member of André Breton's Surrealist group like Georges Bataille — who'd also previously written on children's tales (Bataille, *Documents*, n. 2, 1930) — had pondered the importance of children's literature and comic strips as expressions of resistance in times of war and under occupation (Nunley, 2010, 287):

4 My translations of the Herculano and Correia narratives are available in Appendices A and B as well as on academia.edu:
https://www.academia.edu/26151863/Translation_of_Alexandre_Herculanos_A_Dama_P%C3%A9_de_Cabra
https://www.academia.edu/26066522/Translation_of_H%C3%A9lia_Correias_Fascina%C3%A7%C3%A3o

Unlike those texts Desnos wrote for the clandestine press that articulate in no uncertain terms a call to action against the Germans, *Chantefables* functions less as a primer on what constitutes appropriate behavior when France is at war than an invitation to embrace *the irrepressible urge to misbehave*. *Such behavior is, time and again, associated with freedom*. (Nunley, 2010, 288, italics added)

In *Cradle and All: A Cultural and Psychoanalytic Study of Nursery Rhymes*, Lucy Rollin argues that while folktales offer a way of thinking about the past, nursery rhymes describe reality as it is now and the future as we hope it might be (Rollin, 1992, 5). Or, as Marina Warner suggested, whilst fairy tales are not credible, they nevertheless ‘face two ways: towards a past realm of belief on one side and towards a sceptical present on the other’ (Warner 2014, 2). Like Desnos before her, Warner, too, understands the potential for dissidence inherent in what numerous statuses quo, perhaps unwittingly, offer young minds in the process of being formed: namely ‘the pleasures of imaginative entry that does not have intellectual or religious authority [...] and therefore do[es] not command belief or repudiation. The tongue can be very free when it is speaking outside the jurisdiction of religion’ (Warner 2014, 2). For Warner, fairy tales may be ‘addressing the future as well as the past [...] but they] have a basis in history, in the lived experience of men and women’ (Warner, 2014, 81–83). The grim brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, for example, were invited to compile their tales both as a form of distraction in the context their country’s suffering during the Napoleonic invasions, and as a response to the hunger for cultural affirmation through the revival of national folk tales during a time of war.

Scholars of children’s stories and fairy tales (Marina Warner, Maria Tatar, Bruno Bettelheim and Jack Zipes) broadly agree that these narratives address both personal and social anxieties: fear of violence, abandonment or death, familial troubles, sexual and existential anxiety and wariness about social turbulence. ‘Snow White’ addresses parental death and failure, sexual jealousy and fantasies of rescue; ‘Cinderella’ addresses bullying, envy and retribution; ‘Bluebeard’ addresses misogyny and marital violence; and they all, without exception, address the dangers of female ambition and curiosity, and the retribution that befalls a woman who disobeys the rules of the status quo (the nation),

as embodied in the figures of the king, the father and the husband. Curiously, however, and that is what has interested the scholars, writers, artists and film-makers who have followed in the footsteps of, and reinvented, the original tales of the likes of Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm is that, as is the case also with the large corpus of nursery rhymes passed down to generations immemorial of children, a common denominator links them all: namely, a brand of violence always on the brink of becoming unbridled, perpetrated largely by adults, but which it is assumed children will understand: 'Occupying [a] double register, the fairy tale invites adults to experience it knowingly, their experiences lying athwart the pleasure a child takes in the same material' (Warner, 2014, 147). Elsewhere Warner writes as follows:

Fairy tales offer enigmatic, terrifying images of what the prospects are, of the darkest horrors life may bring. Yet the stories usually imagine ways of opposing this state of affairs, *or at worst, of having revenge on those who inflict suffering, of turning the status quo upside down, as well as defeating the natural course of events*; they dream of reprisals, and they sketch alternative plot lines. They are messages of hope arising from desperate, ordinary situations. (Warner, 2014, 95–96, italics added)

More of this when we come to Paula Rego.

The world of Fairy, then, is, one might argue, a world fit only for heroes. Or heroines. In *The Redundancy of Courage*, Timothy Mo's unforgettable Adolf Ng maintained that 'there's no such thing as a hero — only ordinary people asked extraordinary things in terrible circumstances — and delivering' (Mo, 2002, 407). In the midst of horror, Ng probably envisaged altruism rather than violence — even needs-must, self-defence violence — as the order of the day. But in the places where fairies live, only hardy heroes (and even more so heroines) with well-honed survival skills (with all that those entail) can hope to survive. Who would send their child there, unless s/he was armed to the teeth? Generations of children, pre-Disney and even pre-toned-down Disney, will remember the terror of reading 'Bluebeard'; of being subjected to the gory description of the pain endured by Andersen's little mermaid after she forsook her real self and her fish tail for love of a Prince (if not Horrendous, at least not very faithful); of being traumatized, in the original version of Bambi, by the spectacle of a mother's death. What

kind of parent tells a child such stories? A sadist? What kind of mother would send her daughter on an errand through a forest infested with wolves with no more than a casual warning about not speaking to strangers? Presumably a foolish mother, or else a scheming stepmother in maternal clothing. Both, however, can also serve a pedagogical purpose: violence may beget violence, but even at the risk of escalating hostilities, sometimes it is the only solution to a recurring problem.

Why Are You Glaring at Me?



Fig. 6.1 Paula Rego, *Red Riding Hood (Mother Takes Revenge)* (2003). Pastel on paper, 104 x 79 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

As Maria Tatar would have it, 'fairy tales register an effort on the part of both women and men to develop maps for coping with personal anxieties, family conflicts, social fictions, and the myriad frustrations of everyday life' (Tatar, 1999, xi). But, more optimistically, fairy tales also 'taught mankind in olden times, and teach children to this day [...] to



Fig. 6.2 Paula Rego, *Red Riding Hood (Mother Wears Wolf's Pelt)* (2003). Pastel on paper, 84 x 67 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and high spirits', and in them good always wins against the forces of evil (Benjamin, 1996, 157). Walter Benjamin may have been a little over-optimistic in this view. It might take a woman to be realistic:

At childhood's end, the houses petered out
 into playing fields, the factory, allotments
 kept, like mistresses, by kneeling married men,
 the silent railway line, the hermit's caravan,
 till you came at last to the edge of the woods.
 It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf.

He stood in a clearing, reading his verse out loud
 in his wolfy drawl, a paperback in his hairy paw,
 red wine staining his bearded jaw. What big ears
 he had! What big eyes he had! What teeth!
 In the interval, I made quite sure he spotted me,
 sweet sixteen, never been, babe, waif, and bought me a drink,

[...] I took an axe
 to a willow to see how it wept. I took an axe to a salmon

to see how it leapt. I took an axe to the wolf
 as he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat, and saw
 the glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones.
 I filled his old belly with stones. I stitched him up.
 Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone. (Carol
 Anne Duffy, 'Little Red Cap')

Of course to fight evil one must truly understand it, possibly even become a little bit like it. This would seem to be what happens in Carol Anne Duffy and in Angela Carter's 'The Company of Wolves', her re-telling of 'Red Riding Hood', which culminates in the wayward girl living a happily-ever-after with a twist: 'See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf' (Carter, 1995, 118).

Is your blood curdling yet?

Gamekeepers turn into poachers more often than we like to think, sometimes because in trying to catch criminals the cop discovers he or she understands them all too well: *Hannibal*, Thomas Harris' third novel of the Hannibal Lecter series, ends with Clarice Starling catching the cannibal, Lecter, and he her. They fall in love (they are after all twin souls, that's why they succeeded in entrapping one another) and settle down to a troubling happiness (troubling for the reader) ever after. With no guarantees, admittedly, because at any given point the precarious balance may shatter, with either killing the other or both doing so: 'Someday [...] somewhere Starling may hear a crossbow string and come to some unwilling awakening, if indeed she even sleeps. [...] We can only learn so much and live' (Harris (b), 2000, 562). Twin souls, after all, are just that, and in Thomas Harris the wolf feels just as tender towards the girl as in Angela Carter, but both are natural-born killers even so.

Sara Maitland's beautiful and creepy *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of Our Forests and Fairy Tales* is a composite of the biography of various forests and unsettling rewrites of traditional fairy tales. In one of its re-told tales, 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf', a mysterious identification between the woodcutter (here a forest ranger and game keeper) and the wolf sees the former attempting first to enable the latter's violence and then to save it from the encroaching forces of civilized society encapsulated in the figures of the forestry officials, the grandmother ('a hideous heap of blubber and peroxide blubbering') and Red Riding Hood herself (the 'stupid little brat') (Maitland, 213, 245,

248). But the game is up for unreconstructed beasts and the man knows it, so he euthanizes the wolf by shooting it and then hangs himself.

Depending on which way our sympathies incline, girls — whether silly, disobedient or stubborn — who persist in ignoring the warnings of mothers, dwarves, fairy godmothers and other do-gooders, may not really deserve happy endings, but no one ever said that life was fair, and sometimes (though not often) whether one likes it or not, they come out on top. This certainly seems to be the case in Paula Rego's work. And with any luck, in the battle against wolves, mothers who do their duty by their little girls may also get a nice fur wrap out of it. Some unintended consequences can turn out to be quite delightful. Depending on one's ideas of right and wrong.

In Theory Anyone Can Be a Fairy

Or at least that is the case if we are indulging in word games. But it may not be just word games. Early critical theory, and specifically the likes of Northrop Frye and his successors operating under the umbrella of Structuralism — Vladimir Propp, Julien Greimas — and, after them, others already mentioned, including Jack Zipes, Marina Warner, Lucy Rollin, Maria Tatar, all return to the basic principle that literature and art can be reduced to a finite number of narratives, streamlined into a limited number of categories, all beginning with the basic plots of children's narratives and fairy tales, grouped according to categories, themes, actors and actions. And beyond the original Structuralist formulation, other schools of theory also staked their claim in the consideration of fairy tales, the two principal ones, each differently but equally relevant when thinking about Paula Rego, being Psychoanalysis and Social/Political Theory: in each case with a particular though not exclusive focus on gender.

Freud & Daughters: A Family Concern

Fairy tales deal with magic, the supernatural, or, in Freudian terminology, the uncanny (*unheimlich*), which is always unnerving, scary, creepy. Just like certain artists one might mention. For Freud and his followers down the corridors of sorcerous abnormality, the uncanny, in its several

formulations, articulates anxieties about familial tension, oedipal conflict, castration anxiety, sibling rivalry, penis envy, and motherphobia: all brands of psychic anguish that, for Freud, in *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and its Discontents*, and for Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, are the *sine qua non* for developing the ethical mechanisms that render group dynamics and social interaction possible. It is not for nothing that dark, tangled forests loom large and menacing in children's literature ('Snow White', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Red Riding Hood', 'Hansel and Gretel'): a genre which, like jokes and popular art, offers a home to the id's forbidden desires, and dominates in the study of the psyche.

The fairy tale journey may look like an outward trek across plains and mountains, through castles and forests, but the actual movement is inward, into the lands of the soul. The dark path of the fairytale forest lies in the shadow of our imagination, the depths of our unconscious. To travel to the wood, to face its dangers, is to emerge transformed by this experience. (Terri Windling, 1993, 10)

For Lucy Rollin, as for other students of fantasy and the fantastic mentioned above, 'the products of a collective human effort, such as nursery rhymes, are the result of a culture's projection of the inner concerns of its people' (Rollin, 1992, 11), and, like the genres of the Fantastic and the Gothic, they, in turn, provide 'a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of what cannot be articulated in the more usual, direct way' (Dundes, 1980, 36). And for Bettelheim, too, on the royal road to the unconscious, children's tales are the means of transport of choice, *en route* to resolving life's existential conundra.

Revolution in the Nursery

As we read fairy tales, we simultaneously evoke the cultural experience of the past and allow it to work on our consciousness even as we reinterpret and reshape that experience. (Tatar, xii-xiii)

Marina Warner argues that even if the traditional premises of the fairy tale are reactionary (bad women die, good girls marry princes, happy-ever-afters mean home, marriage, children and continuity), they can also open the door to alternatives: in the hands of the likes of Angela Carter and Paula Rego, even 'in conditions of censorship [...] writers have resorted to folk narrative as protective camouflage: fairy tales

open a door to political fable, the tyrants and ogres could be cast down, justice restored and equality achieved' (Warner, 2014, 153). Along the same lines, Maria Tatar acknowledges that while canonical fairy tales can be 'hopelessly retrograde' (Tatar, 1999, xiii), depending on the reader's slant they can also contain a liberating dimension, for example the granting of power, even if only temporarily, to undesirable women (the ugly sisters in 'Cinderella'), wicked women (the stepmother in 'Snow White') and old ones (the witch in 'Hansel and Gretel').

Marina Warner's suggestion of a revolutionary impetus with national/historical implications, quoted earlier, echoes Jack Zipes innovative readings of fairy tales:

By the beginning of the nineteenth century [...] the literary fairy tale had long since been institutionalized, and [...] assumed different ideological and aesthetic positions within this institutionalization. [...] The literary fairy tale's ascent corresponded to violent and progressive shifts in society and celebrated individualism, subjectivity, and reflection. It featured the narrative voice of the educated author and publisher over communal voices and set new guidelines for freedom of speech and expression. In addition, proprietary rights to a particular tale were established, and the literary tale became a commodity that paradoxically spoke out in the name of the unbridled imagination. Indeed, because it was born out of alienation, the literary fairy tale fostered a search for new 'magical' means to overcome the instrumentalization of the imagination. (Zipes, 2012 quoted in Tatar, 1999, 335–41)

In *Roots of German Nationalism*, Louis Snyder had argued that the Brothers Grimm's tales played a role in the development of modern German nationalism, emphasizing 'such social characteristics as respect for order, belief in the desirability of obedience, subservience to authority, respect for the leader and the hero, veneration of courage and the military spirit, acceptance without protest of cruelty, violence, and atrocity, fear of and hatred for the outsider, and virulent anti-Semitism' (Snyder, 1978, 51). No wonder Hitler liked them. And Jack Zipes follows Walter Benjamin in thinking beyond the written narrative to film (in particular Disney) and arguing that the latter medium's then-revolutionary technological nature 'could either bring about an aestheticization of politics leading to the violation of the masses through fascism, or a politicization of aesthetics that provides the necessary critical detachment for the masses to take charge of their own destiny' (Zipes, 2012 quoted in Tatar, 1999,

342). Elsewhere Zipes maintains that ‘the fable speaks to unequal power relations and prompts those without power to speak in metaphoric codes that can emancipate both the teller and listener’ (Zipes, 2013).

Fairy tales then, can both strengthen the power of those who already had it or, depending on the transformative nature of the hands into which they fall, they can give a voice to the wrath of those who until that point never did. It is true, as Zipes argues, that fairy tales can themselves be magical instruments for changing ourselves and our world in a way conducive to a more peaceful, happier life. It is just that definitions of peace and happiness depend both on the identity of the fairy godmother and of the kind of princess she sponsors. In Paula Rego’s work, as we shall see, princesses are seldom sweet or even pretty, and their teeth would put the average wolf to shame.

Women Telling Tales

Although in fairy tales, as in all other genres, the entitlement to hold the pen, paraphrasing Jane Austen, has been traditionally claimed by men (the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde), Marina Warner, Jack Zipes, Maria Tatar, Karen E. Rowe and Lucy Rollin, to name but a few, have variously drawn attention to the fact that tale-telling, historically — if without acknowledgement — was the domain of mothers, and literarily (in private salons) by women such as Madame d’Aulnoy (Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d’Aulnoy), Mlle. L’Héritier (Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier de Villandon), and Madame de Beaumont (Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont): precursors, assistants and enablers of the better-known men who later laid claim to the stories. The tales of Mother Goose were just that: the tales of *Mother Goose*. Later, under conditions more propitious for the recognition of female authorship, they turned into deviant but now also canonical renditions in the fiction, film and art of Angela Carter, Kiki Smith, Claire Prussian, Dina Goldstein, Catherine Breillat and, in Portugal, Paula Rego and Hélia Correia. All of them, to a woman, giving expression to wayward renditions of what, for those looking with eyes that could see, are undercover social critiques otherwise known as old *wives’* tales: ‘we have noted already how insistently literary raconteurs, both male and

female, validated the authenticity of their folk stories by claiming to have heard them from young girls, nurses, gossips, townswomen, old crones, and wise women' (Tatar, 1999, 306). In Tatar, Marina Warner debates the female etymology of the word 'fairy' (Warner in Tatar 1999, 309–16). Fairies ('*Fées*') are female, and

the female frame narrator, too, is a particularly significant indicator, because it converts into literary convention the belief in women as truth-sayers, those gifted with memory and voice to transmit the culture's wisdom — the silent matter of life itself. [...] *Contes de fées* (fairy tales) are therefore not simply tales told about fairies; implicitly they are tales told by women. In these women's hands, literally and metaphorically, rests the power of birthing, dying, and tale-spinning. (Rowe in Tatar, 1999, 306–7)

It was from female precursors, the mothers and nurses by the hearth that the tales originated, even if they were subsequently handed down by male writers. 'So although male writers and collectors have dominated the production and dissemination of popular wonder tales, they often pass on women's stories from intimate or domestic milieu; their tale-spinners often figure as so many Scheherazades, using narrative to bring about a resolution of satisfaction and justice' (Warner in Tatar, 1999, 311). And Mesdames d'Aulnoy, Heritier and Beaumont, like Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and Oscar Wilde, all acknowledged that the narratives they transmitted were passed on to them by female relatives, governesses, nurses and maid servants (Warner in Tatar, 1999).

Stay by my Cradle till Morning is Nigh: The Nursery Rhymes

Paula Rego has said repeatedly in interviews that whatever the ostensible theme of her pictures, her work is always about Portugal. A statement that requires elaboration, regarding, as it does, a body of work that has drawn inspiration from literature from all over the world (Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, Jean Rhys, Jean Genet, Franz Kafka, Henry Darger, Blake Morrison, Fernando de Rojas) to opera (*Rigoletto*, *Aida*, *Turandot*) not to mention popular culture and children's tales (the traditional fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault, Hans

Christian Andersen, J. M. Barrie mentioned above), as well as nursery rhymes and film (Walt Disney):⁵

As a literary species, nursery rhymes are as singularly British as any of its national institutions but, equally, they belong — together with fairy tales or children’s games to a wider genus of lore which contributes to create our collective unconscious. (Miller, 1991, 53)

‘All about Portugal’, then, must surely refer to those tendencies Portugal has shared with other countries the world over at given points in their history: misogyny, repression of specific types of difference, and violence of various forms.

Rego’s works inspired by children’s tales and nursery rhymes do not eschew any of the violence of her other works, and arguably escalate it. The question for her viewers, however, must be whether her interpretations add a new dimension of horror to the originals or merely lay bare what was always already there.

Fans of horror stories, apocalyptic narratives and science fiction will know that those marketed for children and adolescents are in many ways more uncompromising than the adult versions of the genres:⁶ just like the original, pre-Disney versions of the Grimms, Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen. The savagery directed at young minds may be grounded in one of three possibilities: that the young won’t grasp the full horror of what they are reading; that they will and that understanding the full scale of possible evil will serve as a cautionary lesson; or that children will understand and enjoy it because, as per Freud, or Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, a child prior to the acquisition of social mores is anarchic, immoral, incestuous and violent. If so, we would argue, what Rego presents us with in what follows, as indeed in images discussed in previous chapters (the *Girl and Dog* series, *In the Wilderness* and some of the *Peter Pan* images (the latter not discussed

5 For an illuminating survey of these works see John McEwen, *Paula Rego* (London: Phaidon, 1992).

6 See for example narratives of apocalypse such as: Timothy Findley, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (Ontario: Penguin, 1987); William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002); Judith Merrill, *The Shadow on the Hearth* (New York: Doubleday, 1950); Robert C. O’Brien, *Z for Zacchariah* (London: Puffin, 1998); Monique Peyrouton de Ladebat, *The Village that Slept*, trans. by Thelma Niklaus (London: The Bodley Head, 1963); Meg Rosoff, *How I Live Now* (London: Puffin, 2005); Robert E. Swindells, *Brother in the Land* (Oxford: Oxford Children’s Modern Classics, 1999).

here), to name but a few) simply answers to the undoctored reality of uncontained child sexuality and violence. Just like the Grimms & Co.: although as any sensible child would say when caught out, ‘they [grown-ups] started it’:

Rego’s images [...] suggest that the world is discombobulated, and that childhood is a period of abuse and danger for children, for adults take a sadistic sexual pleasure in administering punishment. [...] Rego is a partisan artist. She takes sides — particularly for children and women — as she seeks to uncover the darkness of stories that we read and tell ourselves. But she does not depict people as helpless victims. Rather they are enmeshed in distorted social relations. [...] Rego bores into the troubled psyches of the characters of her tales and is not afraid to spill blood and guts in her re-creations. (Zipes, 2013, 139–40)

What’s It All About?

In the introduction to their encyclopaedic volume, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, Iona and Peter Opie state that nursery rhymes have been vested with a complex web of mystic symbolisms that link them to social and political events. Attempts to identify characters in the rhymes with real persons have led to multiple, sometimes contradictory theories, some easier to substantiate than others. Humpty Dumpty, for example, may or may not have been Richard III; ‘Bah, Bah, Black Sheep’ may refer to the export tax imposed on wool in Britain in 1275; ‘Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary’ may refer to Scottish unrest at the reinstatement of Roman Catholicism in Scotland under Mary, Queen of Scots; ‘Who Killed Cock Robin’ may allude to the downfall of Robert Walpole’s ministry in 1742; and ‘How Many Miles to Babylon’ may allude to the progress of Christians towards Heaven.

Other critics have opted for a theoretical slant to the interpretation of nursery rhymes. Lucy Rollin, for example, has adopted a psychoanalytic approach that leads her to speculate that rhymes such as ‘Peter Pumpkin’ in the *Mother Goose* collection reveal a fear of women (milk maids, mermaids, castrating women) and the need to control them (Rollin, 1992, 41–47). She also argues that nursery rhymes define men against each other but women in relation to men (*ibid.*, 510). Whereas in folk tales and fairy tales marriage is the end of the story, in nursery rhymes

marriage, and its ever-after, including children, is the story, and one often characterized by strife and violence (ibid., 65, 66). For her, then, old mother Hubbard is the phallic female *par excellence* (ibid., 71); 'Huck a bye baby' expresses controlled maternal hatred (ibid., 84); references to eating suggest the repressed desire to devour one's children (ibid., 88); and undisguised misogyny informs 'Tom married a wife on Sunday' (ibid., 107).

Other aspects of domestic life come under attack too, including pets. Rollin suggests that in nursery rhymes ambivalence towards animals (cruelty and bestiality, what animals 'give us and how they disgust us, our love and contempt for them: the way in which tenderness can co-exist with cruelty, [...] the victimization of cats and dogs without regret because they have grown old and weak', ibid., 17–2,) all express the need for social control and self-control. 'Nursery rhymes play safe: the animals involved are always domestic, nature is tamed. The drives are there but can be controlled' (ibid., 17–2; 36–40). All, I would argue now, instincts with which Paula Rego has engaged in her work of a lifetime. Whether violence is controlled in her images is another matter. We would say not.

Rego's *Nursery Rhymes* were published by Marlborough Graphics in 1989 as a portfolio of 25 etchings and aquatints produced in an edition of 50. Portfolios number 1 to 15 were produced as a deluxe boxed version comprising 25 etchings (of which two were hand tinted) in an edition of 50, plus one untitled image from an edition of 15.

Black Sheep, Strange Creatures and Dangerous Rogues

Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool?
 Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.
 One for the master,
 One for the dame,
 And one for the little boy
 Who lives down the lane.

Sexual innuendo is something in which Paula Rego has frequently indulged and she seldom pulls her punches. 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' is surely one of the most anodyne of all the nursery rhymes. As is the case with others, its origins are open to debate, although Peter and Iona



Fig. 6.3 Paula Rego, *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep* (1989). Etching and aquatint, plate size: 31.3 x 21.6 m; paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Opie speculate that it refers to the a period in the Middle Ages when the weaving of wool was a cottage industry and England passed a law forbidding its export as the raw product. The one bag for the master was wool stretched as much as possible before being woven and passed on to the feudal lord as his due. The bag for the dame was the un-stretched, unwoven material that was fraudulently saved by the serfs for themselves. In 1275 an export tax was imposed on wool, and the bag for the little boy who lives down the lane may refer to the amount needed to pay the tax collector (Opie, Peter and Iona, 1997, 1142).

Rego's print, playing her usual game of disproportionality in scale, depicts a slender girl leaning suggestively between the fore and hind limbs of a massive black sheep. To the right stands a shelf holding three bags of wool and an unidentifiable object on the ground. To the left, seen through a window a short way up a lane, is a small male figure, presumably the little boy of the rhyme.

Sandra Miller discusses the striking blackness of the sheep:

In the *Nursery Rhymes* we witness a return to the mixed cast, which this time also involves a complete reversal of scale: the gambolling creature in *Black Sheep* is a scary black ram seated on a stool, and about to engulf a smaller girl in its embrace. According to the artist, however, the reason for the ram's 'unheimlich' appearance is due to a trivial incident: the print was left too long in the aquatint bath. It was precisely the incongruity of situations such as this that attracted Paula Rego when she undertook the project: 'I love the oddity and the unexpectedness of the *Baa Baa Black Sheep* — the whole thing of a sheep answering is wonderful ... if you see the drawing he has quite a sweet expression on his face, the sheep; then he got so dark in the print; I thought, oh, my God! Doesn't he look like the Devil?' (Miller, 1991, 58)

The macabre darkness of the sheep may have come about by accident, but its size and pose did not, nor did the decision to preserve this version of the print, whose menace chimes with Rego's earlier illustrations of Portuguese folk tales for children: *Two Men Separated by a River of Blood*, *Girl Sitting on a Well With Heads in Foreground* and the better known *Branca Flor*. But equally significant in this image, bearing in mind Zipes' notion of a fable as something 'that speaks to unequal power relations and prompts those without power to speak in metaphoric codes that can emancipate both the teller and listener' (Zipes, 2013), what is striking in this image taken from a verse about serfs tricking their master is the noticeable absence of that master. Yes Sir becomes no Sir. There is no Sir here. Here, as ever, Rego gazes from the side of the disregarded:

Paula Rego has always identified with the least, not the mighty, taken the child's eye view, and counted herself among the commonplace and the disregarded, by the side of the beast, not the beauty.... her sympathy with naiveté, her love of its double character, its weakness and its force, has led her to *Nursery Rhymes* as a new source for her imagery. (Warner, 1994, 8)

The collusion here is between a creature who perhaps just this once will not be fleeced, and a girl who at least this time will unleash her most forbidden desires. The arrangement of the figures, moreover, echoes another that of another of Rego's most famous paintings, *The Family* (fig. 2.14) of 1988, the year before the *Nursery Rhymes* exhibition in 1989 (her first with Marlborough Fine Art, and which signalled her move into the big league in the visual arts, in Britain and worldwide). Nineteen eighty-eight was the year Rego's husband Victor Willing died, twenty

years after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Willing, himself an artist, was cruelly incapacitated by the disease, a condition alluded to in the earlier *Girl and Dog* images of the mid-eighties, which Rego stated were 'about Vic' (see chapter 1). The original title of *The Family* was *The Raising of Lazarus*. In it, the poses of the various figures are construable, as is the case of the *Girl and Dog* images (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), as a combination of caring and attacking as well as indicating ambivalent (incestuous) family relations. A link can therefore be established between it and the quasi-erotic arrangement of the black sheep and girl in the etching. From incest to bestiality with an animal which might be a family pet is but one step along the spectrum of perversion.



Fig. 6.4 Paula Rego, *Ring-a-Ring o' Roses* (1989). Etching and aquatint, plate size: 21.2 x 21.6 cm; paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Ring-a-ring o'roses,
A pocket full of posies,
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down.⁴

Peter and Iona Opie (Opie, P. and I. 1997, 1142–1143) trace the origins of this nursery rhyme to the time of the Black Death, the great plague that swept through Europe from central Asia in the fourteenth century and killed 30–60% of the population of Europe. A red rash on the cheeks (a ring of roses) was the first symptom, followed by sneezing (a-tishoo). The disease progressed quickly and death usually followed. In the absence of any treatment, people often carried a posey of medicinal herbs thought to ward off the disease.

Rego's etching of 1989 is a jolly depiction of a circle of dancers in the open air, with a strong echo of the painting *The Dance* (fig. 2.5) of 1988, for which her son Nick Willing posed. Painted the year Victor Willing died, *The Dance* has been described as 'saying goodbye to Vic'. The strong echoes of ambivalent love (when your lover turns into your patient and then dies), grief, bad omens and the reality of death in these four images (*Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*, *Ring-a-Ring o'Roses*, *The Family* (fig. 2.14) and *The Dance* (fig. 2.5) carry into other images from the nursery-rhymes cycle, all of the same period, foregrounding, I would insist, rather than introducing anew, a horror that was always already there in the originals.

There was a man of double deed,
 Who sowed his garden full of seed;
 When the seed began to grow,
 'Twas like a garden full of snow;
 When the snow began to melt,
 'Twas like a ship without a belt;
 When the ship began to sail,
 'Twas like a bird without a tail;
 When the bird began to fly,
 'Twas like an eagle in the sky;
 When the sky began to roar,
 'Twas like a lion at my door;
 When my door began to crack,
 'Twas like a stick across my back;
 When my back began to smart,
 'Twas like a penknife in my heart;
 And when my heart began to bleed,
 'Twas death, and death, and death indeed.

This is possibly one of the least-explained and most haunting of the corpus of nursery rhymes. A not very persuasive link has been made



Fig. 6.5 Paula Rego, *There Was a Man of Double Deed* (1989). Etching and aquatint, plate size: 31.3 x 21.5 cm; paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

with William Blake's 'A Poison Tree'. Whether or not the two are linked, it is undeniable that each poem, in itself, does resonate with many of the instincts that often reverberate from Rego's work: anger, revenge, destruction.

I was angry with my friend:
 I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
 I was angry with my foe:
 I told it not, my wrath did grow.
 And I watered it in fears.
 Night and morning with my tears:
 And I sunned it with smiles.
 And with soft deceitful wiles.
 And it grew both day and night.
 Till it bore an apple bright.

And my foe beheld it shine.
 And he knew that it was mine.
 And into my garden stole.
 When the night had veild the pole;
 In the morning glad I see;
 My foe outstretched beneath the tree. (Blake, 2001, 43)

Rego's version of the nursery rhyme, unusually for her, foregrounds a woman as the victim, on her knees, her back being beaten by a well-dressed man, the spectacle observed by a disproportionately large male figure peering over the roof of a building smaller than he is. This odd-one-out image does not lend itself to interpretation within Rego's catalogue of images of empowered women, other than possibly as a warning to her sex: might it be that when men get the upper hand it is death, and death indeed for women? We have been warned.

One Elizabeth, Two Marys and Assorted Royals

Given the unclear origins of most nursery rhymes, it is curious that a number of them have been linked to three female figures in Tudor and Stuart history in England and Scotland: Mary I and Elizabeth I, unsatisfactory offspring by virtue of their sex in the eyes their father, Henry VIII, himself a Bluebeard to five dead wives and one whose survival was a near miss;⁷ and Mary Stuart, whose father, James V of Scotland felt much the same as Henry about his own daughter ('it came wi' a lass, it'll gang wi' a lass').⁸ Both, as it turned out, were short-sighted monarchs needlessly obsessed with patrilinearity, and duly punished for it by begetting short-lived sons and historically-significant daughters who (two of them, counter-intuitively, by dying childless)

7 Henry VIII's six wives, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard and Katherine Parr have been immortalized in the rhyme 'divorced, beheaded, dead, divorced, beheaded, survived'. Katherine Parr, the last wife, was nearly condemned to death for her Protestant sympathies, but at the last moment the king spared her and died shortly after.

8 Mary Stuart's father, dying without a male heir, mistakenly foresaw the end of the Stuart dynasty, which had begun with Marjorie Bruce. Henry VIII's only son died young, not long after his father; next in line to the throne was Mary, who married Philip II of Spain but died childless; she was succeeded by Elizabeth, who remained unmarried. After Elizabeth I died in 1603 without an heir, Mary's son, James VI of Scotland became James I of England. Although an official Act of Union did not come into full force until 1707, James called himself King of Great Britain.

brought into being the nation of Great Britain as the result of the union between England and Scotland. It may be an awareness of these epoch-making women who between them brought about a great age (the Elizabethan) and a powerful nation, that led Rego to link five of her twenty-five nursery rhyme etchings to these three women: *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary*, *Little Miss Muffett*, *Three Blind Mice*, *Rock-a-Bye Baby* and *A Frog He Would a-Wooing Go*.



Fig. 6.6 Paula Rego, *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary I*. Etching and aquatint. Plate size: 21.3 x 21.3 cm; paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells, and cockle shells,
And pretty maids all in a row.



Fig. 6.7 Paula Rego, *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary II*. Etching and aquatint. Plate size: 21.2 x 22.1 cm; paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, not included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

The Opies suggest that this rhyme refers to Mary Queen of Scots, who went to France when she was a young girl to obtain her education. While she was in France, Elizabeth I became Queen of England. Under her, the Church of England, already schismatic from the time of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII's break from Rome, became officially Protestant. Scotland was torn by religious conflict between the old and new faiths, with Protestantism gaining the ascendancy towards the end of the life of James V of Scotland. When Mary returned to Scotland after the deaths of her father and her husband, the short-lived Francis II of France, her Catholic religion put her at odds with a large part of the Scottish nobility as well as with her powerful royal cousin to the south, setting in motion the complex events that would eventually lead to her execution. The reference to bells may have referred to the call to Mass; cockle shells, moreover, were the symbols worn by those going on pilgrimage. The pretty maids all in a row were probably the Four Marys: Mary Stuart

herself and Mary Beaton, Mary Fleming and Mary Livingston, the ladies in waiting who remained faithful to the Scottish queen until her death.⁹

Rego produced two images derived from this nursery rhyme. One (fig. 6.6) depicts three smaller figures suspended over a fourth larger-scale one, their relative sizes presumably alluding to their respective ranks as queen and ladies-in-waiting. The three smaller figures are either hovering in the air over the larger one (guardian angels) or entrapped in the railings or mesh behind, possibly indicating Mary's long imprisonment in England, prior to her execution by her cousin Elizabeth. The other image (fig. 6.7) shows a small, child-like Mary in the foreground, with an arch constructed of shells to her left, what might be either a flower bed or more shells to her right, and facing her, disproportionately large, dark and spectral like the sheep in *Baa Baa*, three female figures. The cockle shells included in the original nursery rhyme and image may also refer to Mary Stuart's French tastes, much criticized in Scotland, including her supposed love for exotic foods, acquired during her period in France. The silver bells, also featured in the second print, are possibly the bells that will toll for her death. Figure 6.6 includes unidentifiable shapes hanging from the rails or mesh, which may or may not be cockle shells, a horse-shoe on the ground to the left of the large female figure and, to her right, small and hovering by her skirt (apron strings), two small girls. In figure 6.7 the three Marys loom large and dark over a small, childlike little girl, possibly Mary Stuart now defeated by forces that the three Marys can only observe from a distance but not control. The cockle shells are either scattered on the ground or fossilized into a small structure, beside which a spade is dug upright into the soil, possibly in preparation for its demolition.

As argued previously, in her visual narratives, whether derived from historical events or fiction, Paula Rego has notably shown reluctance to depict women's deaths, even when the original script would dictate she ought. In *The Maids* (fig. 1.4), for example, of 1987, based on Jean Genet's play of the same title, inspired by the real-life murder of a woman by her maidservants (see chapter 1), Rego's image, as already discussed, depicts the murder about to be committed, but the victim is a man in drag. In *The Coop* (fig. 3.12) of 1987, based on Eça de Queirós'

9 There were in fact four Marys who accompanied Mary Stuart to France on the occasion of her marriage to the then-Dauphin, subsequently King Francis II: Mary Seton, Mary Beaton, Mary Fleming and Mary Livingston.

nineteenth-century novel, what in the novel is Amélia's lonely deathbed scene, in Rego becomes a merry hen party. And in *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary*, too, there may be darkness and foreboding, mainly emanating from the figures of the three attending Marys in each image, but that being the case, it is unlikely that the intended victim would be their royal mistress and friend, whom they would more likely seek to rescue. In Rego, of course, they might succeed: anything is possible, even the re-writing of history.



Fig. 6.8 Paula Rego, *Little Miss Muffet*. Etching and aquatint. Plate size: 21.9 x 21.2 cm; paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Little Miss Muffet
 Sat on a tuffett,
 Eating her curds and whey;
 Along came a spider
 Who sat down beside her
 And frightened Miss Muffet away.

Some sources claim this rhyme was written by the sixteenth-century physician and entomologist Dr Thomas Muffet regarding his stepdaughter Patience (Opie, P. and I., 1997, 382); others claim it refers to

Mary, Queen of Scots' fear of John Knox, the Scottish religious reformer who was her staunch enemy. At first glance Paula Rego's image seems to take the rhyme at face value but on closer inspection three points stand out: first, the fact that the spider has a face, possibly female, and looks reasonably amiable; second, the disproportionality in size often found in Rego's work, the size of the spider being approximately the same as that of the girl; and third, the fact that, in a situation of such horror, the girl, rather than being frightened away is looking not at the spider but outwards towards the implied viewer, as indeed is the spider itself. Two of the spider's legs, not unlike those of the sheep in *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, are positioned in a way that could be construed as friendly rather than menacing. Two friends about to hug and both suspicious of possible onlookers? Female co-conspirators? Girls together against the world? With an enemy like this, Miss Muffett may not need a friend.



Fig. 6.9 Paula Rego, *Three Blind Mice I*. Etching and aquatint. Plate size: 21.1 x 21.6 cm; paper size: 52 x 37.6 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Three blind mice. Three blind mice.
 See how they run. See how they run.
 They all ran after the farmer's wife,
 Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,

Did you ever see such a sight in your life,
As three blind mice?

Attempts to read historical significance into the words of this rhyme have led to the speculation that this musical round refers to Mary Tudor's execution of three Protestant Bishops, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer, known as the Oxford Martyrs. If so, the mice's blindness might refer to their failure to return to Roman Catholicism in Mary's reign. Against this theory stand some points: first, that the earliest version of the rhyme makes no mention of harming the mice; and second — though that in itself does not necessarily invalidate the reading above — that the first known date of publication is 1609, long after Mary's death in 1558. Mary was succeeded by her half-sister, Elizabeth I, who was a Protestant. By the early seventeenth-century Protestantism was already well established in England, under the reign of James I of England (and VI of Scotland): a Protestant who in any case, unlike Elizabeth, did not encourage the persecution of Catholics. Even so, their persecution was still very much within living memory, whilst important members of the aristocracy, including the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Northumberland — whose dominions were of strategic importance regarding possible invasions from the continent and Scotland respectively — remained loyal to Rome. The Roman Catholic-Protestant divide was very much still a point of strife, and indeed remains so to the present, Scotland and Northern Ireland being cases in point.

Be that as it may, of the two possibilities, Rego's etching — if it does indeed carry a historical association — is likely to refer to the events relating to the fanatically Catholic Mary Tudor and the three bishops, coming as it does from the hands of an artist not known for her approval of Roman Catholicism. Rego was not overly enamoured of priests of any denomination (see for example her series on *The Sin of Father Amaro* and abortion discussed in chapters 3 and 4), so this narrative, damning of Christianity in general and particularly of priests destroyed because one of that religion's sects turned on the other, might be seen as killing three or four birds with one stone.

Other possibilities, however, run not quite in tandem with this interpretation. In this image, a woman (presumably the farmer's wife) wields a knife, wearing what might be Portuguese traditional dress but a head dress that confusingly could be either a maid servant's scarf

or a typical Tudor gable hood. As was the case with the *Miss Muffett* print, however, the delineation of adversaries is unclear. One of the mice stands by the woman, engaged in what looks like playfulness. The other two also stand on their hind legs, in what looks like confabulation rather than flight. No one is running, and all three mice still have their tails. If this is Mary Tudor, a queen all too prone to torture and murder Protestants, it is possibly not surprising that Paula Rego, a life-long anti-Papist, here withholds from this particular farmer's wife (who in any case is not much bigger in stature than the mice) her intended bloodbath and burning stakes.



Fig. 6.10 Paula Rego, *Rock-a-Bye Baby*. Etching and aquatint. Plate size: 21.1 x 21.6 cm; paper size: 52 x 37.6 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Rock-a-bye baby
 On the tree top,
 When the wind blows,
 The cradle will rock
 When the bough breaks,
 The cradle will fall,
 and down will come Baby,
 Cradle and all.

According to the Opies, the wind that blows in this nursery rhyme may be the Protestant storm blowing from the Netherlands and bringing to England James II/VII's nephew and son-in-law, the Protestant William of Orange who would depose the Catholic monarch. Or it might be the Protestant wind that earlier, in the reign of Elizabeth, saved England from the Spanish Armada, sent to restore Roman Catholicism during the reign of Philip II of Spain. Either version would, once again, tally with Rego's hostility to the Roman Catholic Church. This image however, depicting a large woman crouching barefoot against a starry night sky and rocking a baby in a cradle by her feet, could equally address her life-long ambivalence about women's roles. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the word, and that rule is not necessarily benevolent.

A frog he would a-wooing go,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 Whether his mother would let him or no.
 With a rowley powley, gammon and spinach,
 Heigho, says Anthony Rowley!
 So off he set with his opera hat,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 And on the road he met with a rat.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 'Pray, Mr. Rat, will you go with me,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 Kind Mistress Mousey for to see?'
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 And when they came to Mousey's hall,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 They gave a loud knock, and they gave a loud call.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 'Pray, Mistress Mouse, are you within?'
 Heigho, says Rowley.
 'Oh yes, kind sirs, I'm sitting to spin'.



Fig. 6.11 Paula Rego, *A Frog He Would A-Wooing Go*. Etching and aquatint. Plate size: 21.3 x 21.6 cm, Paper size: 52 x 38 cm. Edition of 50 signed and numbered, included in portfolio. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

With a rowley powley, etc.
 'Pray, Mistress Mouse, will you give us some beer?
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 For Froggy and I are fond of good cheer'.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 'Pray, Mr. Frog, will you give us a song?
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 But let it be something that's not very long'.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 'Indeed, Mistress Mouse', replied Mr. Frog,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 'A cold has made me as hoarse as a dog'.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 'Since you have caught cold, Mr. Frog', Mousey said,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 'I'll sing you a song that I have just made'.
 With a rowley powley, etc.

But while they were all a merry-making,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 A cat and her kittens came tumbling in.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 The cat she seized the rat by the crown;
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 The kittens they pulled the little mouse down.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 This put Mr. Frog in a terrible fright;
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 He took up his hat, and wished them goodnight.
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 But as Froggy was crossing over a brook,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 A lily-white duck came and gobbled him up,
 With a rowley powley, etc.
 So there was an end of one, two, and three,
 Heigho, says Rowley,
 The rat, and the mouse, and the little froggee,
 With a rowley powley, gammon and spinach,
 Heigho, says Anthony Rowley!

This long nursery rhyme may refer to François, Duke of Anjou's courtship of Elizabeth I, although unanswered questions about its date make it more likely that it referred instead to Mary Stuart. The earliest known version of the song was published in 1549 as 'The Frog Came to the Myl Dur' in Robert Wedderburn's *Complaynt of Scotland*. Wedderburn states that in 1547 the Scottish Queen Consort, Mary of Guise, under attack from Henry VIII, brought about the marriage of her daughter Princess Mary (Mistress Mouse; later Mary Queen of Scots) to the young French Dauphin (the 'frog': later Francis II of France).

Many things may have appealed to Rego in this rhyme. In view of her ambivalence regarding the fate of women within the patriarchy and within marriage as its prime institution, the rhyme might have appealed to her whether it referred to Elizabeth, the famously unmarried queen, or her cousin Mary Stuart, whose husbands (Francis II of France, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley and James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell) all came to an early and in two cases violent end. Rego made two prints relating to this rhyme: in the first a well-dressed frog stands before a seated female mouse, begging for her hand. The second print features a female cat and her kittens which, in the rhyme, catch and kill the Frog

Prince's friend and companion, Mr. Rat. In the background we see the Frog Prince escaping through a door, overlooked by a white duck that presumably will soon gobble him up. Men, whether lovers, husbands or protagonists, do not tend to do well at the hands of Scottish Mary, English Elizabeth or Portuguese Paula.

Beautiful Princesses, Evil Stepmothers and Wicked Witches: Who is Dead Now?

Nobody loves a stepmother or a witch. That, of course, is in fact not true. Hence the fact that 'being bewitched' is a synonym for being in love, and that men with children from a first marriage find themselves second wives (their offspring's stepmothers) whom they presumably love. Let us say, then, that *some* people don't like witches (mainly those — priests, men of science, those who wield power in general — whose hegemony is threatened by a different school of thought). And possibly most children do not love their stepmothers, for all the reasons that psychoanalysis and other brands of (family) therapy have made it their business to elucidate. Both witches and stepmothers wield unfathomable power that threatens any manner of cherished beliefs: beliefs about knowledge; about love; about the irreplaceability of first love; about clear-cut definitions of truth and superstition; about right and wrong. Witches and stepmothers are wicked and dangerous, and threaten the natural order of things. Which makes it just as well that for all their mysterious powers, they are the ones who, in the land of happy-ever-after, usually end up dead.

As Bruno Bettelheim tells us, a witch created by a child's anxious fantasies will haunt him or her; but a witch whom that child can push into the witch's own oven, leaving her to burn to death ('Hansel and Gretel') is a witch who the child learns can be defeated (Bettelheim, 1991). In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bettelheim argues that the figure of the wicked stepmother/witch is a safe repository for a child's negative feelings about his or her real mother, that all-powerful being whom, as object relations theory persuasively argues, being the source of both all that is good and all that is bad in the infant's universe, becomes that which must be displaced as maturity replaces helplessness (Chodorow, 1979; Dinnerstein, 1987). It is possible that the long-lasting

appeal of the 'Snow White' narrative owes its enduring fascination to the very real complexities of mother-daughter relations. It is wrong and dangerous to hate one's mother, but it is right and proper to hate one's stepmother or a wicked witch (and the two, of course, may be one and the same). And even if they are not, whilst it may be true that not all witches are stepmothers, it is uncontestedly true that all stepmothers are witches.

In 'Breaking the Disney Spell' Jack Zipes addresses himself to the unchallenging renditions of the original fairy tales provided by the Disney Corporation and its saccharine versions of the central characters in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Cinderella* (1950) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989):

However, despite their beauty and charm, these figures are pale and pathetic compared to the more active and demonic characters in the film. The witches are not only agents of evil but represent erotic and subversive forces that are more appealing both for the artists who drew them and the audiences. The young women are helpless ornaments in need of protection, and when it comes to the action of the film, they are omitted. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the film does not really become lively until the dwarfs enter the narrative. (Zipes, 'Breaking the Disney Spell', quoted in Tatar, 349)

Similar lines of thought inform Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's analysis of two related concerns: first, the antagonism of the woman writer or artist locked in battle against the monolith of a male-dominated canon within which women writers and artists had no place and no voice; and second, the dichotomy of the angel woman versus the monster woman/madwoman/whore, constrained within the confines of a mirror (or in Rego's case a canvas) where appearances (fairest or foulest) are everything.

Rego's series about Snow White has the eponymous heroine dressed in the iconic Disney gown, but the Disney influence stops there, in all possible respects. Not for Rego a lady-like death for Snow White, transformed into *objet d'art* on display in a glass coffin, for the delectation of passing voyeurs. Instead, this (e-fig. 12)¹⁰ is the vision we would expect of a painful death by poisoning.

10 e-fig. 12 Paula Rego, *Swallows the Poisoned Apple* (1995). Pastel on board, 170 x 150 cm. Saatchi Gallery, all rights reserved, https://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/artpages/rego_paula_swallows_poisoned_apple.htm

For Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the angel woman and the monster are merely two facets of problematic female lives lived out according to the limited options of established ontological definitions created by men (good because dead, bad because persistently alive). The monster woman, madwoman or whore are the mouthpieces and avatars for all that, in a male-dominated world, the angel woman dare not say. And in Rego's *Snow White* images too, as in others discussed previously, a worrying complicity (troubling from the point of view of the binary-inclined status quo) replaces the enmity of the original tale (e-fig. 13).¹¹

In this image, it would appear, it is a case of 'you *shall* go to the ball, Cinderella/Snow White, with or without knickers (whichever will best secure the prince's attention)'. And in the women's brave new world of *Snow White Playing with Her Father's Trophies* (e-fig. 14)¹², a Snow White in deceptively virginal attire seems to be busy in ways that ill-become a fairy-tale princess, holding her father's butchered remains, under the gaze of a seemingly unconcerned stepmother.

Where Marcia Pointon (1996) and John McEwen (1997) see enmity between Snow White and her stepmother in these images, one can just as easily see complicity:

As the legend of Lilith shows, and as psychoanalysts from Freud and Jung onward have observed, myths and fairy tales often both state and enforce culture's sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts. If Lilith's story summarizes the genesis of the female monster in a single useful parable, the Grimm tale of 'Little Snow White' dramatizes the essential but equivocal relationship between the angel-woman and the monster-woman [...]. 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves', should really be called 'Snow White and Her Wicked Stepmother', for the central action of the tale — indeed, its only real action — arises from the relationship between these two women. [...] Both have been locked: a magic looking glass, an enchanted and enchanting glass coffin. [...]

11 e-fig. 13 *Snow White and Her Stepmother* (1995). Posted by yigruzeltil, 28 February 2013, Wikiart, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/paula-rego/snow-white-and-her-stepmother-1995>

12 e-fig. 14 *Snow White Playing with Her Father's Trophies* (1995). Posted by yigruzeltil, 28 February 2013, Wikiart, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/paula-rego/snow-white-playing-with-her-father-s-trophies-1995>

What does the future hold for Snow White, however? When her Prince becomes a King and she becomes a Queen, what will her life be like? Trained to domesticity by her dwarf instructors, will she sit in the window, gazing out on the wild forest of her past, and sigh, and sew, and prick her finger, and conceive a child white as snow, red as blood, black as ebony wood? Surely, fairest of them all, Snow White has exchanged one glass coffin for another, delivered from the prison where the Queen put her only to be imprisoned in the looking glass from which the King's voice speaks daily. There is, after all, no female model for her in this tale except the 'good' (dead) mother and her living avatar the 'bad' mother. [...] *Her only escape from her second glass coffin, the imprisoning mirror, must evidently be through 'badness', through plots and stories, duplicitous schemes, wild dreams, fierce fictions, mad impersonations.* [...] The female literary tradition we have been defining participates on all levels in the same duality or duplicity that necessitates the generation of such doubles as monster characters who shadow angelic authors and mad anti-heroines who complicate the lives of sane heroines. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, 36–80, italics added)

Gilbert and Gubar argue that under patriarchy women are set one against another and female solidarity is almost impossible to achieve. But not inevitably so. Let us look at Naomi Segal, in an essay titled 'Matrilinear and Patrilinear':

[Woman is either] positioned in a patrilinear structure, giving a son to her father and husband, or she functions in a matrilinear chain, offering a daughter to her mother. [...] Women who have children in male-authored fiction are a small enough group, commonly becoming pregnant — frequently as the result of a super-potent wedding night — in order that they can suffer obstetrical trauma. Women who give birth to daughters are an even smaller sub-group and a startlingly high number of them are adulteresses. [...] There is something in women who are perceived as desiring which, it seems, deserves the punishment of reproducing themselves; they have disqualified themselves from the uniquely gratifying form of motherhood that Freud identifies in the birth of a son. (Segal, 1990: 136–37)

Segal identifies a further possibility: namely that of a powerful pact between mother and daughter, such that, beyond or outside the perceived act of narcissism and self-reproduction that, according to a male perspective, damns the mothers of daughters, we glimpse another world — clandestine and menacing — 'a potential other-world in which women speak of love' (Segal, 1990: 137), and, I would argue now,

specifically speak to and love one another: ‘in the mother of daughters [the male author] incarnates a less readily available wish: to see in what occult manner she loves the child more exactly of her flesh, in whom no mark of the husband remains’. (Segal, 1990: 137–38). No mark remains or, if it does, only vestigially, in a spectral form haunted by the fear of erasure by women determined to overturn the rule of the husband/father whom they neither recognize nor resemble. When the king stag’s head and antlers are severed and held on her lap by a little girl, nothing is as (or what) it used to be.

Women Against the Canon: Who is Cannon Fodder Now?

All is fair in love and war, especially for those who draw up the rules of engagement: *O Rancor (Grudge)*, a play of 2004 by Hélia Correia — from whose work Rego has also drawn inspiration — draws on themes from the ancient Greek tragedies as well as from Homer. In Correia’s play, Aethra (Etra), Theseus’ wife, is enslaved as a consequence of the vicissitudes of war. But in Correia, all her sufferings notwithstanding, Aethra never loses either her wit or her wits, and opines light-heartedly that ‘the defeated, strangely, become accomplished liars, and their stories are remarkably devoid of accuracy’ (Correia, 2000: 38). Mendacity is a character flaw, though arguably not without justification in the case of the vanquished, since, as is well known, History is rarely written either *by* or *for* them. And be it by means of lies, intrigue, betrayal, murder or unexpected alliances (Snow White and her stepmother, Jane Eyre and Bertha Antoinette Mason) for the conquered, revenge sometimes is not only forgivable but necessary. As are, indeed, revised scripts with disquieting undertones of violence and incest, as suggested by the positioning of bodies (or bodily remains) held between girlish knees in *Snow White Playing with her Father’s Trophies* (e- fig. 15) and also in *The Family* (fig. 2.14) discussed previously. Maria Tatar maintains that ‘another of the “conditions and relationships” that the Grimms seem to have found repugnant, or at least inappropriate as a theme in their collection, was incest and incestuous desire. [...] When a tale was available in several versions, the Grimms invariably preferred one that camouflaged incestuous

desires and Oedipal entanglements. [...] But lurid portrayals of child abuse, starvation, and exposure, like fastidious descriptions of cruel punishments, on the whole escaped censorship' (Tatar, 1999, 368–70). For Rego, it would appear, such niceties are entirely unnecessary. In a differently enchanted world, the future for Snow White may be more charming without a Prince who, in any case, on better acquaintance, might well turn out to be horrendous (e-fig. 15).¹³

Moreover, even in the original tales, there might have been a bit more to Cinderella and Snow White than met the eye. Those who read the original stories by Perrault, Andersen and the Brothers Grimm before Disney got to them will know that Snow White's stepmother arranges the murder of her stepdaughter, and that she herself will die an excruciating death wearing shoes that burn through her feet; that doves peck out the eyes of Cinderella's stepsisters; that Sleeping Beauty's suitors bleed to death in attempting to cross the hedge around her castle; that she, herself, in a sequel turns into a child killer; that a mad rage drives Rumpelstiltskin to tear himself in pieces; and that the Little Mermaid, minus her tongue, forsakes her tail in exchange for legs that feel as though they have red-hot spikes running through them. Pre-Disney, full graphic horror (murders, mutilations, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest) ruled bedtime stories for children. Not even Rego can do worse, and she does not: at her worst, all she does is reproduce in images the horror present in the original narratives.

The difference is that whilst, as Marina Warner would have it, in 'Snow White' the father's remarriage leads to the unbearable persecution of the heroine by the wicked stepmother, or, as Bettelheim argues, the perceived violence of the stepmother towards the child is in reality a projection of the child's jealousy of the mother figure, in Rego this psychodynamic is replaced by an iconoclastic alliance between (step)mother and daughter that reduces the Oedipal father figure to a decapitated stag head held between a rampant daughter's knees, prior to her stealing the prince's horse and galloping off to write a different story (e-fig. 15). Her own story. And in that brand new narrative, who is the hunter? Who is the prey? In Rego's world, did Bambi's mother

13 e-fig. 15 Paula Rego, *Snow White Riding the Prince's Horse* (1995). Pastel on paper. Posted by Artodyssey (scroll down to image no. 21), <http://artodyssey1.blogspot.com/2009/08/paula-rego-paula-figueiroa-rego-born.html>

actually call the shots, grab the gun and kill both the hunter and the king stag? More to the point, which version do we prefer and why?

Bad Wolves, Beastly Beasts and Bluebeard: They Had it Coming, M'Lud

The dangers courted by a curious woman are widely documented in myth and literature: Eve, Pandora, Psyche, Briar Rose, Bluebeard's nameless wife. It is the latter that concerns us here. 'Bluebeard', variously tackled by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm and later by others, and no longer available in the children's section of bookshops, may be either an encouragement for women to do as they are told by their husbands or it may be an exposé of marital violence and serial killing:

The tale of Bluebeard 'touches upon areas of acute anxiety — about male sexuality in general and in extremis; about the rights of husbands — and the rights of wives; about money (Bluebeard is always vastly wealthy); about foreigners and Orientals; about the delinquency of curiosity and women's special propensity to be curious. The deaths of his wives one after another may offer a historical memory of the toll of childbirth. [...] Bluebeard typifies the principal male antagonist in the sex wars, an enemy, a sadist, and a rapist — who can also be irresistibly alluring. (Warner, 2018, 91–92)

Whether or not Bluebeard had a real-life equivalent — cultural historians have variously suggested Cunmar of Brittany (Cunmar the Accursed), who decapitated his pregnant wife Triphine or Gilles de Rais, the Marshal of France, mentioned earlier — the tale serves as a cautionary warning to curious, disobedient wives. But even in Perrault and the Brothers Grimm it is also an edifying tale of female survival and sisterly solidarity: if you can't manage by yourself and you want not just rescuing but bloody revenge, call not on Prince Charming but on sister Anne; or sister Paula; or any of her mad precursors/followers/sisters (and occasionally the odd brother): Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys, Angela Carter, Kiki Smith, Winslow Homer, etc., etc., etc. Let us have a look, even when peeping might be done at great personal cost (fig. 6.12; fig. 6.13).



Fig. 6.12 Walter C. Kiedaisch, *Bluebeard Greets his Latest Wife* (1904). The Tacoma Times, 1 January 1904, p. 3. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miss_Bluebeard_1904.jpg



Fig. 6.13 Winslow Homer, *The Blue Beard Tableau: Fatima Enters the Forbidden Closet* (1868). Wood engraving, 11.4 x 11.7 cm. Boston Public Library, Print Department. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blue_beard_tableau_\(Boston_Public_Library\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blue_beard_tableau_(Boston_Public_Library).jpg)

Size Does Matter: Angry Jane, Gothic Bertha

Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Sara Maitland, Artemisia Gentileschi, Kiki Smith, Catherine Breillart and countless other women writers, artists and directors have made it their business to cut down to size murderous men and wolves in the popular imagination. None more literally than Paula Rego, in her *Jane Eyre* series based on two novels: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* published in 1847 and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* of 1966, a prequel to the *Jane Eyre* plot which imagines the life of Bertha Antoinette Mason, Mr. Rochester's first wife, from childhood till the moment when she dies in the flames she caused to engulf Thornfield Hall.

In Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* becomes governess to Adèle, the ward of Mr. Edward Rochester, a rich man who is the owner of Thornfield Hall, a large manor house in Yorkshire. They fall in love and plan to marry but on the day of the wedding it is revealed that Mr. Rochester already has a wife, Bertha Antoinette Mason, a violent lunatic whom he had kept locked up in the upper storey of Thornfield Hall. Jane leaves Thornfield but will return at a later time to find that Bertha managed to escape from her keeper, set fire to the house, and despite Rochester's attempts to save her had died in the flames. Rochester himself was blinded by a falling beam and lost an arm. Charlotte Brontë understood that in view of Mr. Rochester's conjugal track record and of Bertha's fate — first an unloved wife married for her money, and then a lunatic driven to suicide — Jane's only chance of married happiness with her 'master' would require the implementation of strong checks and balances. So reader, she married him, but only after he had lost much of his wealth in the fire and had been blinded and crippled, thus needing to be led in perpetuity by the small but strong hand of his second wife and former employee. Jean Rhys, charting the cold-hearted calculation that had led Rochester to his first marriage to the unloved, defenceless Bertha, understood why he might have deserved that punishment.

When she published *Jane Eyre* under the pseudonym Currer Bell, Brontë was seemingly under no illusions as to the fact that Prince Charming can easily turn if not into Prince Horrendous, at least into Prince Mendacious or Prince Treacherous, and neither was her character, Jane. The latter only agrees to her happy-ever-after once Bertha, her evil

sidekick, has set fire to Rochester's house and rendered him (formerly tall, strong, rich and powerful whilst Bertha is mad and Jane herself is 'poor, obscure, plain and little', Brontë, 1978, 284) now crippled, blind and utterly dependent on Jane and his servants for survival.

Her very fingers!' he cried; 'her small, slight fingers! If so there must be more of her. [...] Hitherto I have hated to be helped — to be led: henceforth, I feel I shall hate it no more. I did not like to put my hand into a hireling's, but it is pleasant to feel it circled by Jane's little fingers. [...] Jane's soft ministry will be a perpetual joy. Jane suits me: do I suit her? (Brontë, 1978, 482–94)

Hopefully yes, in the name of happy endings. But as we know (echoes of those Regoesque girls and their dogs (figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33), even the most devoted carers can eventually become weary and turn on their charges.

Jean Rhys' novel of 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, imagines the story of Bertha Antoinette Mason, the first Mrs. Rochester, who in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* became the archetypal madwoman in the attic. Rhys' novel takes us from Bertha' childhood and adolescence in Jamaica and the traumatic events of the bloody uprisings following the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, through her marriage to Edward Rochester — who in this novel remains nameless — to her descent into madness, their journey to England and her incarceration in the attic of Thornfield Hall, culminating in the dream-like events that lead to her setting fire to the house and herself burning to death.

Polly Teale's play and novel of 2003, *After Mrs. Rochester*, focuses on the life of Jean Rhys (born Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams) and her fascination with the character of Bertha; like the fictional Bertha, Rhys was brought up in the West Indies and was brought to England at a young age. Once there she embarked on a turbulent life that included periods of poverty, numerous love affairs and three marriages. In the play, Jean has locked herself in a room in an isolated cottage in the countryside and is attempting to write a novel. Various characters from her life are featured, including her daughter Ella and the writer Ford Maddox Ford, in real life one of her lovers. Throughout the play Bertha crawls around on the floor around the stage and sometimes speaks to Jean, either soothing her or encouraging her or mocking her, or she simply lies on the floor, a visual echo of Brontë's mad heroine:

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (Brontë, 1978, 327–28)

Teale, who also directed the play, took her inspiration for the choreography of Bertha from Paula Rego's series, *Dog Women (Baying)*, fig. 1.12; *Bad Dog*, fig. 6.14).



Fig. 6.14 Paula Rego, *Bad Dog* (1994). Pastel on canvas, 120 x 160 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Charlotte, Jean and Polly: three women, three writers, three witches, three bitches, three (dis)graces, or, in Portuguese, *três da vida airada* (three loose women) setting out to hurt the men who sought to tame them. Why would Paula not join them? After all, the three musketeers were actually four, and that in the end, together, they defied both God and King.¹⁴

14 Throughout Alexander Dumas' trilogy, *The Three Musketeers*, *Twenty Years After* and *The Viscount of Bragelonne*, the four friends, D'Artagnan, Athos, Portos and Aramis follow paths that take them from initial unquestioning allegiance to King Louis XIII, to a weakening of their oath, to outright defiance of the monarch when Louis XIII is succeeded by his son, Louis XIV.

In Rego's *Jane Eyre* series, scale and size are subjected to her usual tricks. In Brontë's novel Bertha is described as a large, powerful woman, almost a match for her husband ('She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest — more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was', Brontë, 1978, 328); whilst Jane is small and elfin-like. In Rego's work, however, they swap *personae*. In *Biting*, a direct reference to the episode in the novel in which Bertha attacks and bites her brother, the model is possibly the prettiest and most feminine female figure ever portrayed by this artist; whilst in other images Jane (in the novel 'a little small thing, they say, almost like a child', Brontë, 1978, 474) appears as a bulky, dark, menacing figure.



Fig. 6.15 Paula Rego, *Biting* (2001–2002). Coloured lithograph, image size: 77 x 50.5 cm; paper size: 90 x 62 cm. Edition of 35 signed and numbered, printed on Somerset textured paper. Print 8 from *Jane Eyre — The Guardians*. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 6.16 Paula Rego, *Jane* (2001–2002). Lithograph, image size: 86 x 43.5 cm; paper size: 88 x 63.5 cm. Edition of 35 signed and numbered, printed on Somerset velvet paper. Print 1 from *Jane Eyre* — *The Guardians*. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 6.17 Paula Rego, *Jane Eyre* (2001–2002). Lithograph, image size: 86.0 x 44.5 cm; paper size: 88.0 x 64.5 cm. Edition of 35, signed and numbered, printed on Somerset velvet paper. Print 1 from *Jane Eyre* — *The Guardians*. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

And if, as the physical resemblance suggests, Jane is also the protagonist of *Come to Me* (fig. 6.18) it would appear that in Rego — in tune with Gilbert and Gubar's hypothesis that the two women are neither foes nor opposites but avatars — it is Jane, not Bertha, who sets a torch to Mr. Rochester's fiefdom, and all it represents:

Bertha, in other words, is Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead. For, as Claire Rosenfeld points out, 'the novelist who consciously or unconsciously exploits psychological Doubles' frequently juxtaposes 'two characters, the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self'.

[...] It now begins to appear, if it did not earlier, that Bertha has functioned as Jane's dark double throughout the governess's stay at Thornfield. Specifically, every one of Bertha's appearances — or, more accurately, her manifestations — has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part [...]. Jane's apparently secure response to Rochester's apparently egalitarian sexual confidences was followed by Bertha's attempt to incinerate the master in his bed. Jane's unexpressed resentment at Rochester's manipulative gypsy-masquerade found expression in Bertha's terrible shriek and her even more terrible attack on Richard Mason. Jane's anxieties about her marriage, and in particular her fears of her own alien 'robed and veiled' bridal image, were objectified by the image of Bertha in a 'white and straight' dress, 'whether gown, sheet, or shroud I cannot tell'. Jane's profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude, will be acted out by Bertha, who burns down the house and destroys herself in the process as if she were an agent of Jane's desire as well as her own. And finally, Jane's disguised hostility to Rochester, summarized in her terrifying prediction to herself that 'you shall, yourself, pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand' comes strangely true through the intervention of Bertha, whose melodramatic death causes Rochester to lose both eye and hand. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, 360)

And in contrast in *Edward* (fig. 6.19) whether he is Mr. Rochester himself or, in association with him, he becomes a representative of Mr. Brocklehurst, the sadistic school director of Jane's childhood (fig. 6.20), or even of St. John Rivers, Jane's glacial suitor, the male protagonist appears profoundly vulnerable. Having lost an arm and his eyesight in Brontë's novel, in Rego's work he looks to be in danger of losing his masculinity: no longer a potent patriarch but either a man with genitals



Fig. 6.18 Paula Rego, *Come to Me* (2001–2002). Coloured lithograph, image size: 88.5 x 59 cm; paper size: 99.5 x 67 cm. Edition of 35 signed and numbered, printed on Somerset textured paper. Print 9 from *Jane Eyre* — *The Guardians*. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

open to attack (as suggested by Rego herself, fig. 6.19), or a tiny, pathetic, polymorphously diminished, Bluebeard (*Dressing Him up as Bluebeard*, e-fig. 16):¹⁵ in Brontë a man crippled by one wife and dependent for all his needs on another ('I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion — to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you' (Brontë, 1978, 483); and in Rego an erstwhile deadly wife-killer now miniaturized into insignificance and being helped to get dressed like a child (or an invalid: like those dogs with those girls — figs. 1.13; e-fig. 6; e-fig. 7; figs. 1.21; 1.22; 1.23; 1.26–1.33 and other assorted invalids — *The Family*, fig. 2.14; *Dressing Him up as Bluebeard*, e-fig. 16).

15 e-fig. 16 *Dressing Him up as Bluebeard* (2002). Lithography on Somerset wove paper. Christies, https://pccdn.perfectchannel.com/christies/live/images/item/PaulaRego11105/5880026/large/CKS_11105_0048%20.jpg



Fig. 6.19 Paula Rego, *Edward* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 100 x 80 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 6.20 Paula Rego, *Inspection* (2001). Lithograph on stone. Image size: 38 x 26 cm; paper size: 53 x 38 cm. Edition of 35 signed and numbered, printed on Somerset Book White paper. Print 2 from *Jane Eyre – The Sensuality of the Stone*. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Dearest Satan: The Lady with a Cloven Hoof¹⁶

In 1851, Alexandre Herculano, Portugal's prime historian and his generation's most successful author of historical novels penned in the style of High Romanticism, went rogue and published a hilarious novella, *A Dama Pé de Cabra* (*The Lady with a Cloven Hoof*, translated in Appendix A). Purporting to be a medieval retelling of an old tale ('as old as Portugal itself') it tells a story set at an unspecified time during the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the North African Moors who occupied it from 711 C.E. to 1492 C.E. In Herculano's story, Don Diogo Lopes, a medieval warlord, is out hunting when he hears a beautiful voice singing and stumbles upon a gorgeous woman. He proposes marriage there and then, and offers her all he possesses. She tells him she only wants the one thing that he will never give her, because it was a gift from his dead mother. When further pressed, this turns out to be nothing less than the safety of his immortal soul, which his mother left in the safekeeping of the religious faith she had instilled in him. The beautiful lady agrees to marry Don Diogo on condition that he will never cross himself again, and without further ado he strikes the deal, intending to atone for it later by the tried-and-tested method of bribery (giving the church a piece of land) and violence (the vigorous slaughter of Moors in the name of the Christian God). On his wedding night he discovers that his wife, albeit blessed with the face of an angel and a figure to match, has cloven hoofs instead of feet, but he is unfazed by this. All goes well for years: the cloven-hoofed lady is a perfect wife; and when first a son, Don Inigo, and then a daughter, Dona Sol, are born, she is a devoted mother. The family live in perfect harmony for many years until one night when, at family dinner, the wife's female puppy kills the husband's hunting hound in a ferocious attack. Faced with this bloody spectacle, Don Diogo crosses himself in terror, and at that moment his wife metamorphoses into a black fiend, clutches her daughter under her arm, tries and fails to grab her son, and flies out of the window taking the girl with her.

16 For a close reading of Alexandre Herculano's and Hélia Correia's stories please see Maria Manuel Lisboa, 'Mother/land: Complexities of Love and Loyalty in Alexandre Herculano, Eça de Queirós and Hélia Correia', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 47:1, 2010, 168-89.

To cheer himself up, as well as to atone for his sins, Don Diogo departs on a mission to kill Moors, something not irrelevant in a narrative in which in general, when things get tough, the tough go out and slaughter Muslims. He is however taken prisoner by the Infidel, and does not return. Some years later his pining son (whose only friend is his dog, interestingly named Tariq, the name of the Moorish king who led the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711) is advised to go and ask his absent mother (now described no longer as a damned soul but as '*uma grande fada*' — a great fairy) for help in releasing his father. He finds her, she agrees to help, and puts him to sleep for a year, following which an onager (a small hoofed mammal, which appears elsewhere in the narrative), takes him to Toledo, breaks through the Moorish defences, helps him rescue the father and takes them both to safety. Or so it would appear. On the way home, they come across a tumultuous river spanned by a bridge with a cross in the middle. At that moment, the cloven-hoofed Lady reappears. A struggle between elemental good and evil ensues, and Don Inigo has a vision of Hell, where his mother is now seen to be an inmate. Without much struggle, he chooses the mother and Evil over Good and God, and is allowed to proceed on his way. Father and son return home. The father dies shortly after, but Don Inigo, having vowed never to go to church or to attend confession again, lives to a grand old age, hunting, shooting, fishing and, with the help of his satanic mother, killing Moors in the name of the Christian God. The end of the tale returns to the narratorial voice, which tells us that what happened in the castle on the night of Don Inigo's death is so horrible that we, gentle readers, had better not be told. We never find out.

In a narrative within this narrative we also find out how the Lady came to be who she is. Some time before the events detailed above, the father of another warlord, Argimiro the Dark, dies without having time to tell his son something dreadful that in the past had happened to him. On his deathbed, however, he asks his son to swear that he will never kill a female in litter (a mother). Argimiro is called to war duties but beforehand goes hunting and accidentally kills an onager that has just given birth. He departs to war (the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries) where he successfully kills lots of Moors. In his absence, his wife dreams on three consecutive nights about a handsome knight. Far away, another knight,

Astrigildo the Fair dreams on three consecutive nights about a beautiful lady. An onager appears and takes him to her. They become lovers. Argimiro the Dark hears of it, returns home and kills them both. She becomes a damned soul who thenceforward will haunt that region. Her lover's body is taken away by the onager that had brought him to her. Argimiro the Dark learns that the onager was the animal whose mother he had killed. The Lady with the Cloven Hoof (the *Dama Pé de Cabra*) will turn out to be the incarnation of the murdered wife of Argimiro. This story will in due course be narrated to Don Diogo by an abbot to whom he goes for confession, and who, years later, will tell it to Don Inigo, as a narrative within the narrative.

In 2004 Herculano's tale was taken up by Hélia Correia, one of Portugal's most distinguished contemporary writers, whose work Paula Rego has also drawn upon on at least one other occasion. In this instance, Correia takes up Herculano's tale in a short story titled 'Fascinação' ('Enchantment', translation in Appendix B) and follows it down a different track, to imagine the fate of the devilish mother and the daughter she took with her when she metamorphosed into a fiend and flew out of the window, in one of the climactic episodes of the original narrative. In Correia, as in Herculano before her, there is no easy identification of good and evil. The Lady, the Devil's succubus, was a perfect wife and mother. As such — and presumably with the aid of her dark Master — she helps the father and son in their reconquest of the land from the grasp of Islam back to Christianity.

In Hélia Correia's 'Fascinação', Don Inigo's Oedipal love for his mother becomes an incestuous longing for his sister who, like him, resembles their mother. Inigo's love for his sister and hers for him preclude any other (Dona Sol marries a nobleman, Don Afonso, but she does not love him and the marriage fails; Don Inigo never marries at all). The outcome is a pair of siblings who will never perpetuate the bloodline, non-existent or broken dynasties and, by implication, non-viable communities and nations. Inigo continues to do his duty as good Christian and warrior by slaughtering Moors, but he will not beget a son to continue the good work, whilst Dona Sol's husband, Afonso Pena, increasingly wary of his unfathomable wife, fears to approach her in any way, much less sexually. Unhappy in love, he seeks solace in bellicose pursuits that, however, become ever more unproductive, resulting in the half-hearted slaughter of Moorish women and children.

[Afonso] was just returning from the slaughter of ten [Moorish] innocents whom he had come upon on the way. They were women and children who tried to escape, shouting out and raising a dangerous alarm. Although they were no more than infidels in whose death the Lord gloried, at the moment of their deaths their eyes were so sad that he was moved and his will weakened. But then he killed them, dutifully. (Correia, Appendix B)

Faced with her children's misery, the cloven-hoofed Lady tries to bring them together in incestuous consummation but every attempt is foiled by a spoil-sport God. The story ends inconclusively with the Dama telling her daughter that the only way of being reunited with her brother is for she herself to become a cloven-hoofed fiend. Dona Sol appears to wish it, but somehow her desire is not fulfilled, and at the end it is suggested that she may have gone mad.

Both in Herculano and Correia the cloven-hoofed lady is a beautiful woman and, albeit the Devil's assistant, she is also a loving wife and exemplary mother (even when that devotion includes betraying her master, Satan, by participating in her male relatives' conquest of the land in the name of the Christian God). In these narratives, then, the Devil is an irresistible woman and God is a disagreeable party pooper. If you are Paula Rego, what is there not to like?¹⁷

The images inspired by Herculano's and Correia's narratives were created by Rego in the first instance for an exhibition held at the Paula Rego Museum, *Casa das Histórias* in Cascais, Lisbon in October 2011. For this event, unusually, she worked in conjunction with another artist, Adriana Molder. Each produced two independent sets of large-scale works. Rego's were six different pastels: *Undressing the Divine Lady*; *Singing on the Hill Side* (fig. 6.21); *Death of the Hunter's Dog* (fig. 6.22); *The Quest*; *Levitation* (fig. 6.23) and *Cast of Characters*. Two additional images (etchings) relating to these narratives and produced in the same two-year period between 2010 and 2012 were titled *Goat Girl I & II*. All are busy, complex images more or less directly relating to Herculano's (rather than necessarily Correia's) narrative. As ever in Rego, the titles given to the pictures are informative rather than adventitious. Thus calling the first image *Undressing the Divine Lady* immediately sets in motion the iconoclastic possibility that a devil woman (bad)

17 For a detailed analysis of the many historical and ethical contradictions in these two narratives, see Lisboa, 'Mother/land'.



Fig. 6.21 Paula Rego, *Dame with the Goat's Foot II (Singing on the Hill Side)* (2011–2012). Pastel on paper, 137 x 102 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 6.22 Paula Rego, *Dame with the Goat's Foot III (Death of the Hunter's Dog)* (2011–2012). Pastel on paper, 150 x 170 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 6.23 Paula Rego, *Dame with the Goat's Foot V (Levitation)* (2011–2012). Pastel on paper, 242 x 120 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

can be also be seen to be divine (good). In this image, moreover, the Lady sits cradling a small child. In *Singing on the Hill Side* (fig. 6.21), presumably the episode when Don Diogo first sees the Lady, different time dimensions are conflated, with two children (possibly Don Inigo and Dona Sol) already in existence. In the bottom-right-hand corner of this image, furthermore, seen as if in the background and at some distance, is a large white building with unspecified oriental (possibly Arab) characteristics, and, out of proportion in terms of scale and heading towards it, is what might be an onager. *Death of the Hunter's Dog* (fig. 6.22) depicts a scene of carnage but also, incongruously, of family harmony: the hunting dog lies dead on the ground and a large animal (possibly a fox) or at least its pelt, lies on a table. On a chair sits

Don Diogo playing a macabre flute that is actually an animal bone, and standing beside him in a mockery of a conventional family tableau are the wife and daughter, whilst under the table crouches an inanimate looking male doll, possibly Don Inigo, lovingly clutching a small dog, perhaps the fierce little bitch whose slaughter of the hunting hound unleashed the terrible events central to the narrative. In this image, however, no one seems to be on the brink of metamorphosis, suggesting that had it not been for certain social and religious strictures (making the sign of the cross), what was a happy family before the revelation of the Lady's true nature could have continued to be so after that dangerous knowledge was communicated. *The Quest* is less tangibly linked to any specific event in Herculano's narrative, although different figures, both adults and children, variously engaged each with another, in groups of two but never all together, bespeak the familial separation brought about by the harshness of religious mandates (here represented by the spectacle of a small, desolate-looking little girl kneeling on the floor in the right-hand corner, clutching a crucifix almost as large as herself). In *Levitation* (fig. 6.23), the family peace is broken. After the death of the dog, now lying on the ground, a red-haired lady hovers above her husband. In 'Enchantment', Correia emphasizes the hair colour the cloven-hoofed lady passed on to children who are more like her than their father ('from their mother they had inherited that glow which makes redheads in equal measure objects of desire and of wariness',¹⁸ Correia, Appendix B). In *Levitation* the red-headed woman holds her daughter under her left arm and with her right hand clutches her son's left hand, whilst his right is held in his father's. The latter thus prevents the boy from being snatched by his mother on her way out of the window. Curiously, without knowledge of the narrative's events, were it not for what looks like a large animal suspended from the ceiling, the picture's composition again resembles a happy family portrait in which each of the four figures is holding the hand of one of the others, and the Lady holds both her children. The final picture, *Cast of Characters*, too, makes a mockery of a family whom God has sundered but is here reunited by this female demiurge.

18 Many myths have persisted about redheads, in particular redheaded women: that they are witches, that they don't have souls, that if burnt alive their ashes fertilize fields, that they were conceived during menstruation, that they are harder to sedate and that after they die they become vampires, to name but a few.

Lady, May I Kiss Your Hand? Inês de Castro

You lay, lovely Inês, in lone retreat,
 Savouring the sweet fruit of your young years,
 In that unwary and blind deceit,
 Whose lasting joy Fortune begrudges and fears.
 By the river Mondego's placid meadows,
 Watered by your gentle tears and sorrows,
 To the hills and soft grasses you murmured,
 The beloved name that in your heart you nurtured.

Luís Vaz de Camões, *The Lusiads*, Canto III, stanza 120.

In 2014 Rego created *Inês de Castro* to offer to a collection of works by women artists at New Hall, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of that Cambridge college (now re-named Murray Edwards College).

The story of Inês de Castro is the most romantic and one of the most gruesome in Portugal's history. Inês was the illegitimate daughter of a Galician nobleman, Pero Fernandes de Castro, Lord of Lemos and Sarria, and of his Portuguese mistress Aldonça Lourenço de Valadares. Inês was thus descended from both the Galician and Portuguese nobilities as well as from the Castilian royal family, via another illegitimate line. In 1340 she travelled to Portugal as lady in waiting to the *Infanta* Constança of Castile, recently married to Pedro, later King Pedro I, the heir to the Portuguese throne. The prince fell in love with Inês and they began a love affair that was to last until her death fifteen years later. She bore him four children. Inês' links to the royal house of Castile and her brothers' influence on Pedro as heir apparent to the throne of Portugal were seen by his father, King Afonso IV, as a threat to the carefully cultivated but fragile relations between Portugal and Spain. Constança died in 1345 but although Inês was deemed ineligible as second wife to Pedro, the latter refused to take a more suitable bride. After Constança's death Afonso had Inês banished from the court, but the affair continued, posing an increasing threat to the relations between Castile and Portugal. In 1355 the king ordered her death. Three of his councillors, Pêro Coelho, Álvaro Gonçalves and Diogo Lopes Pacheco went to Coimbra where Inês was housed and decapitated her in front of her children. When Pedro succeeded to the throne upon Afonso's death two years later, he captured two of the councillors and executed them publicly, ripping their hearts out, one from the chest and one from the

back, an act which earned him the cognomen of 'Pedro o Cru', 'Peter the Cruel'. He announced that he had secretly married Inês at an undisclosed date, and that she was therefore his lawful wife, although no proof was ever produced of the marriage. Apocryphal sources maintain that after his coronation Pedro had Inês exhumed, sat her on the throne, had her crowned and forced the entire court to process before her, kissing her hand in homage (in *The Lusíads* Camões calls her '*aquela que depois de morta foi rainha*': 'the one who after death became a queen'). Pedro also ordered that upon his own death they should both be buried in the Monastery of Alcobaça, in ornate tombs engraved with the words '*Até ao fim do mundo*' ('until the end of the world'), and positioned opposite one another so that when they sat up on the Day of Final Judgement the first thing each would see would be the beloved (fig. 6.24). To this day they lie there, an incongruous monument to adulterous love in one of Portugal's most renowned monasteries. Sometimes Prince Charming, Prince Horrendous and Perfect Stranger are not easy to tell apart, and irony is the thread that links them.



Fig. 6.24 Tombs of Pedro and Inês at the Monastery of Santa Maria, Alcobaça, Portugal. Photo by Mário Novais (c. 1954). Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosteiro_de_Santa_Maria,_Alcoba%C3%A7a,_Portugal_\(3598156818\)_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosteiro_de_Santa_Maria,_Alcoba%C3%A7a,_Portugal_(3598156818)_2.jpg)

As one would expect, Rego's image addresses all the awkward questions left unasked, let alone unanswered by the original narrative. If, as apocrypha would have it, Pedro had the dead Inês's body dug up and sat on the throne when she had already been dead two years, it is to be supposed that there would be not very much left of her, and what there was would have been feared as a frightening health hazard at a time when the Black Death was raging through Europe. The dead beloved so dear to the hearts of Dante, Petrarch, Camões, Shakespeare, Dickens, Poe, Rossetti and countless others, might, under the rose-tinted gaze of their male creators, have appeared in perpetuity as an icon of love from beyond the grave; but in the real world she would, in reality, more likely have sported the tufts of grass growing out of the remains of Betsy Skull, Helen Adam's more realistic heroine. And in depicting such a dark possibility, of course, there is no artist more pragmatic than Paula Rego, whose Inês, two years post-mortem, is a gruesome skeleton fully clothed in regal attire, removed from her iconic tomb and now reclining, or rather sliding down a battered sofa, dainty toe bones rather than feet peeping from under a dress whose sleeve seems to contain nothing, not even 'the ultimate bone' (Adam, 2007, 187–88) (e-fig. 17, *Inês de Castro*).¹⁹ She is embraced by her grieving prince who, any minute now, may find that he is holding a garment with nothing inside it, its skeletal contents having long before turned to dust inside their precarious velvet sheath.

The thought of Inês dragged from the grave by another version of Prince Horrendous, her decomposing corpse sitting on a throne having her hand kissed by unwilling courtiers, turns a great love story into a horror tale about the beast that would not die. The beautiful dead princess leaps from the grave: Snow White and Sleeping Beauty awake from a deathly sleep, but in Rego's hands, instead of a happy ever after, their decomposed remains come back to haunt those who consigned them to their coffins in the first place. Especially if they are redheads. Or witches. Or if they defy God in any way, be it murder, suicide or sorcery:

19 e-fig. 17 Paula Rego, *Inês de Castro* (2014). Oil on canvas, 122 x 145 cm. Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, for the college's 60th anniversary. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cam.ac.uk/files/styles/content-885x432/public/news/news/regoinescastro.gif?itok=hxVuDC8h>

In 1869, to retrieve a poetry manuscript he had sentimentally buried with [his wife Lizzie Siddal, whose death was the result of suicide, Dante Gabriel Rossetti] had her coffin exhumed, and literary London buzzed with rumours that her hair 'had continued to grow after her death, to grow so long, so beautiful, so luxuriantly as to fill the coffin with its gold'. As if symbolizing the indomitable earthliness that no woman, however angelic, could entirely renounce, Lizzie Siddal Rossetti's hair leaps like a metaphor for monstrous female sexual energies from the literal and figurative coffins in which her artist-husband enclosed her. To Rossetti, its assertive radiance made the dead Lizzie seem terrifyingly physical and fiercely supernatural. (Gilber and Gubar, 2000, 27)

Dead princesses, sinful suicides and un-dead cloven-hoofed ladies all remind us that it is better never to trust a woman, especially one with red hair.

7. Paula and the Madonna: Who's That Girl?

What you can do is see [Mary's story] from the point of view of a woman, which is what I've done. A woman telling the story — in fact, Mary telling the story. [...] It is about Mary, not about Christ. The story celebrates her — her in her own right. That's what I tried to do. [...] The story is a human story. [...] The whole point of that story is that Jesus was a man and Mary was a woman giving birth [...]. They are people! [...] They are flesh and blood. [...] If the story is going to have power it has to have relevance to each of us, today, as we live.

Paula Rego¹

God addressed Jesus and said, This is the Devil, of whom we were speaking earlier. Jesus looked from one to the other, and saw that, apart from God's beard, they were like twins.

José Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, capriciously malevolent bully.

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

¹ Paula Rego in conversation with Richard Zimler, *Diário de Notícias (Grande Reportagem)*, Lisbon, April 2003, 57–62. English version from Richard Zimler's original transcript.

(Un)Like a Virgin

The opening lines to Madonna's soundtrack song, 'Who's That Girl?', in the film of the same title, are 'Who's that girl? When you see her, say a prayer'. That is clearly good advice. When what you think might follow doesn't, you know you shouldn't be surprised. You always did know it, in fact. The singer may be called Madonna, and that, unlikely though it might seem, is her real name, but if you knew anything about anything you'd have realized from the start that prayer would not have been anywhere on the menu, neither in the song nor the film. Sometimes God can't or won't help, and some would-be virgins are in reality unrepentant whores in holy clothing. So too in Paula Rego's work. And as in the case of Amélia in *The Ambassador of Jesus* (fig. 3.4), for example, prayer is unlikely to help, especially if you never really meant it anyway.

In 2002 Jorge Sampaio, then President of Portugal, commissioned Paula Rego to create eight images based on episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary, to be placed in eight existing flat wall coves in the chapel of the presidential palace in Lisbon, serendipitously named Palácio de Belém, or Bethlehem Palace, after the Lisbon borough of the same name.

As seen in previous chapters, Rego's past work, from its very earliest productions, had often visited religious themes or formats (in the case of the latter, for example, triptychs) in trademark iconoclastic manner: *Annunciation* (e-fig. 10, 1981), *Joseph's Dream* (fig. 3.10), *Deposition* (fig. 7.14), *Up the Tree* (e-fig. 24)² (the latter, whether intentionally or not, a crucified female figure), to name but a few. In the late 1990s she created a series of drawings and pastels inspired by Eça de Queirós's well-known anti-clerical nineteenth-century novel, *The Crime of Father Amaro* (figs. 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7–3.9; 3.12; 3.14; 3.19–3.21; 3.23; 3.27),³ as well as a series on the theme of abortion which, provocatively, included a triptych, a format more habitually associated with religious art and particularly with altar pieces. She might, therefore, appear at first glance

2 e-fig. 24 Paula Rego, *Up the Tree* (2002). Lithograph. Image size: 96.5 x 61.6 cm. Posted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/492818>

3 Eça de Queirós, *The Crime of Father Amaro*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (Sawston, 2001).

an odd choice for the presidential commission, but Sampaio, who had known her for many decades, having been her lawyer in a pre-political incarnation, ought to have known what he was getting.

What he got was a series of eight images which together constitute some of the most startling work this artist has produced to date. Rego herself has stated in interviews, with some disingenuity, that she does not consider the Virgin images to be in any way polemical or irreverent: 'these pictures were created with admiration and respect'.⁴ Her approach to religion, which is elusive, at its most unequivocal has acknowledged a dislike of organized religion ('I am anti-Pope; I don't like the Pope'),⁵ but has staunchly refused any attempt to translate unorthodoxy into the vocabulary of atheism.

Be that as it may, and whether or not with the intent of controversy, this iconoclastic maker of images here produced a series of renditions of one of Christianity's chief icons (in Catholic countries such as Portugal *the* primary icon, more so even than Jesus or God himself) whose effect, as we shall see, contravenes or elides a series of the standard tenets of doctrine: *Annunciation*, fig. 7.1; *Nativity*, fig. 7.3; *Adoration*, fig. 7.9; *Purification at the Temple*, fig. 7.10; *Flight into Egypt*, fig. 7.11; *Lamentation*, fig. 7.12; *Pietá*, fig. 7.19; *Assumption*, fig. 7.20.

Just a Girl

Rego's Virgin Mary cycle engages with and interrogates specific aspects of the Marian cult, by implication also questioning basic premises of Christian dogma. These would include Mary's status — secondary to a Trinity from which she is doctrinally relegated — which Rego rescues and establishes as possessing iconic primacy at the exclusion of Christ himself, nowhere to be seen here (*Lamentation*, fig. 7.12) and sometimes a near-demonic aspect (*Assumption* fig. 7.20).

In Rego's images, then, key doctrinal points are contravened by a series of compositional, symbolic and casting devices, which on the one

4 Paula Rego in interview with Kathleen Gomes, *Público*, Saturday, 8 February 2003, 38. Also in interview with Anabela Mota Ribeiro, *Diário de Notícias*, 1 February 2003, 8.

5 Interview by Edward King in *Paula Rego: Celestina's House* (Kendal: Abbot Hall Art Gallery, 2001; New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2001).



Fig. 7.1 Paula Rego, *Annunciation* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 7.2 Leonardo da Vinci, *Annunciation* (c. 1472-1475) (detail). Oil on panel. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo_da_Vinci_Annunciazione_1472_Uffizien_Florenz-03.jpg

hand bring Mary closer to the human/female condition defined as the consequence of original sin (for example childbirth in pain, in *Nativity*, fig. 7.3, from which doctrinally Mary alone was exempt, Warner, 1985); and on the other hand, raise her in importance above her divine son, giving her representation in scenes in which he should figure but in which she alone does (*Deposition*, fig. 7.14; *Lamentation*, fig. 7.12).

Where's God Gone?



Fig. 7.3 Paula Rego, *Nativity* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In these works, Rego has emphasized the human — as opposed to special or approximately divine — condition of Mary and Jesus by reducing divine content to non-signification, an emphasis that had previously, on occasion, extended to an even more radical move whereby even the species status of Jesus might not be taken for granted (as betokened



Fig. 7.4 Juan de Flandes, *Nativity of Jesus Christ* (c.1435–1438). Oil on panel, 48.5×36.9 cm. Royal Chapel, Granada. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Juan_de_Flandes_Nativity_Granada_012.jpg

by an earlier image of 1987, *Two Girls and a Dog*, e-fig. 4, representing two girls supporting a recumbent dog, which Rego has referred to as a deposition).

If, as Jasper Griffin would have it, Homer was the first ‘theologian’ to bring the gods down into the realm of the human,⁶ the separation of the divine and the earthly, or of the religious and the secular, became ever more problematic in the long time span that followed those first epics. ‘What is truth?’ (John 18:38). Pontius Pilate’s only partly disingenuous question when faced with the mutually exclusive claims of a would-be-

6 Jasper Griffin, *Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

divine Christ and the Jewish religious powers that proclaimed him not to be so, set the agenda for a Judaeo-Christian debate that has shaped much of Western culture, including the visual arts. The problem has not lost any of its urgency, giving rise to explicit or construable, but either way unresolved confrontations with the issue of questionable categories: divinity or temporality, spirituality or carnality, mortality or immortality, the sublime or the mundane, high art or popular culture. Or, to put it another way, and extending the discussion to other cultural parameters, the choice between, and attempted synthesis of, Homer's libidinous, envious, petty, all-too-human deities and a sacrificial Son of God on Golgotha.

In an increasingly polarized age such as ours, inscribed in equal measure by religious indifference (as betokened by drastically declining church attendance)⁷ and martyrdom terrorism, in the West at least, the break between the sign (iconography, symbols) and the referent (God himself) becomes discernible in any number of anecdotes from church websites, the media, urban myth and daily life: the girl in a high street jewellery shop who dithers between a crucifix with or without a miniature Christ, and eventually opts for the former because the cross 'without the little man looks a bit bare';⁸ the media report of a Japanese card manufacturer that got its wires crossed and ended up with an unusable consignment of Christmas cards depicting a crucified Father Christmas;⁹ rules on the nutritional contents and alcohol levels of Eucharistic bread and wine (which may be the actual body and blood of Christ, rather than merely symbolic of it, but are available on Amazon, carry a sell-by date and may be obtained in alcohol-free and gluten-free varieties).¹⁰ Perishable or immortal? Potentially intoxicating

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- 7 Statistics for church attendance in the United Kingdom: <https://www.google.com/search?q=statistics+church+attendance+uk>
 Statistics for church attendance in Portugal: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Statistics+for+church+attendance+in+Portugal>
- 8 William Patrick Casey, 'Jesus: The "Little Man" on the Cross?', *The Fathers of Mercy*, <https://fathersofmercy.com/jesus-man-on-the-cross/>
- 9 Tim Willis, 'Did Japanese Workers Really Get their Symbols Mixed Up and Display Santa on a Crucifix?', *The Independent*, 17 December 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/christmas/entertainment/did-japanese-workers-really-get-their-symbols-mixed-up-and-display-santa-on-a-crucifix-9931931.html>
- 10 Cavanagh Alter Bread on Amazon, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07CXZRV6H>; gluten-free altar bread on Church Buying Group, http://www.churchbuyinggroup.co.uk/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=412; Society of St Vincent de Paul altar bread, <https://www.vinnies-wellington.org.nz/altar-breads/>; Dave

or otherwise? Tolerant or intolerant of dietary restrictions? Echoing Pontius Pilate, we may well ask with some perplexity, what is truth?

Whether due to fear, divine interdiction or the limitations of the visual imagination, the difficulties and challenges of painting, sculpting, performing, installing or videoing the divine may be one of the central challenges that drives such recent and contemporary artists as Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Barnett Newman, Brice Marden, Francis Bacon, Antony Gormley (e-fig. 18),¹¹ Bill Viola, Damien Hirst (e-fig. 19),¹² Anna Chromy, Ana Maria Pacheco, Kiki Smith and Marion Coutts (e-fig. 20).¹³

But if so, I would argue that these artists, rather than insurgents against tradition, might be the inheritors of it, which is to say the heirs — in a continuous, unbroken line — to a longstanding heritage of artists (Caravaggio, Donatello, El Greco, Goya, Sargeant, Mantegna, Grünewald, Raphael, Piero de la Francesca and almost any artist of any significance in the art canon) who experienced the same difficulties in their confrontation with an impalpable, undepictable, possibly unbelievable divinity. Almost always, with the exception of Michaelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, what is available is the iconography not of God but of his all-too-dead Son (fig. 4.18).

Is He Dead or Just Resting?

The counterpoint to an escalating lack of religious commitment in Western societies, however, is not necessarily, or not exclusively, a

Lieberman, 'The Nutritional Content of Holy Communion', *OC Weekly*, 26 December 2014, <https://ocweekly.com/the-nutritional-content-of-holy-communion-6618675/>; 'Transubstantiation', Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transubstantiation>; Nutritional values of the Eucharist, myfitnesspal, <https://www.myfitnesspal.com/food/calories/eucharist-161038831>; Emily Bell, 'What Is Sacramental Wine and Where Does It Come From?', [vinepair.com](http://vinepair.com/wine-blog/the-popes-coming-to-town-drink-some-sacramental-wine/), 18 September 2015, <https://vinepair.com/wine-blog/the-popes-coming-to-town-drink-some-sacramental-wine/>

- 11 e-fig. 18 Antony Gormley, *Still Being* (2012). Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo, Brazil. antonygormley.com, © Antony Gormley, all rights reserved, <http://www.antonygormley.com/uploads/images/5088fd0b55c70.jpg>
- 12 e-fig. 19 Damien Hirst, *God Alone Knows* (2007). Glass, painted stainless steel, silicone, mirror, stainless steel, plastic cable ties, sheep and formaldehyde solution with steel and Carrara marble plinths, 323.6 x 171 x 61.1 cm. (Left) | 380.5 x 201.4 x 61.1 cm. (Centre) | 323.6 x 171 x 61.1 cm. (Right). Photo by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd., all rights reserved, http://damienhirst.com/images/hirstimage/DHS6003_771_0.jpg
- 13 e-fig. 20 Marion Coutts, *Decalogue* (2001). Skittles, enamel, vinyl lettering, dimensions variable, 35 cm. marioncoutts.com, © Marion Coutts, all rights reserved, <http://www.marioncoutts.com/img//th/13.jpg>

polarized North-American Bible-Belt Christian or Middle-Eastern Islamic fundamentalism, but rather an aesthetic, cutting-edge cultivation of deviant formats, as manifested in art and literature. Bill Viola's video installation of *The Passions* of 2003, for example (first exhibited, coincidentally one year after Rego's *Virgin Mary* series) was arguably, in many ways, the most straight-forwardly reverential instance of religious art available at that point in the whole of London's National Gallery collection, old or new: surpassing, in hushed, irony-free homage, any Leonardo, Bellini or Raphael housed within those walls. But even so, the resurrection — underwritten in one of Viola's pieces by its title, *Emergence* — remains a promise that does not materialize.¹⁴ Instead, in this piece, and in a reversal of the established order, resurrection quickly (slowly: a video film shown in extremely slow motion of a man's body in a loin cloth rising from a water tank) becomes a lamentation by two women, and then an embrace that might be either the kiss of life or of death. The theme of Madonnas turned black widows/bunny boilers will become of the essence presently, in this consideration of Paula Rego's religious imagery.

Whether revisionist, iconoclastic, polemical or reverential, one of the theological difficulties that confronts the sceptical mind is the problem of sorrow surrounding the death of Christ.

For agnostic or atheist thought, Christian bereavement appears out of place, both regarding Jesus himself (since he will resuscitate) and those he left behind (since thanks to *his* transitory death *they* will be saved). The enduring shadow of sorrow, then, must imply, at some level, a failure of faith, the weakening of belief in the divinity of Christ (he may not rise again, he may turn out not to be the promised Saviour). A doubt, indeed, planted within the Christian faith by the Gospel text itself, in the narration of the moment of death: 'when Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost'.¹⁵ Giving up the ghost (the Holy Spirit) is the most cryptic of all Biblical ambiguities, construable, arguably, as the abdication of any claimed association with the Trinity that might confirm Jesus's status as divine.

14 Bill Viola, 'Emergence' from *The Passions* (2003), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTPf6mHKYD0>

15 John 19:30.



Fig. 7.5 Bronzino, *Deposition of Christ* (1543–1545). Oil on panel, 268 x 173 cm. Musée de Beaux Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:D%C3%A9ploration_sur_le_Christ_mort_\(Bronzino\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:D%C3%A9ploration_sur_le_Christ_mort_(Bronzino).jpg)

In his analysis of tragedy and of Jesus as tragic hero Terry Eagleton addresses these matters from the point of view of the sacrificed Christ, when he argues that on the cross, the latter believes he has lost his divinity ('it is finished'). Hence the despair at the last, and the accusing cry to a forsaking Father. For Jesus, according to Eagleton (2003, 23–40), the tragic moment, the moment when he could justifiably say 'this is the worst' comes when belief (in himself as Son of God) is lost, and instead he finds himself 'a little lower than the angels'.¹⁶ Finds, in short, that now it is, indeed, 'a time to die'.¹⁷ World without end¹⁸ no longer.

16 Psalms 8.

17 Ecclesiastes 3:2.

18 *Book of Common Prayer*, Morning Prayer, 'Gloria'.

For Saint Augustine, evil was definable as the place where God was not (Rotman, 1993; Evans, 1982). When the possibility of divinity disappears, whether it be for Jesus on the cross, or for the agonizing believer undergoing a dark night of the soul, or for the merrily atheistic denier, that is where, for Augustine, the Devil, understandable not as a force for malevolence but merely as an absence, can be located.¹⁹ Other possibilities, however, offer themselves, with an exactly antithetical effect, namely the broadly Humanist one of a species that, stripped of faith, comes into its own on a trajectory of earthly fulfilment that includes the acceptance of human duty and moral responsibility *here and now*, without the inducement of a blank cheque for atonement, forgiveness or reward in the hereafter.

Primo Levi, confronting the need to articulate the historic unutterable that was the Holocaust (an event in the context of which, even supposing he was anywhere else at all, God indeed was not) wrote *If This is a Man*.²⁰ The title may be a quotation from Rabbi Hillel, who some believe to have been Jesus' teacher: 'in a place of no men, strive to be a man'.²¹ In our understanding, paradoxically, the place of no men may also be the place of no God, which, Augustinianly, is the place of evil. Confronted with that danger, however, the Rabbi may be urging not the pursuit of God but the pursuit of the self in its humanity (striving to be a man), as the antidote to evil down the ages, from ancient Palestine to the Nazis and back again (grimly, albeit arguably with a numerical difference, back full-circle to modern conflict-torn Palestine). 'When everyone acts inhuman, what should a man do? He should act more human'.²² Long before Christianity came into being, ancient theologies and philosophies had already wrestled with the problem of God, good and evil and had come up with no firm answers. The Epicurean Paradox sums it up: if God can prevent evil but does not, he is malevolent; if he would but cannot, he is not omnipotent; if he is both able and willing, where does evil come from? And if he is neither, why call him God? Faced with these difficulties, it is no wonder that artists have been unable to

19 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961).

20 Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: The Orion Press, 1959).

21 Rabbi Hillel, *Pirke Avot* 1:12–14, 2:5–6. Or, 'In a place where there are no leaders, try to be a leader'.

22 Janusz Korczak, quoted in Bettelheim, Bruno, 'Janusz Korczak: A Tale for Our Time', in *Recollections and Reflections* (London: Penguin, 1992), 191–206, <https://archive.org/details/JanuszKorczak-ATaleForOurTime>

envisage God and had to resort instead to depicting his son made flesh at its most vulnerable. If, as the song would have it, ‘they ain’t makin’ Jews like Jesus anymore’,²³ this applies most fittingly to the absolutely human Jesus in confrontation with his own mortality and embarked upon a two-pronged rebellion: on the one hand against the old, corrupt, organized Jewish religion; and on the other hand against his ruthless abandoning father (and, as we know, beginning with Abraham, there are plenty such fathers both in the Old and New Testaments, and in our historical and daily quotidian).

The trajectory to godlessness as the only available option in the attempt to be morally human may have been what consciously or unconsciously drove artists and writers in various modes of religiosity, scepticism or out-and-out anticlericalism/atheism, throughout the centuries of Western creativity. Rebellion, and in a religious context its twin sentiment, iconoclasm, as Baudrillard understood, are not the same as atheism. As every teenager unrequited in love knows, indifference, not hate, is the antithesis of love.

The visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God [...] is precisely what was feared by the Iconoclasts, whose millennial quarrel is still with us today. Their rage to destroy images rose precisely because they sensed this omnipotence of the simulacra, this facility they have of erasing God from the consciousnesses of people, and the overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God; that only simulacra exist; indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum. Had they been able to believe that images only occulted or masked the Platonic idea of God, there would have been no reason to destroy them. One can live with the idea of a distorted truth. But their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the images concealed nothing at all, and that in fact they were not images, such as the original model would have made them, but actual perfect simulacra forever radiant with their own fascination. But this death of the divine referential has to be exorcised at all cost. [...] All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange — God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated,

23 Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jew Boys, ‘They Ain’t Makin’ Jews Like Jesus Anymore’, 1973, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FSWm67IhDU>

that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum [...] never again exchanging for what is real. (Baudrillard in Poster, 1988, 169–70)

Whatever the case may be, the trajectory towards immanence (God-everywhere, God-down-here, God-in-us), can also be seen as the trajectory of usurpation of divinity by the human or the humanization of the Divine, which is what concerns us in the art works under contemplation here. That trajectory, artist-specific and different in each case, may or may not be also the trajectory to atheism, or to iconoclasm, which as already argued are not necessarily the same. Immanence requires a specific vocabulary and iconography through which to be articulated and understood. When God is made flesh and arguably stays flesh — the despairing Christ on the cross, a doubting Thomas *avant la letter*, unable to envisage his own resurrection ('it is finished') — the trajectory towards immanence, synthesizing as it does the divine and the human, becomes translatable as a voyage towards (sometimes atheist) innocence or non-faith. Or, put a different way, towards scepticism, towards inexperience (including inexperience of evil), towards the purity of lack of experience or lack of knowledge, as found in the Edenic state. Built in to the Epicurean paradox outlined above is the unavoidable conclusion that without evil there is no need for God. In *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* José Saramago, Paula Rego's fellow-countryman and Nobel Prize winner ponders this notion:

Jesus had heard some old men travelling through Nazareth say that inside the bowels of the world there existed enormous caverns where there were cities, fields, rivers, forests and deserts, just like on the surface, and that that underground world, an exact copy of ours, had been created by the Devil after God had flung him from the heavenly heights as punishment for his rebellion [...] And, said the old men, as the Devil had been present on the occasion of the creation of Adam and Eve, and had learned how it was done, he copied the creation of a man and a woman in his subterranean kingdom, the only difference being that, unlike God, he had forbidden them nothing, that being the reason why, in the Devil's world there is no original sin. One of the old men went as far as saying, And if there was no original sin, there was no other kind either. (Saramago, 1991, italics added)

And elsewhere God addresses Satan as follows:

[I do not forgive you, I want you just as you are, or even worse if possible, Why, Because the Goodness that I am would not exist without the Evil that you are, a Goodness that existed without you would be inconceivable [...] if you go, I go, in order for me to be Goodness you have to continue being Evil, if the Devil isn't the Devil, God is not God, the death of one would be the death of the other.]

Saramago makes God the worst kind of narcissist, and many would no doubt agree, but even that does not necessarily make him easier to portray in images. Spirituality, bullied by artists caught up in the lure of representation but outwitted by the difficulties of depicting the metaphysical, may have resulted in the paradox of divinity beguiled visually into immanence. Looking up at God on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, too many viewers, however sincere their faith, may have murmured in their hearts 'that wasn't how I imagined Him'. Unable to find a convincing format for depicting God, the easy way out is the way we know, the shapes we recognize, the emotions we ourselves experience. The Word made flesh, wounded flesh, which, like Thomas, we need to touch in order to credit it. Seeing is believing, touching is believing.²⁴ The price to be paid, in terms of faith, is the risk of either immanence or scepticism, in both cases the risk of imagining that there is no heaven.

Ecce Homo ('Behold the man!' John 19:5), Pontius Pilate's delivery of Christ to the mob in Gospel passages of remarkable complexity, presents the latter as someone with whom Pilate can engage only as *a man*, and whom, as such, he wishes and fights to rescue. Christ himself, cryptically, points a vague finger of blame ('he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin', John 19:11), leaving ambiguous whether by that he means God (which would make himself, as Saramago would have it, a reluctant sacrificial Son²⁵), or merely the earthly authorities (which would disrupt his claim to divinity as lamb — of God — to the

24 John 20: 25–29.

25 The idea as Christ as a reluctant pawn of Jehovah is masterfully presented in José Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991). For a discussion of this see also Maria Manuel Lisboa, *A Heaven of Their Own: Heresy and Heterodoxy in Portuguese Literature from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* and several of the essays in the bibliography to that volume, in particular Harold Bloom's essay, 'The One with the Beard is God, the Other One is the Devil', listed in the bibliography to this current volume.

slaughter). Whatever the case may be, the Pilate passages arguably transfigure Christ into a figure who, more than anyone else, is in need of a saviour: a saviour whom Pilate repeatedly struggles to be ('I find in him no fault at all'; 'Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him', John 18:38, 19:3).

Baudrillard's reading of iconoclasm, as discussed above, located it as the home of true religious fervour — with the iconoclast cast as the destroyer of icons that threaten to upstage the unique (inimitable) reality of God.²⁶ In a different interpretation we would argue here that the cult of immanence may be iconoclasm by a different name (the Divine made human rather than transcendental). Be that as it may, trouble with faith seems to be what motivates a variety of contemporary creations (in literature, film, painting, sculpture, installation and video) whose take on the metaphysical and the sacred reflects it back at us and possibly at itself, with disquieting but beguiling modifications. And occasionally with no hope. Sometimes the light at the end of the tunnel really is that of an oncoming train.

It may have been this silent possibility that drove a long and populous tradition of artists who, consciously or not, more readily painted the decay than the resurrection of holy flesh. Of all the Biblical tableaux relating to the person of Jesus, numerically speaking by far the scenes that have more often attracted either artists' attention or their patrons' commissioning desires have been those that emphasize his humanity, his mortality, his perishability (man of sorrows, crucifixions, lamentations, *pietás*). From early medieval iconography onwards, painters and sculptors, in surprisingly counter-hieratic mode, have insistently emphasized the chains that bind Jesus to his earth-bound, destructible, inconsolable condition.

The Jewish tradition of Midrash invites elaboration upon the questions left unanswered in Scripture. What was the name of Lot's wife? Why did she look back and risk the fate that befell her?²⁷ What did the snake look like before the condemnation, in Genesis, that thenceforth it should crawl on its belly? Did God hesitate before wiping out his *chef d'oeuvre* in the annihilations of the Flood and the Cities of the Plain? When is it a time to die?

²⁶ Baudrillard, *op. cit.*

²⁷ For an interesting discussion of this see Celina Spiegel and Christina Buchmann, *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).



Fig. 7.6 Rembrandt (workshop of), *Descent from the Cross* (1634). Oil on canvas, 158 x 117 cm. Hermitage Museum. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Descent_from_the_Cross_\(Rembrandt\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Descent_from_the_Cross_(Rembrandt).jpg)



Fig. 7.7 Anonymous (Wroclaw), *Christ as Man of Sorrows* (1443). Tempera on larch wood, 180 x 136 cm. National Museum, Warsaw. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wroc%C5%82aw_Christ_as_Man_of_Sorrows.jpg

His Mother's Little Boy

For the Son of God as seen through art, just as for the rest of us, the time to die, all too commonly, seems to have been there and then, here and now, in artists from unattributed medieval art (fig. 7.8) to Damien Hirst (e-fig. 19), all of whom emphasized the chains that bind Jesus, and with him Mary and associated figures (such as Mary Magdalene) to their earth-bound, human condition, rather than to any credible hope of eternity.



Fig. 7.8 Anonymous (Germany), *Altarpiece with the Passion of Christ: Entombment* (c. 1480–1495). Oil on panel, 129.5 x 119.7 cm. Walters Arts Museum, Baltimore. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:German_-_Altarpiece_with_the_Passion_of_Christ_-_Entombment_-_Walters_37664.jpg

In a recent image by Paula Rego (*Our Lady of Sorrows*, e-fig. 21),²⁸ Jesus is modelled by a doll or mannequin: in other words, a truly lifeless being,

28 e-fig. 21 Paula Rego, *Our Lady of Sorrows* (2013). Acrylic, graphite and pastel on paper mounted on aluminium. Marlborough Fine Art, London. Posted by *The New Statesman*, [https://www.newstatesman.com/sites/default/files/images/2014%2B41%20Our%20Lady%20of%20Sorrows22\(1\).jpg](https://www.newstatesman.com/sites/default/files/images/2014%2B41%20Our%20Lady%20of%20Sorrows22(1).jpg)

whilst the picture's title, like those of the *Cycle of the Life of the Virgin Mary*, draws attention instead to Mary's anguish.

In its totality, then, the overall effect of Biblical themes, contested redemptory assumptions, empty *locus divinum*, tragedy, betrayal and pathos all add up to the recuperation of key narratives of heretic, antagonistic, love-turned-hatred, hell-hath-no-wrath, scorned, betrayed, animalistic but also absolutely human (in the sense of temporal as opposed to spiritual) effect. A prime demonstration, in short, of the appropriation of the vocabulary of spirituality for the purpose of in-your-face unorthodoxy. This urge to profanity leads me now to what is arguably some of Paula Rego's most complex work to date, the *Life of the Virgin Mary* series.

The head-hunting of Mary — like that of Jesus — by a Humanist contingent hungry for its own icons, gives rise to revisionist images such as those of Rego's Virgin. It takes very little tampering, after all, and only a moderate degree of irreverence, to re-cast Mary as a modern icon, offered as a role model to contemporary women: single mother; mother of a child with an absent (busy) career father (since creating and monitoring the world, after all, gives exaggerated meaning to the life of a busy CEO submerged in boardroom battles); or mother in a modern-day relationship of serial monogamy, with a child raised by his stepfather.

In the past, Rego had expressed a predilection for profanity, when she claimed Max Ernst's *The Virgin Spanking the Infant Jesus in Front of Three Witnesses* (1926, e-fig. 22)²⁹ as one of her favourite paintings. In her *Virgin* cycle of 2002, the humanity of Mary permeates the paradigmatic iconographic tenets of endlessly repeated imagistic convention: unexpected and unavoidable pregnancy (*Annunciation*, fig. 7.1); the attendant difficulties of painful childbirth (*Nativity*, fig. 7.3); thoughtfulness to the needs of others (dutifully receiving visitors when body — leaving aside soul — cries out for rest after childbirth: *Adoration*, fig. 7.9); attention to the prescriptions of religious ritual

29 e-fig. 22 Max Ernst, *The Virgin Spanking the Infant Jesus in Front of Three Witnesses* (1926). Oil on canvas, 196 x 130 cm. Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Wikiart, <https://uploads6.wikiart.org/images/max-ernst/the-virgin-spanking-the-christ-child-before-three-witnesses-andre-breton-paul-eluard-and-the-1926.jpg!Large.jpg>

(*Purification at the Temple*, fig. 7.10); harassment by an unhelpful outside world (*Flight into Egypt*, fig. 7.11); the sorrow of a death in the family (*Lamentation*, fig. 7.12); the pain of losing a son (*Pietá*, fig. 7.19); letting go of an ambivalently valued life (*Assumption*, fig. 7.20).



Fig. 7.9 Paula Rego, *Adoration* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

In Genesis, in addition to all the punishments levelled at Adam, Eve accrued one all of her own, namely childbirth in pain, as befitted her superior guilt. It is possible that Eve's may have been the *felix culpa* that necessitated the advent of Mary, the über-gimmick that redeemed her sex:



Fig. 7.10 Paula Rego, *Purification at the Temple* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 7.11 Paula Rego, *Flight into Egypt* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Ne had the apple taken been,
 The apple taken been,
 Ne had never our lady
 A-been heavenè queen.

Blessèd be the time
 That apple taken was.
 Therefore we moun singen
*Deo gracias!*³⁰

Or not, since Mary, whilst being a woman, was unique, and in effect left the rest of womankind still unshriven, as well as unreleased from the painful punishment mentioned above. For Mary alone, then, was reserved the divine epidural still withheld from other women in perpetuity. Traditional nativities make clear that for Mary there was no pain, but the iconography of human parturition was not always so coyly airbrushed out, nor were the ancients mealy-mouthed about depicting back-to-basics labour as betokened by, for example, extant ancient statuary (e-fig. 23).³¹

And in the Old Testament, too, reproduction and matters akin are handled with sometimes less than minimum delicacy. Try telling this story to your child, or even the more prudish churchgoers:

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, [she...] said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. (Genesis 30: 1–7)

In no sense, then, is Margaret Atwood's revision of the Rachel/Bilhah episode as the starter gun to her nightmare futuristic world in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1987) any cruder or more brutal than its

30 'Adam lay ybounden' in David Willcocks and John Rutter (eds.), *Carols for Choirs 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 86.

31 e-fig. 23 Unattributed (Antinoe, Egypt), *Clay rattle of a woman giving birth* (c. 100–150). Clay, 8.5 x 6 x 6 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, United Kingdom, all rights reserved, <http://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/51735>

precursor narrative. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the few women who are still fertile in the post-cataclysm world of a Republic of Gilead made barren by radiation, are held hostage, forcibly impregnated and compelled to breed under duress for the Commanders, the ruling class of males in the new order. Their fruitful wombs now transformed into the scarce commodity of species continuity; they are compelled into ritualistic ceremonies in the course of which they are impregnated by the Commanders while lying clamped between the legs of their barren wives, and give birth in the same position.

The Commander's Wife hurries in, in her ridiculous white cotton nightgown, her spindly legs sticking out beneath it. Two of the Wives in their blue dresses and veils hold her by the arms, as if she needs it; she has a tight little smile on her face, like a hostess at a party she'd rather not be giving. She must know what we think of her. She scrambles onto the Birthing Stool, sits on the seat behind and above Janine, so that Janine is framed by her: her skinny legs come down on either side, like the arms of an eccentric chair. Oddly enough, she's wearing white cotton socks, and bedroom slippers, blue ones made of fuzzy material, like toilet-seat covers. But we pay no attention to the Wife, we hardly even see her, our eyes are on Janine. In the dim light, in her white gown, she glows like a moon in cloud. She is grunting now, with the effort. 'Push, push, push', we whisper. (Atwood, 1987, 135)

The third text of pertinence to these considerations, of Biblical sourcing like the first, is the forerunner of the observations that follow:

And the angel came unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. [...] Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (Luke 1:28–34)

A Mother's Work Is Never Done

Genesis offers no comment at all regarding Bilhah's feelings faced with the bargain struck between the barren Rachel, a frustrated Jacob and an inscrutable God. Margaret Atwood's haunting fiction of a post-apocalypse world, in contrast, offers eloquent first-person comment on

the plight of the Handmaids, known only by the genitive 'Of' attached to their masters' first name (Offred, Ofglen, Ofwarren).

For Mary in Luke, and even more cryptically in Matthew (the event merits no mention in the other two Gospels), it is a different story: a brief show of reluctance on hers (and Joseph's) part — 'Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be [...] Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (Luke 1:29–34); 'Then Joseph her husband [...] was minded to put her away (Matthew 1:19) — quickly replaced by submissive acquiescence ('and Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord' (Luke 1:38), and a glossed-over pregnancy from which, after centuries of doctrinal patristic pondering, she emerges still a virgin and pain-free, even in parturition: in short, absolutely stripped of all that might link her to the rest of her sex, all the way back to and including Eve ('in sorrow shalt though bring forth children' (Genesis 3:16).

Mother and maiden
Was never none but she;
Well may such a lady
Godès mother be. (Anonymous, *Chester Book of Carols*, s.d.)³²

Rachel and Bilhah in Genesis, Mary in Luke and Matthew, Serena Joy and Offred in Gilead — and not (St.) Paul back then, definitely not *him*, but Paul(a) right now: different women, but a connecting thread, or posture, physical and mental. The posture is that of painful human parturition and also of reluctance: virgins and/or wives press-ganged with greater or lesser unwillingness into reproductive service by the envoys of a higher purpose.

It is left to Paula Rego's image of the *Nativity* (fig. 7.3) — an image with which she declared herself to be 'particularly happy'³³ — to restore Mary to both her humanity (because this is an image of realistic childbirth in pain), and to an admittedly ambivalent yet undeniable sorority with other women who, with all the mixed feelings of sisterhood and hate

32 'I sing of a maiden' (Anon., music by Lennox Berkeley), *Chester Book of Carols* (London: Chester [s.d.]). https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/i_sing_of_a_maiden.htm

33 Paula Rego in interview with Richard Zimler, op. cit.

that presumably afflicted Rachel, Bilhah and the Gileadian Wives (and, in this picture, possibly, the unlovely female angel — female, in dress or drag), held their more fertile counterparts between their legs.

Paula Rego has often related in interviews an episode from her student days at the Slade School of Art in the 1950s, in which she was advised to paint only what she could see. With reference to the Virgin Mary images, she has stated that that is what she did.³⁴ Tongue in cheek? Don't count on it.

[Richard Zimler — That pastel gives us the Virgin with her legs apart, suffering the pains of childbirth].

Paula Rego — I think every woman feels it, that's why we can identify with her. We all know it's like that — to be pregnant [...] is upsetting and frightening. She's frightened and yet she's accepting.

If there is anything new about these representations of the Virgin, it is the fact that they were done by a woman] which is very rare. [...] It always used to be men who painted the life of the Virgin, and now it is a woman. It offers a different point of view, because we identify more easily with her.³⁵

Jane Caplan, elaborating on the writings of Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, writes as follows:

If you are taken in by the Catholic Church's adulation of the Virgin Mary, you will also be open to address as fascism's fertile Mother; if the Holy Family is an ideal relation in your eyes, you will be readily incorporated in the fascist family. Thus the originality of fascism is not the content of its ideology, but the use it makes of pre-existent ideology which is already deeply inscribed in the unconscious. [...] you can't talk about fascism unless you are also prepared to discuss patriarchy. (Caplan, 1979, 59–66)³⁶

And, needless to say, Catholicism too. In this context, it is worth remembering that the fascist regime in Portugal signed a Concordat

34 Paula Rego in interview with Kathleen Gomes, op. cit.

35 Paula Rego in interview with Richard Zimler, op. cit.

36 Maria Antonietta Macciocchi (1979), 'Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology', *Feminist Review*, 1 (1979), 67–81.

Jane Caplan, 'Introduction to Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology', *Feminist Review*, 1 (1979), 59–66.

with the Vatican in 1940 which translated the law and iconography of the church into state law and propagandist culture. For Jorge Sampaio, president of a country restored to democracy in 1974 but which, in a referendum in 1998, rejected the liberalization of what was then one of Europe's harshest abortion laws, these pictures, 'a militant interpretation [of Mary]', are an *aperçu* of 'the saga of woman throughout the centuries [...] the woman as subject [...] a trajectory of female emancipation [which throws light] on the vicissitudes of suffering'. (Sampaio, 2003, 40–41).³⁷ The pose, in any case, is always familiar and always cryptic, to the followers of this artist's work. Have I seen you here before? I think so: whether pain is inflected by a positive aspect — paroxysms of love (*Love*, fig. 4.34, *Bride*, fig. 4.35); childbirth (*Nativity*, fig. 7.3) — or by something more destructive — betrayal, rejection, revenge (*Moth*, fig. 4.32); sex gone wrong (untitled abortion pastels, figs. 4.3–4.5; 4.14; 4.15; 4.24–4.26; 4.30; 4.31; 4.37; 4.38; 4.41; 4.49) — the pose that links these concerns lends itself to interpretation as extending an agenda of challenge, whether intentional or unintentional. In the dark, all pain is grey.

Making His Mother Cry

Physical pain, made more ignoble because made invisible — in other words, not even meriting a place in posterity — is also the theme of *Lamentation* (fig. 7.12), as well as *Deposition* (fig. 7.14), an earlier image, not part of this series. In the past Rego had already taken an iconoclastic approach to sacred scenes, such as Christ's deposition, which she had depicted featuring Jesus as a dog in *Two Girls and a Dog* (e-fig. 4). Unlike in the standard iconography associated with this topic (Van Cleeve, *Lamentation of Christ*, fig. 7.13; Bourdon, *Descent from the Cross*, fig. 7.15; Rubens, *Descent from the Cross*, fig. 7.16) in Rego's lamentations and depositions (figs. 7.12 and 7.14), Jesus Christ, supposedly the star of this particular show, either figures as a dog or is not present at all; and in one case (Rego, *Up the Tree*, e-fig. 24) his position on the cross is usurped by a woman who might be Bertha, mad wife of a man intent on bigamy.

37 Jorge Sampaio, *Diário de Notícias*, Lisbon, Saturday 15 February 2003, 40–41.



Fig. 7.12 Paula Rego, *Lamentation* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 7.13 Joos Van Cleve, *Lamentation of Christ* (first quarter of 16th century). Oil on oak, 71.5 x 55 cm. National Museum of Warsaw. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joos_van_Cleve_\(follower\)_Lamentation_of_Christ.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joos_van_Cleve_(follower)_Lamentation_of_Christ.jpg)



Fig. 7.14 Paula Rego, *Deposition* (1998). Pastel on paper, 160 x 120 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 7.15 Sébastien Bourdon, *Descent from the Cross* (third quarter of 17th century). Oil on canvas, 111 x 78 cm. National Museum, Warsaw. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bourdon_Descent_from_the_Cross.jpg



Fig. 7.16 Peter Paul Rubens, *Descent from the Cross* (c. 1612–1614). Oil on panel, 420.5 x 320 cm. Our Lady's Cathedral, Antwerp. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_-_Descent_from_the_Cross_-_WGA20212.jpg

The lamentation at the foot of the cross is one of the set pieces of religious art. Its supporting cast traditionally are the women: Mary always, Magdalene usually, Martha sometimes. The lead player, however, is Jesus himself, crucified *en route* back to immortality, the Son with whom God, after all, was well pleased. Within religious iconographic tradition, Jesus is present both as chief protagonist of iconic lamentations and *pietás*, and under contract for future roles: depositions, entombments, resurrections, assumptions (figs. 7.17; 7.18).

In Rego's *Lamentation* (fig. 7.12), an example of her unorthodoxy is found in her overruling of the doctrinal supremacy of the Trinitarian Jesus, who is elided from this image, only the supporting cast of the women being present). As in her *Deposition* (fig. 7.14) Jesus is absent, or at least not available to view, excluded from the main spectacle, hung too high to be seen. Is invisibility (non-existence) the price of overdone, literal loftiness? If you are raised so high that you cannot be glimpsed, you might as well not exist. Can the Divine have any real meaning only if it is brought a little lower than the angels? If it is made more like us? In Rego's *Lamentation* the intention and effect of the compositional decision is to remove Christ from the centre stage, replacing him with his mother whom Rego declares to be 'the star'.



Fig. 7.17 Anonymous, *Entombment* (c. 1495 and 1505). Oil on panel. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:German_School_-_Entombment_-_1926.570_-_Art_Institute_of_Chicago.jpg



Fig. 7.18 Tintoretto, *The Resurrection of Christ* (1579–1581). Oil on canvas, 529 x 485 cm. Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_-_The_Resurrection_of_Christ_-_WGA22555.jpg

How can you do a crucifixion? If you do one it upstages everything. You cannot put it in this series. And it's not necessary. The crucifixion is there in *The Lamentation*, but it's out of the picture. So you concentrate on Mary. (Rego quoted in Zimler, 2003)³⁸

Concentrate on her and arguably identify with her. It may be for this reason that the female protagonists of this image, in stark contrast to that ethereal/ephemeral Son of God, so wholly holy that he becomes at once incomprehensible, remote and simply not there, rub in our faces their contrasting flawed humanity. An entirely different species to Raphael's Boden-catalogue-style yummy-mummy Madonnas (fig. 4.22), Paula Rego's protagonists provoke us on many levels: on the one hand a tart's micro-skirt, skimpy top and fuck-me boots (fig. 7.12); and on the other a dowdy figure in deep mourning (*Lamentation*, fig. 7.19), with no apparent faith in a resurrection supposedly to come, and whose sorrow therefore begs the question, not only in this image and the next (*Pietá*, fig. 7.19) but in the entire *Pietá* sub-genre in the canon: why so *dolorosa*, if the Son is only temporarily dead? Or is it after all not temporary?



Fig. 7.19 Paula Rego, *Pietá* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

38 Paula Rego in interview with Richard Zimler, op. cit.

Rego's *Pietá* plays age games also deployed elsewhere in her work. In *The Crime of Father Amaro* series she had cast a grown man (albeit in foetal pose) in the role of the child Amaro (*The Company of Women*, fig. 3.1). In *Pietá*, contrarily, both the man Christ and his supposedly middle-aged or elderly mother are depicted as children, and as such restored to an eminently destructible vulnerability. They carry echoes of the youthful Mary in the first image in this series (*Annunciation*, fig. 7.1), a *collégiene précoce*, sitting under the gaze of a butch angel, dressed in girlish frills and a pleated school skirt, and herself shockingly reminiscent of the child-like abortion girls ('the pictures I most enjoyed doing in all my life'³⁹), some of whom also wore school uniform (figs. 4.14 and 4.15). Like the latter (and as Paula Rego is keen to emphasize, very much *unlike* a long line of iconography by the great Renaissance masters), her Madonna, in *Nativity* (fig. 7.3), carries an undertow of violence: the 'profane pain [...] of someone like us';⁴⁰ 'a twelve year old girl [...] in a desperate, difficult situation';⁴¹ 'and why not? She had a child. It is a dramatic moment. [...] Violence begins at birth'.⁴²

Rego's Virgin Mary images invite any number of hard questions with no obvious answers provided either in the Gospels or elsewhere in doctrine. Who is a mother here? Who is blessed or blissful? Where is God? How old is his bride? What happened to the age of consent? When do bridal white or virgin blue become hellish black (*Assumption*, fig. 7.20)? When does religious ecstasy become orgasmic profanity? When does a bride become a slut? When does the sound of epiphany become the beat of punk rock? In the words of another Madonna, author and singer of *Like a Virgin*, 'who's that girl?'

I made it through the wilderness
Somehow I made it through
Didn't know how lost I was
Until I found you

I was beat
Incomplete
I'd been had, I was sad and blue
But you made me feel

39 Paula Rego in interview with Ana Marques Gastão, *Diário de Notícias*, 19 July 2002.

40 Interview with Rocha de Sousa, *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Idéias*, 5 March 2003.

41 Interview with Anabela Mota Ribeiro, *op. cit.*, 10.

42 Paula Rego in interview with Kathleen Gomes, *op. cit.*

Yeah, you made me feel
Shiny and new

Hoo, Like a virgin
Touched for the very first time
Like a virgin
When your heart beats
Next to mine

Gonna give you all my love, boy
My fear is fading fast
Been saving it all for you
'Cause only love can last

You're so fine
And you're mine
Make me strong, yeah you make me bold
Oh your love thawed out
Yeah, your love thawed out
What was scared and cold

Like a virgin, hey
Touched for the very first time
Like a virgin
With your heartbeat
Next to mine

Whoa
Whoa, ah
Whoa

You're so fine
And you're mine
I'll be yours
'Till the end of time.

Madonna, 'Like a Virgin'

Where Is She Going Now?

'Till the end of time'. World without end? In Paula Rego's version of Mary the question 'who's that girl?' is not unreasonable. And the disquiet created by the first seven images reaches a climax in the last image in this series, *Assumption* (fig. 7.29), featuring a satanic, runaway Madonna, clad not in traditional virgin blue or red but rather in witch's black.



Fig. 7.20 Paula Rego, *Assumption* (2002). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 54 x 52 cm. Belém Palace, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 7.21 Andrea Mantegna, *Christ's Descent into Limbo* (1470–1475). Tempera on wood, 38.8 x 41.3 cm. Lent to the Frick Museum, NYC from the Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection. Wikimedia, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MantegnaDescentLimbo.jpg>



Fig. 7.22 Titian, *Assumption of Mary* (1516–1518). Oil on panel, 690 x 360 cm. Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tizian_041.jpg



Fig. 7.23 Andrea del Sarto, *Assumption of the Virgin* (1530). Oil on panel 309 x 205 cm. Poppi altar piece, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea_del_Sarto_-_Assumption_of_the_Virgin_\(Poppi_Altarpiece\)_-_WGA0416.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea_del_Sarto_-_Assumption_of_the_Virgin_(Poppi_Altarpiece)_-_WGA0416.jpg)

With reference to her *Assumption* Rego has commented, possibly disingenuously: 'There's a wonderful picture by Mantegna of Christ descending into Limbo [fig. 7.30]. It's the most marvelous picture in the world. [...it] came into my mind when I was doing *The Assumption*. The Virgin Mary is rising to heaven, but underneath her — underneath them — might be a black gap'.⁴³ Is Rego's Mary really Heaven-bound or is she heading in the opposite direction? With Scripture, as with everything else, everything depends on who's interpreting it.

In Rego's *Assumption*, Mary's attire is reminiscent in hue of the anti-clerical context of *The Sin of Father Amaro* series, for example in *Angel* (fig. 3.27), as well as of what is arguably the most violent picture in that series of images (*Amélia's Dream*, fig. 3.21). The hell hag in *Assumption* (fig. 7.20), moreover, whose posture reprises that of some of Rego's dancing ostriches of 1995 (*Dancing Ostriches from Disney's Fantasia*, fig. 3.22),⁴⁴ is dressed entirely in black and stands with her back turned to the viewer, inscrutable and unapproachable, with arms raised in incantatory mode, theoretically born aloft by an angel whose comparative slightness, however, suggests the likelihood that he will be crushed by her.

What is going on, then, in these images in which the destructibility of the child Jesus — whether unborn (*Annunciation*, fig. 7.1; *Nativity*, fig. 7.3), newborn (*Adoration*, fig. 7.9; *Purification at the Temple*, fig. 7.10; *Flight into Egypt*, fig. 7.11), or descended from the cross (*Pietá*, fig. 7.19) — is made even more conspicuous by the scandal of his absence (*Lamentation*, fig. 7.12) and the fragility of his angels (*Assumption*, fig. 7.20)?

In the Scrolls, the face of God may be hidden. More challengingly still, it may not be there at all. At least if you leave it to women to tell the story. In the Book of Esther, in the Old Testament, King Ahasuerus' wife, Vashti, is put away when she refuses to perform the ultimate trophy-wife act of stripping in public in order to impress his mates. Vashti is replaced by Esther, who, unbeknownst to Ahasuerus, is Jewish. As the plot thickens, Esther turns out to be much brighter than the king, and the intrigue builds up to a *dénouement* that sees her saving her people from genocide. The Book of Esther is defined by the theme of a woman who serially outwits violent men. It may be no coincidence that it is

43 Ibid.

44 In an interview with Anabela Mota Ribeiro, however, Paula Rego rejects the link between the two images, op. cit. 13.

also the only book in the Hebrew Bible in which God is not mentioned. Did she not like him very much? Did she forget about him? Was she just not interested? Or did she simply not believe in him? And what about her sister Paula? Rego described the eight images discussed here as the various stations of Mary's cross, but paradoxically, when asked what she would like people to take from them, her reply was not straightforward: 'I hope they will feel in good company here — good and helpful company'.⁴⁵ Good, possibly; helpful, perhaps, depending on who's asking for succour; but cruel and unusual too, definitely. In a scary, lawless status quo in which the only certainty is the suspension of *Habeas Corpus*, and paraphrasing the well-known horror film of 1962, whatever happened to Baby Jesus?

45 Paula Rego in interview with Richard Zimler, *op. cit.*

8. Epilogue

Let Me Count the Ways I Love You

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
[...] I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*

History is above all a lesson in morality.
Joaquim Pedro de Oliveira Martins, *História de Portugal*

It may be asked whether the interpretation of meanings apart from satisfying our intellectual curiosity also contributed to our enjoyment of works of art. I for one am inclined to maintain that it does. Modern psychology has taught us... that the senses have their own kind of reason. It may well be that the intellect has its own kind of joys.

Erwin Panofsky

'The work of the painter and of all other representative artists [is] far removed from the truth and associated with elements in us equally far removed from reason, in a fond liaison without health or truth. [...] Representative art is an inferior child born of inferior parents' (Plato, 1987, 371). For Plato, the visual artist's pursuit belonged in an ignoble

league because he saw it as purely mimetic: 'the artist knows little or nothing about the subjects he represents and [...] the art of representation is something that has no serious value' (Plato, 1987, 369). Furthermore, he berates the visual and dramatic arts alike for inciting immorality, and for this reason, in Book Ten of *The Republic* he banishes both from his ideal state. According to this tract, poetry (and, it is to be supposed, art too), 'has a terrible power to corrupt even the best characters'. It does so by encouraging indulgence in excesses of emotion, so that in exposing ourselves to it we 'let ourselves be carried away by our feelings' (Plato, 1987, 374). Both art and poetry were thus deemed to be unworthy activities for the free citizen.

In Plato's philistine republic, however, and in the encounter between the emotive artist and the truth-loving philosopher, there prevails nonetheless an enduring feeling of disquiet on the part of the latter towards the banished yet awe-ful artist: the feeling, in fact, of the subordinate in thrall to anxiety of influence *vis à vis* the resented precursor. In the Platonic view, the apprehensiveness experienced by the philosopher towards the artist is that of 'the bitch that growls and snarls at her master' (Plato, 1987, 376). Plato's moralising dictates, moreover, entail a subsequent reversal whereby art becomes the dethroned master turned bitch, in the tidy backyard of a house-proud state, purged of unruly aesthetic representations. According to these wholesome Platonic prescriptions, Paula Rego, an artist who pertinaciously insists upon exposing the excesses of emotion that even Greek tragedy coyly consigned backstage, would undoubtedly have been kicked out of the yard.

Hers is an anti-Platonic aesthetic of unrestraint, within which 'the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom' (Blake, 1990, xviii), and she claims that she knows a painting is ready when she is ashamed of what it reveals (Rego quoted in Kent, 1998, 15; Rodrigues da Silva, 1998, 11). Her pictures abound in sex, politics and religion, much like outbursts of bad manners in the midst of polite dinner party conversation. And it is that rudeness that transposes what I argue are *sui generis* history paintings into the sphere of what in the eighteenth century developed as the genre of Civic Painting or Art for the Public Good.

By then, the task of refuting Plato's diatribes against the arts — which Aristotle had left only half accomplished (Gellrich, 1988) — was well

underway. John Barrell has traced a shift in the perception of art's function in the eighteenth century from the promotion of private virtues to that of public ones. It is in the context of this shift that he locates the rise of a civic Humanist Theory of painting that sought to recuperate a commitment to and belief in art as performing a public duty, namely that of fostering of a spirit of citizenship and a passion for the 'commonweal' (Barrell, 1986, 5).

In the early decades of the eighteenth century in England, the most influential attempts to provide the practice of painting with a theory were those which adopted the terms of value of the discourse we now describe as Civic Humanism. The republic of the fine arts was understood to be structured as a political republic; the most dignified function to which painting could aspire was the promotion of the public virtues; and the genres of painting were ranked according to their tendency to promote them. As only the free citizen members of the political republic could exhibit those virtues, the highest genre, History-Painting, was primarily addressed to them, and it addressed them rhetorically, as an orator addresses an audience of citizens who are his equals, and persuades them to act in the interests of the public. (Barrell, 1986, 1)

For writers like George Turnbull, James Thomson and Anthony Shaftesbury, painting was a liberal art, concerned with depicting not the material but the ideal aspect of objects. Thus, rather than mechanical mimesis that neglected the loftier regions of intellectual meditation, as deplored by Plato, painting, like the other liberal arts, guarded the mind and society against corruption by encouraging public virtue, a civic spirit and a love of the common good (Barrell, 1986, 11–14).

Curiously, the project of art's moral rehabilitation, which Plato's onslaught had arguably rendered necessary, has more recently been taken up in an unlikely quarter, and moreover in the context of an argument that rings with unexpected echoes of both Platonism and Civic Humanism: namely an open letter by Pope John Paul II to artists (John Paul II, 1999). Departing from Plato himself, albeit in a different text and in a different vein (Plato, 1975), the Pope entered the fray by assigning the artist, and artistic creation, the position through which humanity attains its closest proximity to God: 'in artistic creation, more than in any other activity, man reveals himself as "the image of God" [...] by exercising creative command over the universe around him' (John Paul II, 1999, 3). While at pains to emphasize that 'the

infinite distance between the Creator and His creature' remains intact, John Paul II rescued art (or at least a certain type of supposedly sacral art) from the charge of immorality, via the Platonic route of beauty. The artist, as the conduit of beauty to humanity, becomes also the transmitter of morality, following the Platonic tenet that beauty is the physical expression of goodness, and goodness the metaphysical precondition of beauty: 'the power of Good took refuge in the essence of Beauty' (Plato, 1975, 79–95).¹

John Paul's exhortation to artists, encouraging them in the pursuit of inspirational and moral creativity ('beauty will save the world', 16), presupposes, of course, a brand of art at one with the particular status quo he represented. Such specificities aside, beauty (art) for the social good ('society needs artists [...] in order to guarantee the growth of the individual and the progress of the community, through that sublime art form which is "the art of education"', John Paul II, 1999, 5), makes him the improbable bedfellow of that zeal for the commonweal of the eighteenth century Civic Humanists referred to above:

Society needs artists, in the same way that it needs scientists, technicians, workers, experts, witnesses to the faith, teachers, fathers and mothers, who might guarantee the growth of the individual and the progress of humanity [...]. In the vast panorama of each nation, artists have their allocated place. It is precisely when they obey their artistic genius in the fulfillment of works of true validity and beauty, that they enrich not only the nation's and the whole of humanity's cultural heritage, but also render a social service directed at the common good. (John Paul II, 1999, 5)

The common good, of course, is only ever that from a limited, inevitably narrow point of view. One (wo)man's meat is almost invariably another's poison. I wish to conclude this book with a proposal. Paula Rego's work of the last decade, conveniently, from the point of view

1 Whether through an error of reference or as the result of rather free interpretation, John Paul II's text, p. 4, gives as the reference for this quotation Plato's *Philebus*, 65a. This passage in fact reads as follows: 'Then if we cannot use just one category to catch the good let's take this trio, fineness, commensurability, truth (*aletheia*), and treating them as a single unit say that this is the element in the mixture that we should most correctly hold responsible, that it is because of this as something good that such a mixture becomes good. The connection between Beauty and Good appears to be more fully developed in the dialogue between Socrates and Diotima in *The Symposium*, 79–95.

of linking it chronologically to the Civic Humanist theory of art, has included some recent works sourced in the work of the eighteenth-century painter William Hogarth, possibly British art's best-known social commentator and pictorial moralist as well as lampooner of the status quo. Not coincidentally, the theme she selected from his work was that of marriage (*à la mode*, his and her versions respectively). In her rendition, as might be expected, mothers rather than fathers broker marriage and money deals, and husbands rather than wives languish or die untimely deaths (Hogarth, *Marriage à la Mode*, figs. 8.1 and 8.2; Paula Rego, *Marriage à la Mode (After Hogarth Triptych)*, figs. 8.3; 8.4; 8.5).



Fig. 8.1 William Hogarth, *Marriage à-la-Mode 2 (The Tête à Tête)* (c. 1743). Oil on canvas 69.9 x 90.8 cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marriage_A-la-Mode_2,_The_T%C3%AAte_%C3%A0_T%C3%AAte_-_William_Hogarth.jpg

The cruel satirical streak that Hogarth and Rego share, and which perhaps initially attracted her to him for inspiration, gestures towards another trait common to both, namely the propensity for morality with wit and also very much with a twist.



Fig. 8.2 William Hogarth, *Marriage à-la-Mode 1, The Marriage Settlement* (c. 1743). Oil on canvas 69.9 x 90.8 cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marriage_A-la-Mode_1,_The_Marriage_Settlement_-_William_Hogarth.jpg



Fig. 8.3 Paula Rego, *Marriage à la Mode (The Betrothal after 'Marriage à la Mode' by Hogarth)* (1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium 150 x 160 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 8.4 Paula Rego, *Marriage à la Mode (Lessons after 'Marriage à la Mode' by Hogarth)* (1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium 150 x 90 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.



Fig. 8.5 Paula Rego, *Marriage à la Mode (The Shipwreck after 'Marriage à la Mode' by Hogarth)* (1999). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium 150 x 160 cm. Photograph courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved.

Of course, nobody is perfect. Curiously, and not irrelevantly here, just as Genesis excludes women from morality (and therefore, Platonically, from beauty) in the aftermath of Eve's purloined apple, so too the Civic Humanist approach to art would exclude Rego from the production of Civic Art and history painting, due to an innate 'imbecility of the female mind' (quoted in Barrell, 1986, 66):

That theory assumes that, as Shaftesbury had put it, 'Ladies hate the great manner'; that women cannot understand History-Paintings, which are public and idealised works, the comprehension of which demands an understanding of public virtue, an ability to generalize, and 'an acquaintance with the grand outline of human nature', which (whether by nature or nurture) is denied to women, who are obliged to remain 'satisfied with common nature'. If the 'ladies' cannot discuss history-paintings, that is because it has been presumed impossible for them to learn how to do so. Portraits, however, work in terms of 'personal' ideas; they aim to present particular likenesses; where they represent virtue, they favour the private virtues; and they gratify the vanity of those who sit for them, and so of women especially, who are known to be especially vain. That women are happy to discuss portraits only confirms their inability to comprehend the higher, the public genre of art. (Barrell, 1986, 68)

In view of this, Paula Rego's work, seeking as it does to challenge traditional historiography by, among other things, inscribing women into history, offers us a triple twist. First, simply by virtue of her work being that of a woman engaged, albeit largely antagonistically, in dialogue with the master narratives of her country or countries — Portugal and Britain — in different periods. Second, because the civic message her work extends, and the public service it seeks to render — albeit very much out of step with some implied moral principles of the status quo, religious or otherwise — nonetheless advance areas of ethical and political debate. The result, whatever the final position adopted, will probably be a series of paradigm shifts in the attribution of guilt and blamelessness in a variety of contexts. 'A law which reverses another law makes for a surprise' (Rego and Bessa-Luís, 2001, 118). And third, because, as these images become reinscribed within the specific historical referents that anchor them, the very fabric of human freedom is exposed as fragile.

With reference to the cycle of her own *Marriage à la Mode* (*After Hogarth Triptych*) Rego makes the following remarks: 'this all takes place in Portugal in the 1940s during Salazar's dictatorship. The rules were very strong and people had to cheat to survive. [...] The girl is doing what she feels she must do: be obedient to her husband. It's a little bit of a rape, I guess' (Gleadell, 2000, 54). The 'little bit of a rape', startlingly, takes place within an unholy composition that sees Hogarth's six-part piece truncated, into, of all things, a triptych format, with all the sacramental implications this entails.²

The genre of the triptych, as observed previously, was traditionally reserved for scenes from the birth and life of Jesus, but here it gestures instead towards secular *droits de seigneur*, exercised now not over semi-willing virginal handmaidens but instead over reluctant daughters compelled into wedlock by their parents (fathers): in either case, whether the girl in question is a hesitant Virgin Mary or a non-consenting daughter, what we are dealing with in each case is arguably 'a little bit of a rape'. In a typical Rego twist, however, in reply to a question as to what was inside the bag in *Lessons after 'Marriage à la Mode' by Hogarth*, fig. 8.4, centre panel), the artist, possibly channelling Artemisia Gentileschi (fig. 4.47), one of her female precursors, as well as her own Judith in *Crivelli's Garden* (fig. 3.6), replied: 'Well, heads, maybe. To survive, women had to do a few decapitations. When the man was asleep, up she comes, and whoosh, off with his head! [...] She's quite tough. She's got to clear things up. Life goes on'. (Rego, quoted in Gleadell, 2000, p. 54).

In *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, Leo Steinberg discusses what he calls 'the plight of the public' faced with the challenges and irritations of radically new art, but also the disconcertingly 'rapid domestication of the outrageous' and the way in which 'the time lapse between shock received and thanks returned gets progressively shorter', turning '*enfants terribles* into elder statesmen' with ever escalating speed (Steinberg, 1975, 5–6). But not always, perhaps. In reply to a question regarding men's reaction to her works on abortion, Rego replied that 'they don't look, or if they do, they do so with

2 The triptych is a format traditionally used to depict religious scenes, specifically events relating to the life of Jesus Christ. Rego uses this format controversially, here in the *Abortion Series*.

difficulty. [...] [The pictures] were well received as art, but their content was not mentioned. Art can conceal many things. [...] If the colours are pretty, they attract, but then you see it, and ouch!...' (Rego quoted in Marques Gastão, 2002, 40). In these final pages I should wish to contend that Paula Rego's work endures within a paradox, whereby her critical and popular success, and the extraordinary saleability of her pictures coexist with the probability that a clear-sighted, fully comprehending acceptance of those images by the establishment (beyond an instinctive appreciation of their visually pleasing dimensions — 'if the colours are pretty, they attract') should only be possible in the aftermath of a sea-change in the world she depicts, and which her work would therefore have helped to tame. Like a girl, and her dog.

Her pictures contain much that is erotic but also frightening, sometimes frightening because erotic, and vice-versa. As argued previously, in the Western sexualized tradition of the visual arts, a presupposed (male) gaze looked, and a (female) body was looked at. But the first voyeuristic moment in iconography and literature, the paradigmatic instant that set the ball rolling, was the moment when Psyche raised her lamp to spy out the truth about Cupid, the mysterious lover who visited her in the night and upon whom she had previously not been allowed to gaze. Curiously, then, and I would hazard threateningly, the first voyeur was a *voyeuse*, a situation that clearly demanded a gender reversal and was duly set to rights by ensuing traditions. Paula Rego's iconoclastic impact takes us back to Psyche and to the darkest reaches of our psyches. She breaks (bad) old habits and reverses habitual power organizations, allowing us to see and think anew, as women, men and citizens. It has been said that her works tend to elicit from women the slightly nervous complicity of those who see their most secret thoughts and wishes given scandalous but welcome exposure: 'It is not often given to women to recognize themselves in painting, still less to see their private world, their dreams, the insides of their heads, projected on such a scale and so immodestly' (Greer, 1988, 34). And Rego, herself proclaiming, as quoted previously, that her work is 'always, always about revenge', has laid down a mission statement: 'I can make it so that women are stronger than men in the pictures. I can turn the tables and do as I want. I can make women stronger. I can make them obedient and murderous at the same time' (Rego, quoted in MacDonald, 1998, 7).

For this relief, much thanks. Rego herself once said that the problem with art education is that it ensures that its recipients cannot see things, that they can *not see* them, they are able to avoid seeing them, like those ostrich women she painted in the past. Or rather, unlike *those* ostriches (fig. 3.22), who unnervingly tend to look things in the eye, rather than burying their heads in the sand, even when, as was the case with Psyche, looking comes at a heavy price.

In *The Female Eunuch* Germaine Greer — who has both written about Paula Rego and been portrayed by her — notoriously maintained that ‘women have very little idea of how much men hate them’ (Greer, 1985, 249). Blake Morrison, who has written about Paula Rego and whose poem, ‘Moth’, she illustrated, also wrote ‘The Ballad of the Yorkshire Ripper’, already mentioned. The subtext within this poem written in Yorkshire dialect about Peter Sutcliffe, the real-life serial killer of the 1970s and 80s, portrays him as quantitatively but not qualitatively different from many respectable men and pillars of the community. These, according to one writer, included some of the policemen who interviewed Sutcliffe on several different occasions, but failed to charge him because they laboured under the misapprehension that they were looking for someone *absolutely different* in his misogyny, rather than someone whose misogyny was in fact so disturbingly like theirs (Smith, 1989):

It’s then I think on t’Ripper
 an what e did an why,
 an ow mi mates ate women,
 an ow Pete med em die. (Morrison, 1987, 24)

Morrison’s explorations of the darker reaches of male sexuality and sexual violence even within marriage (‘this curt fuck was how I paid her back’, Morrison, 1987, 37), lay bare various unpalatable human drives (misogyny, paedophilia, murder). And it is to these forces that Paula Rego has responded life-long, with a contrary gender sign, proportional insolence and a hijacked scalpel that manifestly cuts two ways. As a young woman in Portugal, and for years as a much patronized painter’s wife in Britain, she stumbled upon the shockingly smug script of an ideological project from which both women and their stories had been written out.³

³ See for example Nicholas Willing’s comments to John McEwen on the chauvinism encountered by Paula Rego as the wife of a great painter who was seen as herself dabbling in painting (McEwen 1997, 242). Also see his BBC2 documentary *Paula Rego: Secrets and Stories*, dir. by Nick Willing, BBC (2017).

Or painted out: literally brushed aside from 'a visual field for art in which feminine inscriptions [were] not only rendered invisible through exclusion or neglect but made *illegible* because of the phallogocentric logic which allows only one sex' (Pollock, 1999, 102). Her reaction has been an ongoing sibylline twisting of that masculinist script, for purposes that *ought* to warn us and to frighten us. What underwrites her gallery of ruminative and savage heroines is the problem of unorthodoxy pitted against brutal conformity. Rego's strategy, faced with the multifarious corporate and institutional facades of that conformity, has always been to respond with proportionate forcefulness, an approach whose other name is tit-for-tat. Following a parallel agenda to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformist zeal which has variously inspired her (Hogarth, Eça de Queirós), but with recourse to the metaphors of her opponents (and like certain angels in her work) she is cruel, sometimes though not necessarily in order to be kind. The difference, of course, is that the recipients of her cruelty and her kindness are invariably not the same.

The relationship between artist and model, whether it is acknowledged or not, has always been hyper-determined by the struggle for power or against powerlessness, and by aggressiveness and defensiveness as common components. Throughout more than six decades of creative activity Paula Rego has produced pictures whose models are Portugal and Britain, her two motherlands, in all their permutations, from the personal to the political. And in echo of some of Portugal's and Britain's most renowned writers and creative artists throughout the centuries, her relationship to those motherlands, like theirs, has not been devoid of ambivalence. Let us count the ways they loved it.

This is the happy homeland, my beloved,
To which if Heaven permit my safe return,
With my life's mission now achieved,
May that light with me now cease to burn. (Camões)

Luís de Camões, sixteenth-century Portugal's own bard, was inspired by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama's first sea voyage to India in 1497. His epic poem, *The Lusiads* (*The Portuguese*, from the old term for Portugal, *Lusitânia*) was published in 1572, — one year before his own death — and not long before the military disaster at Alcácer Quibir in 1578 that saw Portugal come under the dominion of Spain for sixty years. Even at the time of *The Lusiads'* publication, the nation's early

imperial growing pains had begun to change almost without transition into the arthritis of over-expansion, and its territorial holdings in the East Indies were already beginning to unravel. Against the weight of scholarly opinion, this critic remains unpersuaded that the net balance of jingoistic patriotism versus imperial doubt in *The Lusíads* is weighted in favour of the motherland in her empire-building capacity. Paraphrasing James V of Scotland, quoted earlier, for the Portuguese it began with Africa and it ended with Africa. And not just for the Portuguese.

In *Out of Africa*, Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), bleached Scandinavian in an African context that nonetheless intoxicated and imaginatively captivated her beyond any possibility of recovery — the ultimate act of terrorism on the part of an empire that does after all strike back in mysterious ways — wrote poignantly of the postcolonial uncertainty facing the erstwhile colonizer:

If I know a song of Africa [...] of the giraffe, and the African new moon lying on her back, of the ploughs in the fields, and the sweaty faces of the coffee-pickers, does Africa know a song of me? Would the air over the plain quiver with a colour that I had had on, or the children invent a game in which my name was, or the full moon throw a shadow over the gravel of the drive that was like me, or would the eagles of Ngong look out for me? [...] But these communications from Africa come to me in a strange, unreal way, and are more like shadows, or mirages, than like news of a reality. (Blixen, 1988, 75–76)

Elsewhere the answer to her inconsolable longing, the immobilization of flickering meaning, is attempted, curiously, in the best tradition of a European lyrical lament:

You must not think that I feel, in spite of it having ended in such defeat, that my 'life has been wasted' here, or that I would exchange it with that of anyone I know. [...] She may be more gentle to others, but I hold to the belief that I am one of Africa's *favourite children*. A great world of poetry has revealed itself to me and taken me to itself here, and I have loved it. I have looked into the eyes of lions and slept under the Southern Cross, I have seen the grass of the great plains ablaze and covered with delicate green after the rains, I have been the friend of Somali, Kikuyu, and Masai, I have flown over the Ngong Hills, — 'I plucked the best rose of life [...]'. (Blixen, 1981, 416)

Blixen was arguably whistling in the dark. Her enduring postcolonial self-doubt shares a species similarity with Camões's imperial

ambivalence. The latter, as argued previously, has echoed down generations of Portuguese creative life, and never more emphatically than in the work of this artist.

Paula Rego is Portuguese and has often said that her work is always about Portugal. One can take this to mean many things. Here, I will take 'Portugal' to mean those forces of gender, autocracy and racial conflict that preoccupy her in all her work. But these of course are not uniquely Portuguese problems, and neither is Rego entirely Portuguese: she is also British (*Dame* Paula Rego, no less), has spent most of her life in Britain and has been influenced by its reality in her art. It is reasonable to say, therefore, that in the concluding remarks that follow, hyphenating 'Portugal' and 'Britain' will not impugn her statement about her national influences.

In Portuguese, tellingly perhaps, the standard reply to the question 'how are you' is not the automatic 'fine' expected elsewhere, but, more often than not, a gloomier *menos mal* ('less bad', not so different, after all, from the English 'not too bad'). This Portuguese 'less bad' may translate as a grudging admission that things could be worse, but paradoxically, and equally revealingly, it conveys also both cloying pessimism and the realistic assessment of only relative improvement, both individually and collectively. Post-imperial Portugal is a nation in the grip of enduring contradictions: mariological reverence for maternity side by side with chauvinistic denigration of women; pro-European modernity hand in hand with Atlantic imperial nostalgia; nouveau-democracy in the face of counter-meritocracy and ingrained civic discrimination. The latter allegation requires some elaboration. The Portuguese fixation upon its lost empire in the aftermath of the independence of the remaining colonies in Africa, has coexisted with a continuing resentment against the last generation of empire builders, who in 1975 returned (or travelled for the first time) to the European 'motherland', to no warm welcome from those who had stayed at home. The economic difficulties resulting from the loss of colonial revenue were compounded by the arrival in a small country, in the space of less than two years, of one million Portuguese citizens from the erstwhile colonies, as well as a few rare black holders of Portuguese passports. The longing for the lost empire — which endures to this day in Portugal, with considerable lack of historical self-reflection and proportionate political incorrectness regarding the

moral implications of imperialism — goes hand in hand with two social phenomena: institutional racism towards the small number of black incomers from those former Portuguese ‘provinces’;⁴ and a persistent resentment against the white so-called *retornados* or *returnees*, who had been the keepers of the imperial goose that laid the golden eggs. To a greater or lesser degree — largely depending on skin colour and ease of identification — a quarter of a century later both groups continue to suffer from ostracism in their land of origin or of post-colonial adoption. The irony of a grave lack of self-knowledge, as evinced by a longing for empire that runs in parallel with a hatred of empire-builders (white colonials) and empire-fodder (black citizens) alike, is aggravated in the case of a country such as Portugal, whose dominant religion in theory trumpets the merits of universal love. How white was Jesus? At a guess, not Aryan. Just like most Portuguese people.

The self-insight that Paula Rego seeks to impose upon her fellow countrymen through her art, therefore, may be interpreted as a case of administering to the nation a taste of its own medicine, or, to put it another way, forcing it to practice what it preaches: ‘to thine own self be true’. Arguably the most remarkable aspect of Rego’s work is the way in which, echoing a previous remark, she compels her viewers, whether as individuals, groups or nations, to self-insight, and makes it at the very least difficult *not* to see.

We may be talking about Portugal, but in the United Kingdom too, in the aftermath of an empire on which the sun never set, with all that entailed (unresolved Irish ‘Troubles’, Scottish dreams of independence, the burning of English-owned second homes in Wales, the diatribes of Enoch Powell, race riots, endemic racial inequality, Windrush, UKIP, Brexit, xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism) all this may apply also to a (dis)United Kingdom and beyond it to a world more than ever torn by a hatred of difference, be it of gender, colour or religion.

Picasso stated in relation to Cézanne, and Steinberg discussed in connection with them both, the possibility that modern art is always born of anxiety and that its function is to transmit that anxiety to the spectator, creating in him or her ‘a genuine existential predicament’.

4 Following the independence of the African colonies in 1975, those born in those territories were eligible for Portuguese citizenship if they had at least one Portuguese ascendant in the second degree (grandparent) of the direct line.

Such pictures, like 'God, who demands a sacrifice of Abraham in violation of every moral standard [...] are arbitrary, cruel, irrational, demanding your faith, while [making] no promise of future rewards' (Steinberg, 1975, 15). So too, Paula Rego's paintings and pastels disrupt familiar ways of looking at the world, and violate barriers that, once breached, turn that world upside down, thereby transforming history into stories and vice-versa. In what are, in an idiosyncratic sense of the term, life paintings, she addresses births, loves, marriages and deaths that do not necessarily or even often come to fruition. Time has passed between the early and recent political paintings, but it would seem, at least in this artist's semi-apocalyptic vision, that little has altered in significant areas of men's and women's lives, as signalled perhaps by the redundant, unworn watch, discarded on the floor of a timeless room (*Untitled n. 3*, fig. 4.24). This scene could be located in any place, at any time, including here and now, where women and children, born and unborn, suffer and die. How are we doing, then, as a nation? As two nations? As a world?

At best, less bad.

I will attempt a less despondent conclusion. In Karen Blixen's novella, 'Babette's Feast', the eponymous protagonist is a French woman who in the past had been head chef in Paris's Café Royal, cooking for the rich and beautiful, and now lives in remote Jutland, in exile from the restored royalists, after the fall of the Paris Commune. She leads a life of obscurity in a grey, puritanical Danish village. After twelve years of cooking boiled split-cod and bread-and-ale soup for the two spinster sisters who took her in, Babette wins ten thousand francs in a lottery back home, and persuades her two mistresses to allow her to cook a special meal for the annual celebration of the birth of the community's spiritual father. At the end of a dinner for twelve of indescribable splendour, the two sisters discover with horror and gratitude that Babette has spent the entirety of her windfall on the meal. A meal whose ripples will turn out to extend well beyond the sphere of that evening's gastronomic delights, by introducing the ascetic community to a brief moment of bodily, sensual and emotional self-indulgence. As the radical shift takes place from pain to pleasure and from puritanism to pulchritudinous self-abandon, Babette's culinary feat, or feast, is acknowledged by the two sisters for what it is: food as art, and art as the universal solvent

that changes lives. Babette, an unorthodox ministering Christ to twelve bemused disciples stranded at a body/soul crossroads, trades the cost of a return ticket to her old life for this last supper. The latter, like its biblical precursor, stands as a final but also foundational moment of creativity. Her gesture does not go to waste. It finds an improbable audience but absolute understanding in the two spinster sisters, for whom the meal, with the utmost literalness, opened up worlds without end:

‘Yet this is not the end! I feel, Babette, that this is not the end. In Paradise you will be the great artist that God meant you to be! Ah!’ she added, the tears streaming down her cheeks. ‘Ah, how you will enchant the angels!’ (Blixen, 1986, 68)

Babette, alleged revolutionary and *petroleuse* with a murky past, is the artist-cook who formerly had brought occasional shudders of apprehension to her mistresses’ spines, but for the duration of one evening brings them shivers of delight. The sweet and sour perils of pleasure she discloses to them are not unlike the experience that Rego’s work offers to our delighted and appalled eyes. Feasting on these paintings is like dining with panthers. There may be a price to pay, which here entails seeing set out plainly what previously we had not dared even to think. Paula Rego is the unforgiving creator of *Dog Women*, bitches who snarl at the heels of their masters and urinate on the bed of aesthetic, ethical and political conventions (*Bad Dog*, fig. 6.14).

In Portuguese navigational charts of the fourteenth century the warning ‘from here onward there be dragons’ indicated the places where the world was thought to end, ships fell off the edge and were destroyed by dragons (or monsters).⁵

5 Adamastor (from the Greek ‘adamastos’ or ‘untamed’) was a creation of Luís de Camões in *The Lusíads*. He was a sea giant banished by Doris, a sea nymph, for falling in love with her daughter, Tethis. His domain became the sea around what is now Cape Town in South Africa. At that point the Atlantic and the Indian oceans meet, and the sea is notoriously turbulent. When the Portuguese sought a sea route to India at the end of the fifteenth century, countless ships were lost in the attempt to sail around the Cape, which became known as the Cape of Torments. The legend created by Camões and perpetuated by subsequent writers, poets and artists, attributed the violence of the waves to the rage of Adamastor, who guarded his kingdom against intruders and swallowed any ship that sought to enter it. The first Portuguese fleet, under the command of Bartolomeu Dias, finally managed to navigate around the Cape in 1488.



Fig. 8.6 Jorge Colaço, *Adamastor* (Sea Monster) (1907). Tiled panel. Buçaco Palace Hotel, Buçaco, Portugal. Wikimedia, CC BY-SA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palace_Hotel_do_Bu%C3%A7aco_-_Azulejo.jpg

In this artist's case, a lifetime of depicting families and other animals can be summed up as a career fine-tuned in crossing forbidden lines beyond which, very likely, dragons recline, digesting their prey. Needless to say, she-dragons: that female of the species which as Kipling well knew, was 'more deadly than the male'.⁶

Is Paula Rego, deadlier indeed than most of her male peers, themselves in the end all too human? *All Too Human: Bacon, Freud and a Century of Painting Life* is the title of an exhibition that opened at Tate Britain in March 2018. In that show, Rego's work featured alongside such luminaries as Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Euan Uglow and others. Rego, however, like the other women artists (Dorothy Meade, Celia Paul, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Jenny Saville and Cecily Brown) was elided from the subtitle of the exhibition. When promoting blockbuster shows, it would appear, if she is a woman, even an artist of

6 Rudyard Kipling, *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Inclusive Edition, 1885–1918* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919).



Fig. 8.7 Paula Rego, *War* (2003). Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 160 x 120 cm. Photo courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art, all rights reserved, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/paula-rego/war-2003>

the enormous renown of Paula Rego, falls foul not so much of 'Me Too' but 'Me Neither'. No need to signpost the little women. In this show, Rego's contribution was the (in)famous image *The Family* (fig. 2.14). As discussed in chapter 2, this picture, created in the last year of the life of her husband Victor Willing, as already mentioned, was initially to be called *The Raising of Lazarus*. In the end, however, human beings are indeed all too human, and seldom rise from the dead — not even temporary humans, such as the Son of God. Or at least not if they are portrayed/erased by this woman. And why should they? For once, let us forget men on crosses and look at Mary instead. Let's concentrate on the woman. *Us too. Us now.*

I see this artist as a visual anarchist, a Bluebeard in drag, in whose bloody studio artefacts are made from dismembered and reassembled

bodies and attitudes: literally so when one thinks of her early work, made of paintings cut up and reassembled to gruesome pedagogical effect (*Iberian Dawn*, e-fig. 3; *When We Used to Have a House in the Country*, fig. 1.2); or works for which throughout the years she has occasionally used dolls as models (*The Ambassador of Jesus*, fig. 3.4), or toys made especially for her (*War*, fig. 8.7). This dreamer of serene demons would undoubtedly have been kicked out of Plato's dull backyard. But in an alternative paradise populated by scary cherubs, how she will enchant the angels.

Appendix A

*A Dama Pé de Cabra (The Lady with a Cloven Hoof)*¹

By Alexandre Herculano (1851)

Translated by Maria Manuel Lisboa (2016)

First Canticle

1

You who do not believe in witches or in damned souls or in the mischievousness of Satan, sit you here close by me at the hearth and I shall tell you the tale of Don Diogo Lopes, Lord of Biscay.

And do not tell me when I finish: 'that cannot be so'. Think you that I would fabricate such a tale? If I tell it, it is because I read it in an ancient book, as old as Portugal itself. And that ancient book's author read it somewhere, or heard it from the lips of a minstrel as he sang of it.

It is a revered tradition; and he who has no faith in traditions will surely go to that place where such doubts are punished.

¹ *The Lady with a Cloven Hoof: A Minstrel's Romance* (eleventh century). Also available at https://www.academia.edu/26151863/Translation_of_Alexandre_Herculanos_A_Dama_P%C3%A9_de_Cabra

I vouch to you that if you deny this most true of all true stories you are tenfold as faithless as that Doubting Thomas before he became a great saint. And I know not if I might forgive you, even as Christ forgave him.

Be now most profoundly silent for I begin.

2

Don Diogo Lopes was a tireless huntsman: snows in the mountain in winter, burning suns in high summer, night time or break of day, he heeded them not. The early morning on a tranquil day found Don Diogo and his army on a wild and craggy hill, awaiting a wild boar which, flushed by hunting hounds, would surely be felled.

Hark, at that moment a faraway melody: a lovely, lovely tune. He raised his eyes to an overhanging boulder upon which sat a beautiful lady: it was she who sang. This time the boar goes free and unaccountable; because Don Diogo runs, or better flies towards the cliff.

'Who are you my lady, so pleasing to behold; who are you who so swiftly enchanted me?'

'My lineage matches yours; because I am of royal breeding, like you, Lord of Biscay'.

'If you know who I am, I offer you my hand and with it my lands, chattels and vassals'.

'Keep your lands, Don Diogo Lopes, because they hardly suffice for your sport; for the sport and pleasure of the good knight that you are. Keep your vassals, Lord of Biscay, because they are too few to beat your prey'.

'What dowry, then, lovely lady, might I offer you, worthy us both: since your beauty is heavenly and in Spain there is no man wealthier than I'.

'Rich man, rich man, the pledge I would take from you has no value, but even so I doubt you would grant it to me; for it is the legacy of your mother, the lofty Lady of Biscay'.

'And what if I loved you more than I love my mother, why then would I not grant any of her gifts to you?'

'If so, and if you want to keep me by your side forever, do not swear to do what you say, give me your word'.

'By my honour as knight, I shall give you not one but a thousand words'.

'Know then that in order that I might be yours you must forget one thing that your good lady mother taught you as a child, and of which, on her deathbed she reminded you'.

'What is that, damsel?' retorted the knight with flaming eyes. 'Is it the vow to give no quarter to the Moorish rabble, nor ever to forgive the Mohammedan? I am a good Christian. Woe to thee and me if you are of that damned race!'

'That I am not, good knight', laughed the damsel. 'What I ask you to forget is how to make the sign of the cross: what I want you to promise me is that you will never again bless yourself'.

'That is another matter', replied Don Diogo, who in his pleasures and dissipations had long ago lost his path to Heaven. And he pondered the matter. And in pondering it he mused to himself: 'What is the use of blessings? I shall simply kill two hundred more Moors and offer a farm to St. Tiago. It all works out. A gift to the Apostle and the heads of two hundred Mohammedan hell hounds are the correct pay for a grave sin'.

And raising his eyes to the lady who was beaming tenderly at him, he exclaimed:

'So be it: it is agreed. Let us do it and let the Devil take the hindmost'.

And it was only when that evening in his castle he was able to examine in detail the naked form of the ravishing lady, he noticed that her feet were cloven like a goat's.

3

Someone might now say: 'That was for certain the Devil who entered the home of Don Diogo Lopes'. As well he might. Well, know this now; that was not the case.

For many years the lady and the knight lived in harmony and tranquillity. And two living proofs there were of this: Inigo Guerra and Dona Sol, both the apple of their father's eye.

One afternoon, Don Diogo return from the hunt: he brought a large wild boar, very large. The table was laid. He ordered the beast to be brought to the chamber where he took his meals, to feast his eyes on the excellent catch he had snared. His son sat beside him; beside her mother sat Dona Sol; and they began their dinner with much merriment.

'It was a good ride you had, Don Diogo', said his wife. 'A good, clean hunt'.

'In the name of Judas' entrails!' replied the nobleman. 'It has been at least five years since I caught a bear or wild pig to match this one'.

Then, filling with wine a pitcher of silver, richly engraved, he up-ended it to the health of all the woodsmen and hunters.

And wining and dining, the meal continued late into the night.

4

Now you need to know that the Lord of Biscay had a hunting dog whom he highly esteemed, ferocious in his handling of wild beasts but gentle with his master and even with the servants.

Don Diogo's noble lady had a small bitch, dark as ebony, clever and lively in the utmost, and by her no less valued.

The hound was seated portentously at the feet of Don Diogo, its large ears drooping and the eyes half-shut as if sleeping.

The black bitch, now, she ran across the chamber, frisky and restless, jumpy like a little demon: her soft sleek fur shone with a red tinge.

The baron, having made an all-encompassing toast to the assembly, was working through a long roll of individual toasts, to each name downing a goblet of wine.

He acted as befitted a nobleman with nothing to do in the world other than sleep, drink, eat and hunt.

And the hound nodded like an old monk in the choir, and the bitch hopped around.

Then the Lord of Biscay picked up a bone rich with meat and marrow and threw it to the hound, shouting: 'take it, Silvano, you are a working beast: the Devil take the bitch, which does nothing but jump and thrash about'.

The gigantic dog opened its eyes, growled, placed its paw on the bone, bared teeth sharp as daggers, like a pale smile.

But suddenly it let off a howl and fell, limbs thrashing, half dead: the bitch had leapt at its throat, and the hound lay dying.

'By the beard of Don From, my great-grandsire!' exclaimed Don Diogo standing upright, shaking with rage and wine. 'The fiendish bitch killed the best hound in my pack; but she will pay for it'.

And turning over the bleeding dog with his foot, he gazed at the fearful wounds of the noble beast that lay dying.

'By my soul, I never saw such a thing! Holy Mother of God. This is the work of Beelzebub'. And cursing and gesticulating, he blessed and crossed himself.

'Ouch!' cried his wife as if burnt. The baron looked at her: he saw her glittering eyes, her face charcoal-black, the mouth twisted and her hair standing on end.

And she revolved higher and higher in the air, poor Dona Sol clutched under her left arm: the right arm she was stretching across the table towards her son, Don Inigo of Biscay.

And the arm stretched and stretched, reaching out for the small boy, who, from fear, sat speechless and motionless.

The lady's hand was black and glossy like the bitch's fur, and her nails had grown a good handspan in length, and curved like claws.

'Jesus Christ, holy name of God!' cried Don Diogo, whom terror had sobered up. And grabbing his son with his left hand, he made the sign of the cross in the air, again and again.

His wife gave a loud moan and released Inigo Guerra's arm, which she had seized, and rising ever higher she flew off through a crack in the wall, taking her weeping daughter with her.

From that day forward, nothing more was heard either of the mother or the daughter. The black bitch disappeared, thanks to what black arts no one knows, and no one in the castle ever cast eyes on her again.

Don Diogo Lopes lived for a long time sad and bored, since he no longer dared hunt. One day, however, it occurred to him, in order to cheer himself up, to go hunting not deer, bears or zebras, but instead Moors.

He ordered his banner to be raised, his cauldron to be cleaned and polished, and his armour to be assembled. He handed on to Don Inigo, now a young man and knight, the command of his castles, and rode off with a glittering army to join the ranks of King Ramiro who was embarking upon a crusade against the Moorish rabble of Spain.

And for a long time there came from him to Biscay no news or messengers.

Second Canticle

1

It was at nightfall: Don Inigo sat at table but his appetite failed him, his heart grew faint. A page boy, charming and discreet, who, standing before him awaited his orders, said to him: 'My Lord, why do you not eat?'

'How should I eat, Brearte, when, if his letters are to be believed, my lord Don Diogo is a prisoner of the Moors?'

'But his rescue is in your hands: you have ten thousand foot soldiers and one thousand horsemen in your demesne of Biscay: let us overrun Moorish lands; the prisoners we take will be your father's ransom'.

'That hell hound, the King of Leon has made peace with the dirty dog Moors of Toledo, they who hold my father captive. The noblemen and powers-that-be of that vile and treacherous monarch would not grant passage to the good armies of Biscay'.

'Do you wish, my Lord, for a piece of advice that will cost you not a cent?'

'Speak on, Brearte'.

'Why go you not to the mountain and seek your mother? The elders say that she is a great fairy'.

'What say you, Brearte? Do you know who my mother is, and what breed of fairy?'

'Many tales have I heard of what took place on a certain night in this castle: you were but a little boy and I was yet unborn. But the whys and wherefores of such tales, only God knows'.

'Then I shall tell you. Come closer, Brearte'.

The page looked around almost unwillingly, and drew close to his master: obedience but also a certain fearful shiver moved him.

'Look you here, Brearte, at that boarded-up crack in the wall. It was through there that my mother escaped. How and why I'll wager you have been told'.

'My Lord, yes, and she took your sister with her'.

'Reply only to what I ask you. I know that, so hold your tongue'.

The page looked down, ashamed, seeing as he was humble and well mannered.

2

And the knight began his tale:

'After that accursed day, my father fell to wondering; and his thoughts diminished him, leading him to enquire of all elderly huntsmen whether by chance they recollected having met on those hills, in their youth, any evil doings or sorceresses. Upon which there flowed an endless stream of tales of witches and damned souls.

'For many years before that, my father had not attended confession: for some years, too, he had become a widower without being widowed.

'One Sunday the day broke merrily as though it were Easter; and my Lord Don Diogo awoke, surly and sad as was his wont.

'The bells of the monastery in yonder valley pealed as beautifully as if heaven had opened wide its gates. He listened to them with a longing that made him weep.

"I shall go to the abbot", he mused to himself, "I wish to confess. Who knows whether this sadness is Satan's temptation".

'The abbot was a very old man, holy like no other.

'It was to him that my father made confession. After making his *mea culpa* he told him in detail the story of his betrothal.

"Ouch, my son", yelped the monk, "you wedded a lost soul!"

"As for lost souls I know nothing of them", retorted Don Diogo; "but truly it was a hellish thing".

"It was a damned soul: so I tell you, my son", replied the abbot. "I know the story of that woman from the hills. It was written down more than one hundred years ago on the last page of a Gothic saints' calendar in our monastery. Your faintheartedness does not surprise me. Worse anxieties and fainting spells have been known to gnaw at the insides of the excommunicated".

"Am I then excommunicated?"

"From top to toe, inside out; there is nothing more to say".

'And my father wept through his beard for the first time in his life.

'The good monk soothed him as one would a girl child; he consoled him as one would the unfortunate. Then he began the tale of the hillside lady who, God help me, is my mother.

'And as penance, he ordered him to go make war against the Saracens for as long as he had lived in sin, killing as many of them as the number of days that those years encompassed. Fridays did not count for the

reckoning, since they are the day of Christ's Passion, which would make it profane to afflict the foul riff-raff of Mohammedans, the most shameless and pointless beings on Earth.

'Now the legend of the lovely lady from the hills, *de verbo ad verbum*, as spelled out on the blank page of the calendar, ran thus, according to the abbot's recollection':

3

'In the days of the Visigothic kings, good times that they were! there lived in Biscay an earl, lord of a castle perched on a craggy mountain, surrounded by the slopes and pitfalls of a vast domain. Those lands boasted all manner of prey, and Argimiro the Dark (such was the name of the nobleman), like all the barons of Spain, enjoyed first and foremost three good pleasures of the flesh: war, wine and women; but even more than those three things, he enjoyed hunting. A woman he possessed and beautiful, such was the countess; wine, none better than his, in his cellars; and prey that was abundant on his terrains. His father, in his day also a hunter and mountain man, on his deathbed summoned his son and said:

"Swear to me something that will cost you nothing". Argimiro swore to obey any command of his lord father.

"It is that you will never kill a breeding female, be she bear, boar or deer. If you do so, Argimiro, you will never lack in your wildernesses and hunting grounds game upon which to practice the noblest of a nobleman's pursuits. Moreover, if you knew what befell me one day... Hear me for it was a dreadful case..."

'The old man did not finish his story because at that very moment death grabbed him with its claws. He murmured a few halting words, rolled his eyes and expired. May God keep his soul.

'Years went by: one day there arrived at the castle a young nobleman, an emissary of King Wamba. His Majesty summoned him to Toledo, to accompany him, with his men, in an assault upon the rebel Paul. Other nobles from that region had been summoned like him.

'Before they set off, however, they gathered in Argimiro's castle for a great hunt, with more than one hundred hunting hounds, mongrels and greyhounds, fifty horsemen and numberless mounted men. It was a striking gathering.

'They set off as dawn broke: they stormed through valleys and hills: they hunted through forests and woods. By midday, however, they had yet to raise boar, bear or deer. They cursed heavily, swore and pulled their beards.

'Argimiro, who, from long years of practice, knew the deepest parts of the thickets, felt stirring inside him a devilish temptation.

"My guests", he thought to himself, "will not depart without drinking a few goblets of wine over some pieces of game. I swear it on my father's soul".

'And followed by some of the horsemen with their packs of hounds, he abandoned the assembled company and rode and rode until he came upon a steep valley. The valley was dark and gloomy: through it ran a cold and haunted stream. The banks of the stream were rugged and steep.

'Argimiro came to the first bend in the river; he halted, looked around and found what he was seeking. A cave opened up on the side of a rocky hill that sloped down to the narrow path on which he rode. Argimiro entered the mouth of the cave, and signalled the noisy huntsmen, mounted boys, hunting hounds, mongrels and greyhounds to follow him.

'It was the lair of an onager: the beast sighed and lowered its head as if in supplication.

"Go to it", shouted Argimiro, but he turned his face as he did so.

'The pack fell upon the poor animal which sighed again and fell in a pool of blood.

'A voice rang in the nobleman's ears, and said: "the onagers's cubs have been orphaned and at the hand of an onager you will be dishonoured".

"Who amongst you dares to cast a curse on me?" shouted the nobleman, looking wrathfully at the huntsmen. They all remained silent; but they were all pale.

'Argimiro pondered matters for one moment: then walking out of the cave he muttered: "be gone, or a thousand demons take you".

'With merry blows of the horns and barking by the dogs, he led had the dead beast carried to the castle.

'And taking his falcon upon his wrist he ordered the huntsmen to tell the noblemen that two hours thence they would find in his palace well seasoned meat.

'Then, followed by his falconers, he headed towards his manor, releasing hawks and falcons and gathering the spoils of the birds of prey, abundant in those whereabouts'.

4

'The bells of the keep in Argimiro's castle tolled for the lovely countess whom her husband had killed. Grief-stricken mourners take her to her burial in the neighbouring monastery: the friars follow the mourners, singing funeral psalms: following them comes the nobleman dressed in sackcloth tied with a rope, and injuring his naked feet upon splinters and stones.

'Why had he killed his wife, and why did he walk barefoot?

'That is precisely what is disclosed in the tale written upon the blank page of the saints' calendar'.

5

'Two years was how long lasted King Wamba's wars; and lots of tales attach to them. And in them fought the noblemen and his *bucelarii*, as such were called at that time rearguard men and foot soldiers. He performed tremendous deeds and riding triumphs; but he returned covered in scars, and leaving behind on the battle fields his legions, weakened and worn out.

'And upon returning from Toledo to Biscay he was accompanied by a single page. Elderly, grey-haired and wrinkled, he, himself was, not from age but from sorrow and weariness.

'He travelled heavy-hearted and angry in aspect; because from his castle news had arrived that had saddened and enraged him.

'And riding day and night over hills and heaths, woods and gardens, he pondered how to ascertain the truth or falsehood of such sinful rumours'.

6

'In Argimiro's manor, even one year after his departure everything exhibited signs of the countess' anguish and heartache: the rooms were draped in black; black was her attire; in the inner courtyards of the palaces weeds had grown so tall that they might have been scythed: the iron grids and shutters on the windows remained closed: the melodies

of the servants and maids, the sound of psalteries and harps, had grown silent.

‘But in the second year of his absence, all appeared to have changed:

‘The drapes were now a silver hue; white and red the gowns of the lovely countess; from the palace windows rang the sound of music and balls; and Argimiro’s manor was restored inside and out. An old overseer it was who had warned him of these changes. Such merriment and happiness pained him; as did his master’s honour, by reason of what he saw and what was rumoured.

‘And here is what had befallen’:

7

‘Far from the illustrious Baron Argimiro the Dark’s county, in the region of Galicia, there lived a noble warrior — that is to say a lesser aristocrat — a handsome gentleman-in-waiting and youthful man called Astrigildo the Blond.

‘He was twenty-five years old; the dreams that populated his nights were of beautiful damsels; they involved love and pleasure: but at daybreak they all vanished, because when he went out to the fields all he could see were shepherdesses burnt by the sun and the snow, and the rustic maids of his manor.

‘Of these he had had enough. He had deceived at least five with his words; he had bought the favours of at least ten with gold; another ten he had raped brutally, as was his right as nobleman and lord.

‘Aged twenty-five, the book of divine justice had already inscribed twenty-five instances of wrongdoing under his name.

‘One night Astrigildo dreamed that he was running along mountains and valleys at the speed of the wind, riding on the back of a wild onager which, after much running arrived late at night at a manor in which he begged for shelter.

‘And that a beautiful lady welcomed him, and that they promptly fell in love.

‘He woke with a start and all day long he thought of nothing other than the lovely lady whom he had met in that dawn-time dream.

‘Three nights the dream returned; three days the young man pondered it. Leaning against a balcony on a terrace, on the afternoon

of the third day he contemplated melancholically the mountains to the North, which he glimpsed on the horizon like grey clouds.

'The sun went down in the West but he remained absorbed in his sombre thoughts.

'As chance would have it, at that moment he turned and looked down to the terrace beneath; there a forest onager lay, resembling a docile donkey; it was identical in all respects to the animal in his dream.

'Dreams entertained three nights in succession cannot lie; Astrigildo hastened down to the terrace. The onager allowed himself to be saddled; and the young man mounted him and hurtled down the hill, towards God and happiness. All went just right: the onager flew rather than galloped. But the sky grew stormy as night fell: darkness deepened and turned into wind, thunder, rain and lightning. The young man lost his bearings, and the onager doubled its speed, snorting violently. At long last it halted, in the dead hours of the night. Knowing not how, Astrigildo found himself at the gates of a castle.

'He blew his horn, which released a long, tremulous sound, because he was trembling from fear and cold. As he ceased blowing, the drawbridge was lowered, many pages bearing torches appeared to welcome him and the rooms of the palace were lit up. The countess, too, had dreamed the same as he for three nights'.

8

'The clepsydra signals late-night vigil time, but in the castle of the Lord of Biscay the ball continues; because the noble countess and the handsome Astrigildo watch the dancing and the games of serfs and freed men, who, to entertain them, labour away in the weaponry room. In a chamber lower down, however, a man stands, dagger in hand, with an enraged mien and tangled hair, seemingly listening to a remote tune.

'Another man stands before him and says:

"'My Lord, the time has not yet come to punish this great sin. When they retire, yonder light will be extinguished. Go up then and you will find unobstructed the secret way into the chamber, the same one where your nuptials were spent'".

'He who spoke departed, and soon after the light was extinguished, and the man with grizzly hair and staring eyes ascended a steep and dingy stairwell'.

9

'When, early in the morning, from his balcony, Count Argimiro ordered the body of the countess to be taken to a women's monastery that he had founded so that in it he and those of his house might have their sepulchre, and ordered his men-at-arms to drag away Astrigildo's corpse and hurl it over the underlying abyss, he saw a wild onager reclining in a corner of the courtyard.

"A tame onager is something I never saw", he said to his steward; "how came he to be here?"

'The steward was preparing to answer when a voice was heard: it was as though the air was speaking.

"It was he that brought Astrigildo: it was he that will carry him off. At your hand the onager's young were orphaned, and by his actions, oh Lord, you have been dishonoured. You were cruel to the poor beasts: God has avenged them".

"Mercy!" cried Argimiro, for at that moment he remembered the ill-fated hunt.

'In the meanwhile the count's men were departing with the bloodied corpse of the young man: when the onager saw this, he leapt like a lion into the mob which he caused to disperse, and gripping the dead man with his teeth he dragged him outside the castle, and, as if born by a legion of demons, hurtled down the cliff.

'It was for that reason that the count, robe tied with a string and barefoot, was now following the cortege of monks and coffin. He wished to do penance at the monastery for having broken the vow made to his father.

'The souls of the countess and the young knight fell headlong into hell, for having departed this life as adulterers, which is a mortal sin.

'From that moment the two wretched souls have appeared to many people in remote areas of Biscay: she dressed in red and white, sitting on rocks, singing melodious songs: he gamboling around in the shape of an onager.

'This was the story the old abbot told my father, and which he told me, before going to serve his penance in that war against the Moors that proved fatal to him'.

Thus Don Inigo ended his tale. Brearte, the young page, felt his hair stand on end. He remained motionless for a long while before his

master: both silent. The young knight choked on his food. At last he withdrew from his pouch Don Diogo's letter and read it again. The trials and tribulations there told were such that Don Inigo felt tears streaming down his face. He rose from the table to retire. Neither he nor the page slept a wink all night; the latter from fear, the former from sorrow.

And in Don Inigo's ears there rang non-stop Brearte's words: 'Why not go to the mountain to seek your mother?' It was true that only a magic spell could release the wretched Lord of Biscay from the clutches of the Moors.

At long last dawn broke.

Third Canticle

1

Messenger after messenger, missive after missive arrived for Don Inigo from Toledo. The King of Leon exchanged Moorish knights for his own every day, but he held no *wali* or *kayid* of a rank to equal that of the Lord of Biscay.

Many of those ransomed were natives of the mountains; and these, upon their return, carried those messages, and told of tears even more copious, were that possible, than those described in the letters.

'At the eagle gate, in Toledo' — they told him — 'the Moorish rabble has a very well appointed field. There they hold feasts, dances and bull fights on the name days of their dirty-dog saints, as they are told and taught by *khatibs* and *ul-máis*.

'There they keep cages of ferocious beasts, sights to behold and disbelieve: if tigers and lions cannot break out, the notion of human hands doing so is foolish.

'In one of these cells, almost naked, with chains on his hands and feet is the illustrious nobleman who formerly led large and distinguished armies.

'The Moors are mostly courteous to their aristocratic prisoners. They treat Don Diogo like this because three years have now gone by with no sign of a ransom'.

The returning pilgrims, freed from captivity, well fed and clothed in the castle, told such stories and the following day left with provisions, travelling in the peace of God.

Don Inigo, however, was not left with peace of mind: 'why not go to the mountain?' a voice whispered in his ear. 'Why not go seek your mother?' repeated Brearte, the page.

What could he do?

He spent a sleepless night thinking about it.

In the morning, trusting to God and good fortune, behold him at long last embarking, albeit unwillingly, upon this adventure,

In order to avoid crossing himself he blessed himself twenty times. He prayed a *Pater*, an *Ave* and a *Credo*; seeing as he did not know whether shortly he would remember such prayers.

Then, followed by his favourite hound, on foot and with a javelin in hand, he went through thickets, up a path towards dismal, lonely summits where, tradition had it, the lovely lady had appeared to his father.

2

The nightingales twitter in the brook; the water of the streams murmurs in the distance; the leaves rustle in the early morning breeze: it is a beautiful dawn.

And Don Inigo Guerra climbs, softly, softly, the steep slopes, leaps over sunken hollows, and despite all efforts feels his heart beat with unaccustomed anxiety.

Where the woods opened into a clearing or the hillocks levelled out, Don Inigo would pause, catching his breath and listening.

He had been deep in the woods for a long time: the sun was high in the sky, the day warm: the nightingale's song had been replaced by the screeching of the crickets.

And he came upon a fountain that erupted from a black rock and, flowing from crag to crag, came to a rustic pool upon which the sunlight seemed to dance to the rhythm of the wavelets caused by the waterfall.

Don Inigo sat in the shade of the rock and, removing his hunting cap, quenched his severe thirst and washed his face and hair, covered as they had been in dust and sweat.

His hound, having also drunk, lay beside him, tongue lolling, panting with tiredness.

Suddenly the dog stood and hurled itself forward barking loudly. Don Inigo moved his eyes: a wild donkey was grazing at the edge of the clearing, under a leafy oak tree.

'Tarik!' cried the young man. 'Tarik!' But Tarik kept on heedless.

'Let him go, my son! Your dog will not get the better of that onager'.

The words came from a voice on top of the promontory. He looked: a beautiful woman was perched there, and leaned towards him with a loving gesture and an angel smile.

'Mother! Mother!' cried Inigo Guerra rising to his feet, whilst inwardly saying: '*Vade retro!* Saint Hermenegildo help me!' and his hair being wet, he felt it standing on end.

'My son, on your lips sweet words; in your heart, curses. But it matters not, for you are my son. Tell me what you want from me and it will be done as you wish and require'.

The young knight was speechless with fear. Tarik, meanwhile, sighed and howled at the feet of the onager.

'My father, Don Diogo Lopes, has been a prisoner of the Moors for many years' he stammered at last. 'Would that you would show me, Lady, how to rescue him'.

'His troubles I know as well as you. If I could I would have helped him, had you asked me or not: but the old tyrant up in Heaven wishes him to suffer for as many years as he lived with the... godless creature they call the Lady with Cloven Hoofs'.

'Do not blaspheme against God, mother, it is a fearful sin', interjected the youth, ever more appalled.

'Sin?! For me there is no such thing as either sin or virtue', said the lady with howls of laughter.

It was a languid laughter, sad and awful. If Satan laughs, surely it is thus that he laughs.

The knight could say naught else. 'Inigo!' she proceeded, 'one year is yet left of the penance of the noble Lord of Biscay. A year soon passes: but I will make it pass more speedily even. See you that brave onager? When, upon waking one night you see him standing by you, gentle as a lamb, mount him and ride off unafraid, and he will take you to Toledo from whence you will release your father'. And she added with vehemence, 'Is this to your liking, Sparrow?' The onager wiggled its ears in agreement and began braying; he began where sometimes the learned finish.

Then the Lady started singing a sorcerous song, accompanying herself with a psaltery from which she drew the strangest chords:

'In the name of the broomstick,
In the name of the hanging pulley,
In the name of serpents present,
Of the Surah and the Torah;

'In the name of the magic wand,
In the name of the sieve's chambray,
In the name of the old witch,
Of him killed by human hand;

'In the name of the goat, king of revels,
In the name of the frog dead and stiff,
In the name of the bloodless infant
Whose blood witches sucked as he napped.

'In the name of pale, glossy skulls,
From which blood was imbibed,
In the name of fratricide,
And the pain that it exacted;

'In the name of the secret,
Whose name must not be uttered,
Hither come hell-bound creature,
Come to listen to my psaltery!

'And let you dance, here on Earth,
The most frenzied of dances,
And let him grow dizzy,
My own son Inigo Guerra.

'Let him sleep for one whole year,
As though merely for one hour,
By the fountain that gently bubbles,
Upon the lawn of this hill'.

Whilst the Lady sang these melodies, the young man was overcome by a languor of the limbs that grew and forced him to sit down.

And at that very moment a dull sound was heard, as of lightening and wind-storms blowing through caves: and the sky grew dark and ever more downcast, until lit only as at twilight.

And the water in the peaceful tank now churned, and the boulders cracked, and the trees twisted, and the air hissed.

And from the water bubbles in the tank, and the cracks in the rocks, and the immensity of the trees and the vastness of the air one could

see sinking and rising, breaking and leaping... what? Something very astonishing indeed.

It was thousands and thousands of disembodied limbs, charcoal black, on each stump a wing, and in each hand a torch of sorts.

Like the straw that the typhoon blows off the turf, that multitude of lights intercrossed, twirled, mingled and parted, twisted, but always rhythmically, in step. Don Inigo's head revolved: the lights seemed to him to be blue, green and red: but his limbs succumbed to such a gentle languor that he could not summon up the strength to make the sign of the cross to drive off that band of demons.

And he felt himself slowly growing faint, began to slumber, and soon he snored. Meanwhile, back at the castle, his absence had been noticed. They waited for him until nightfall; they waited for him for a week, a month, a year, but he did not return.

Poor Brearte searched the mountain a long time, but the place where the knight lay was unreachable.

3

Don Inigo awoke in the dead of night: he had slept for some hours: or at least, so he thought. He gazed at the sky, saw stars: he felt his surroundings, touched the ground: he listened, heard the rustle of the trees.

Bit by bit he recalled what had happened with his unfortunate mother; because to begin, he remembered nothing.

He thought he heard breathing: he looked more closely: it was Sparrow, the onager.

'I am bewitched', thought he: 'let us follow this adventure to the end and see if I can save my father'.

And standing up straight, he approached the animal, who was already saddled up and harnessed. What manner of harness, only the Devil knew.

He hesitated briefly, overcome by scruples — none too soon — about riding that infernal sprinter.

Presently he heard a voice stirring the air and singing very clearly. It was the voice of the fearful Lady with cloven hoofs:

'Ride, my knight,
Down that promising path;
Go rescue your good lord;
Go and end his captivity.

'Sparrow, you will eat
Neither barley nor oats,
You will neither dine nor sup,
Strong and nimble you'll return.

'Neither whip nor spur,
Are needed, oh knight!
He runs fast and easily,
Night and day, any time.

'Remove neither rein nor saddle,
Do not speak, do not spike him,
As he gallops do not panic,
Look back you never must.

'Onwards and upwards, forward, forward!
Quick, quick, at a fast run!
Not a minute to be lost,
Though the cockerel is yet mute'.

'Go!' shouted Don Inigo Guerra, in a kind of frenzy, occasioned by that melody; and with one leap he mounted the motionless onager.

And as he settled in the saddle, behold! off he gallops!

4

Though at peace with the Christians, Toledo's Moors keep sentries and watchmen on the towers, sentry posts and ramparts, and on the hills that overlook the borders of Leon, torches and torch guards.

But if the King of Leon only knew how undefended Toledo is now; how, come nightfall, the watchmen doze off, fail to light torches, he would break his oath and mount an assault against it.

Would do so, were it not that he would then need to make confession, saying to his priest *Confiteor Deo* and *pecavi*; since the breaking an oath, even to godless dogs, is believed to be a most ugly sin.

It was twilight: at sundown those over there in Toledo, gazing towards the North, glimpsed, far, far away, a fast-moving black cloud, undulating and twisting in the sky, as the road did on Earth, winding between the hills, as if drunk.

At first it was but a dot; then it grew ever larger: when night fell, it had moved near and covered a large stretch of land.

The muezzin, climbing the tower of the mosque, called Mohammed's faithful to afternoon prayer.

The clap of thunder mingled with his high voice, like a soprano and a bass.

And a tornado blowing by, twirled and got entangled in the long, white beard of the muezzin, lashing his face with it.

It then began to rain cats and dogs, such as neither young nor old recollected ever having seen anywhere. On that occasion one might see the scouts sheltering in the keeps; the pulley men running down the ramparts; the torch carriers vanishing into the torch holds; the *hajibs*, drenched to the skin, taking refuge in the mosques; the old women who had come out at the sound of the muezzin's voice, dragged by the flowing water down narrow, winding streets, calling out to Mohammed and Allah. And down came the rain, ever heavier!

The inhabitants of Toledo either run or kneel. And down comes the rain, ever heavier!

Fear breaks their spirit: the *cassiks* exorcise the storm: penitent *fakhirs* shout that it is the end of the world, and urge those wanting to be saved to bestow upon them all their worldly goods. And down came the rain, ever heavier!

What saved Toledo was the failure to close the city gates: had that happened, all the Moors would have drowned within the city precinct.

Don Diogo lay in his dungeon, leaning against the iron bars. The poor old man passed the time listening to that tremendous deluge; for the night was long, and he had nothing to do.

But as the ground on which sat his wild-beast cage was fenced in by walls the rain could not drain out in full and rose, so that he could feel his feet growing damp.

And thus, regardless of his torments, he grew afraid of dying, because well he knew that death is worst of all; seeing as the Lord of Biscay was no atheist, or philosopher or idiot.

But behold, he now glimpses a pale shape that jumped over the raised dais, and hears, in the middle of the grounds — *plash* — and he heard a voice saying 'Noble Lord Don Diogo, where are you?'

'What is it I see and hear?!' clamoured the old man. 'A garment that is not white is not worn by an Ishmaelite; a voice that utters not gobbledegook does not belong to an Infidel; a leap from such height,

comes not from a human rider. By all you believe tell me, are you an angel or are you St. Tiago?’

‘My father, my father!’ said the knight, ‘know you not Inigo’s voice? It is I, come to rescue you’.

And Don Inigo dismounted and, pulling the heavy reins, sought to loosen them: the water already came up to his toes, yet he took no notice.

Greatly distressed, the young man sought to invoke Jesus’ name; but he remembered how he came to be where he was, and the holy name died on his lips.

Sparrow, however, seemed to guess his innermost thoughts and let out a sudden, piercing sigh, as though burnt by a red-hot iron.

And, pushing Don Inigo with his head, he leaned his hip against the iron bars.

A crash was heard. A single kick and the trellis broke into a thousand splinters. Whether you believe me or not, history so records it: I stand to gain nothing from telling it.

As for Don Diogo, he believed it: because a wooden sliver knocked his last two remaining teeth down his throat. The pain rendered him speechless.

His son had him ride ahead of him, and galloping behind him shouted: ‘Father, you are free!’

And Sparrow climbed onto the dais again with a single leap, seeing as he measured fifteen hands.

In the morning it did not rain; the air was calm and clear, and when the Moors went to check up on Don Diogo Lopes, they found no trace of him.

5

Don Inigo and his father, the old Lord of Biscay, go through the city gates of Toledo with the speed of an arrow: in the blink of an eye they leave behind towers, sentry posts and ramparts. The downpour diminishes: the clouds break, and some stars can be seen, like so many eyes with which heaven spies through the darkness upon the affairs down below.

The road, weaving up and down the slopes, turned into a cascading river, and on level ground into lakes.

But whether through lakes or torrents, the brave onager stampeded, snorting like the Devil.

No sooner than they had climbed a hill than they descended another slope; no sooner had they reached a clearing than they felt drops dripping down from the swaying branches of trees in the deepest forest.

It is soon after midnight, and the snowy summits of Vindio outline stretches of clear sky, akin to the crags of a gigantic mountain range capable of sundering in half the austral and boreal hemispheres.

And Sparrow charges the amorphous mountains with a loose gallop, climbs the fearful valleys, and, ever more adroitly, as his name suggests, he resembles less a four-legged animal than a bird.

But what sound is that which drowns out the wind? What is that, far away, which now gleams, now glitters in the pitch dark, like a pack of wolves wrapped in white shrouds, only their eyes uncovered, spreading out like a thread at the bottom of the valley?

It is a fast-flowing river, foaming, with protruding crags like a spine whose hair stands on end, and upon which the reflexes and rays of the stars refract a thousandfold.

A bridge looms dark over the river, and in the centre of it a slender shape. 'Is it a mile post, a statue?' wonder the riders. It cannot be a conifer; they are not known to grow on bridges.

Sparrow sneers at the rivers, makes as little of them as of a bale of hay. Even though he could have jumped twenty such streams, he headed straight for the bridge; he wasn't the kind of animal that wastes time on pointless pursuits.

The onager lunged into the narrow mountain pass like a flash of lightning... but behold, he paused abruptly.

He trembled like a leaf and breathed stertorously: the two riders looked on.

The slim shape was a stone cross raised half-way along the bridge and it was the cause of Sparrow's reluctance.

Then, from amidst some tall poplars that swayed on the farthest bank, a little closer, a weary, tremulous voice was heard:

'Back, back at a gallop.
Now!
Round and round, come
Hither!
Nothing stands in your way.
Shush,

Not a word, you two. Avoid that
Cross'.

'Holy name of God!' roared Don Diogo, blessing himself at the sound of that voice he well knew but thought not to hear in those thereabouts, his son having not revealed how he had come to rescue him.

The moment the old man's words were heard, he and Don Inigo too, were hurled against the base of the crucifix and lay prone, covered in sludge. The onager, having thrown them off, howled like a wild beast. And they smelled the intolerable aroma of sulphur and charcoal, which they immediately understood to be linked to Satan.

And they heard a peal of thunder underground; and the bridge swayed, as though the Earth's innards broke apart.

His great fear notwithstanding, and even though he called upon the Holy Virgin, Don Inigo peeped out of the corner of his eye to see how matters fared.

We men often say women are curious. We are the curious ones. We lie like damned souls.

What could it be that the knight could see? A gaping pitfall, close by, over the bridge and erupting from the water.

And along the riverbed; and down into the entrails of the Earth; and over Hell's ceiling (there was nothing else it could be), a scarlet fire reverberated in those depths.

So much so that he glimpsed a demon with a twisted spit in his hand, a Jew impaled upon it.

And Sparrow spiralled down that chasm, like a feather falling from a tower on a windless day.

The sight caused Don Inigo to faint, refraining from calling upon Jesus' sacred name. Both the old man and the youth lay there senseless.

When they came to, at the dawn of a sunny day, they knew where they were. It was the bridge by the village of Nustúrio, above which stood the castle built by Don From, the Saxon grandsire of Don Diogo Lopes, and first Lord of Biscay.

There were no traces of the night's events; the two men, worn out and covered in sludge and bruises, dragged themselves as best they could until they came upon some serfs to whom they made themselves known, and who took them home.

Many banquets were held in Nustúrio in honour of their return, and more that I cannot tell you; seeing as soon it will be time to eat, pray and sleep.

6

Don Diogo lived but a short time longer: every day he went to mass, and every week he made confession. Don Inigo, however, never set feet in church again, never prayed again, and did naught but hunt in the mountains.

Whenever he was obliged to go to war for Leon, he was seen climbing the mountain armed to the teeth and thence return mounted on a gigantic onager.

And his name rang throughout Spain; for there was no battle in which he fought and which was lost, and no conflict in which he was wounded or toppled.

It was whispered in Nustúrio that the illustrious Baron had signed a pact with the Devil. How surprising!

He was already half demon on his mother's side; all that remained was for him to sell the other half of his soul.

For an eighty percent profit on receipt of defection, any pawnbroker gives a soul to Satan in its entirety and considers it a good transaction.

Be that as it may, Don Inigo died of old age: what history does not record is what then happened in the castle. As I do not wish to fabricate lies, I shall say nothing.

But God's mercy is bounteous. As a precaution, say a *Pater* and an *Ave* for him. If it profit him not, may it help me instead. Amen.

Appendix B

‘Fascinação’ (‘Enchantment’)¹

By Hélia Correia (2004)

Translated by Maria Manuel Lisboa (2016)

Fearful moons.

Dona Sol loved her brother more than she loved her husband, and she disregarded all the voices that spoke of it. Everyone must have been asleep, people must have been resting, the servants too. Everything on God’s earth, Christian souls and animals alike, went to bed with the sun. All shut their eyes, made way for night’s creatures, which knocked on the boards of the gates, like waves on a pitch black sea. But on that exceptional twilight, in which enormous lights flew over the wicked hills to the southwest, arose a fear, a kind of euphoria that gave rise to screeches and flying skirts, and the behaviour of the locals changed.

Well might some say, the most cautious ones, that it was a festival for the Moors, the conquered ones, those who had been expelled from the towns, those destined to see their hands, destroyed by hard labour, dropping from the spade into the snow. A Moorish festival might awaken in the Lord’s villagers a longing for the mass murders of yore. The clinking of weaponry in the hay lofts would ring louder than church bells filling the air. The men would snort deep in their throats

1 Also available at https://www.academia.edu/26066522/Translation_of_H%C3%A9lia_Correias_Fascina%C3%A7%C3%A3o

with a relief more heartfelt than the moans of the sated flesh, as they looked at their weapons, scourged and dented in wars gone by. And they would hurtle down the slopes, forgiven in anticipation, followed by the slobbering of holy fathers who stumbled behind them.

The moons rose in the sky, scarlet, first two, than four, like the eyes of a pack of wolves shining in the dark. It is true that the Moors worshipped it, that crescent they carried on their flags, like a beast's horns, like a serpent's tongue. But there was no way in which they could have hammered so many stars upon the surface of the sky, and no one accused them of it. And so the hunger for bloodshed went through the houses but found no target upon which to relieve itself. A fear that the world might end, that the graves might yield up their dead, bringing forth last-minute despairs, rotting remains hopeful of a divine cleansing, overcame everyone, like the effect of a new wine.

Dona Sol lifted her skirt a little, but the light from the torch was too weak for any significant disclosure. She stooped and touched her feet, bare despite the winter cold. She caressed the ten toes as though age had frozen them and it pained her. She sighed, leaning against the wall, whose unevenness, so real, so harsh against her flesh, caused her to tremble.

It was not her mother, then, the Lady with Cloven Hoofs, who, by means of those moons, was letting Sol know that she, too, had been transformed into an unchained creature from Hell.

She remembered that mother, beautiful as she sang, who had bewitched Don Diogo Lopes and lured him into proposing marriage, to which she had said yes on the condition that he never again made the sign of the cross.

Both of them, she forgetting her cloven hoofs, he forgetting to cross himself, lived years in such perfect harmony that two children were born to them, just as it happens in unions upon which God has smiled. Inigo and Sol, such were their names, did not hide away in the kitchens of the manor, and showed their faces to all visitors. From their mother they had inherited that glow that makes redheads in equal measure objects of desire and of wariness. It was from their colouring, which however was not uncommon to humankind, that there rose a glow, a sign that in that household there prevailed a sin, the wretchedness of the heathen. Everyone in the vicinity said so, as people came and went,

stopped by water wells, blessing themselves, unaware that Don Diogo never did likewise.

In a way, when the tragedy took place, it was a relief, at last making sense, as it did, of what had made none before. In the hovels, in church cloisters, among the spirit sellers who came close to the town, the tales captured the attention of even the most hardened audiences, telling of how the wife of the great huntsman had metamorphosed into a demon. Upon an ill-fated hour the knight, angered more greatly than he ought to have been by the death of his favourite hound at the jaws of his wife's bitch, an animal until then entirely tame, upon that ill-fated hour, they said, he had done something imprudent that had transformed the lovely lady into a dark, hairy, wiry creature who flew into the air stretching out her claws towards her children.

What had befallen the hall? As told by the servants, some had seen him swear an oath, others still saw him making the sign of the cross, an over-reaction, one might say, seeing as what was in question was two dogs, without sin although powerfully bloodthirsty. It was as if his hand, set loose and taking advantage of its owner's momentary distraction, had made the sign of the cross wilfully and of its own volition.

His wife released the most frightful howl that any Christian soul ever heard. And, as though dragged upwards, something that led many listeners to shrug in disbelief, since it is well known that demons do not rise, the lady, now blackened, was lifted upwards, the roof opening up sufficiently for her escape. But woe, whether impelled by a mother's heart who from its darkness longs for its young, or by an order from its master, Beelzebub, who craved young flesh for some unspeakable purpose, she stretched towards her children what were now tarantulas' pincers rather than hands. The father, aghast, hurled himself on the boy in a tight grasp and held him to the ground. It is not for me, discreet lady and narrator that I am, to remark upon the choice made by the nobleman. Perhaps he was closest to Inigo, and, as the experienced huntsman that he was, he guessed at the probability of success. Those who told the tale have not specified the relative positions of the four participants. The most reliable one, who put this account in writing, tells us that Dona Sol had already been dragged up from the ground when Diogo Lopes came to his senses and prevented his son's kidnap. Who knows, however, whether, in having to choose, and accustomed as he was to choosing one wager over

another, he might have been influenced by the advantages of keeping his male heir rather than the less valuable maiden. Be that as it may, it was Inigo Guerra who remained and we are left gazing upon the air-born Dona Sol, so stunned, so dumbfounded, that her skirt swirled around her, herself swinging like a pendulum, like a body recently hung from the gallows. She said nothing, nor was any weeping heard from her. Her soft hair, let loose, glowed auburn against her mother. And her gaze fell disconsolately on the desolate eyes of her brother.

Many tales are told of Inigo Guerra. All is known of the ferocity that his entire life drove him into the woods, growling louder than any growling beast. The plunging of the knife, the spilling of blood from the neck, be it of deer or of poachers, gave him a pleasure unmatched by anything ever experienced by his father. For his father had loved the Lady with the Cloven Hoof, and the whole world knows that ardour in bed finds its match that of the hunt. But as for Inigo, in his entire life he had loved no woman.

He was a taciturn man, and that very glow of redheads discouraged any closeness, keeping even shadows at bay.

And what of Dona Sol, wrenched away from her dogs and her playthings, stolen from a brother who had been everything to her? Clutched in her mother's claws she flew through the air for three days and three nights, glimpsing, from on high, valleys and habitations in a way no mortal will ever see them, or not until Satan invents a device that will permit it.

It is not open to us to conjecture the nature of the circumstances in which she grew up. Whether it was in Hell's dark lands, amidst the ashes of spectral regions or in a pagan Eden forgotten by God's annihilating wrath, no Christian soul ever heard it from her lips. To be sure it must have taken place in the company of women, since she was a consummate mistress of the arts of hairdressing and needlework.

Wherever it might be, she wasted away. And her poor mother, much respected amongst the damned for the great powers at her command, could do nothing to dry the tears that ever shone in the girl's eyes. Not parties nor balls nor a thousand suns garlanded upon the night sky; not even the fairies of the woods or the agitated sisterhood of goats succeeded in bringing a smile to her lips. Because, although herself a redhead, Dona Sol was no stranger to the torment of the dark peoples of Hispania, and she knew the pain of love.

She was in love with Inigo, her brother. In the whirlwind of dancing and laughter which ruled her days, to judge by the sabbaths later depicted in books, she conjured as in a mirror the image of the brother chained to the father whose impulse had sundered them. He looked at her, amidst the remains of food and the corpses of dogs, and she rose. And, binding them, the thread of their gaze, with elastic resilience, enduring, overcoming immeasurable distances.

Sol grew up, undergoing the laws of human bodies, because in her, her mother's infernal substance played no part. Her small, pink feet with ten toes drew so much attention that it made her shy.

She dwelt among strangers. Oddly, that which strengthened her in her conviction that she was a Christian was also what swept her away from her church, by which I mean that her longing for the company of her brother was also the one thing that rendered her somewhat diabolical: the brutish desire of incest. In this, she resembled her mother who, in order that she might enjoy the pleasures of the flesh with Don Diogo, behaved all her married life like the most Christian of wives. Now, beyond the laws of both worlds, her maternal love endured.

At the sight of Sol suspended in such a void, she suffered like any woman who, amidst sighs, spies the daughter whose broken heart causes her to pine. Being a lady with cloven hoofs, however, she had a deeper understanding than an ordinary mother. And she saw reflected in the maiden's the tormented face of her own son, which, it must be acknowledged, flattered her. Because not only was this love entirely contrary to all Christian rules, but what was loved here was she herself, in the two versions of her own being that she had borne. And she decided that the two should meet, that their innermost selves might rejoice in the encounter. She would return Sol to daylight and to the Earth.

'Be gone, then', she said. And she hurled her upon the castle where she herself had lived happily with Don Diogo and where her son Inigo now ruled.

Another arm, however, that of the Lord, intervened, and pushed Sol away, a further twenty leagues to the south, where the last Christians battled against the enemy. These were sun-drenched whereabouts, where water was scarce and no hunting was to be had other than rabbits and wild donkeys. On a stone ledge beside wilting oleanders, Dona Sol rested her feet. And, raising her lyre, she sang the most poignant of songs.

She had felt the angry blow that had pushed her away from the path that would have led her back home and hurtled her instead to where she now found herself. Loneliness encircled her like a bell jar. She called her mother who appeared, blacker, if that is possible, from rage. Twice, thrice she propelled her daughter with her breath, which was the breath of a dragon, towards Don Inigo's bed. Twice, thrice God intervened and slapped her away.

Dona Sol found herself once again in a gentle and sleepy countryside where sometimes there glittered a blade, or what appeared to be a blade. A curse forced her to sing. Moors and Christians heard her and all covered their ears, fearful of the lure of such a seductive tune.

One day Afonso Pena, a warrior weary of war, rode by. He rode at some distance from his servants and, unaccustomedly for him, he dreamed. The dust clinging to blood and sweat gave him the appearance of a leper. He was just returning from the slaughter of ten innocents whom he had come upon in his way. They were women and children who tried to escape, shouting out and raising a dangerous alarm. Although they were no more than infidels in whose death the Lord gloried, at the moment of their deaths their eyes were so sad that he was moved and his will weakened. But then he killed them, dutifully.

For one moment he thought that deep and shameful reluctance to kill was the sound he heard, like the voice of a beautiful singer. Then he raised his eyes and saw her, so white and auburn-haired that it ought to have acted as a warning, but it did not.

Just as Don Diogo had married the Lady, so too Afonso married Sol. But she imposed no conditions. They led the blameless life of Christians, bowing as priests went by, lying prone in penitence over the tombs of nuns. Dona Sol had one single fault: she liked to ride alone, leaving behind her pages, incapable of such speed. They would watch her ride away and they doubted their own eyes when the lady, in the distance, seemed to fly, as though born aloft in the hot air.

Sometimes she returned very late, stained from the mud swamps and their devotion angered her. 'How could we return without your ladyship?' they asked tearfully. They were either very young or already old; they were unsure of their position. They took her to Don Afonso and he dismissed them away to the kitchens. She lay down in disquiet

and her husband left her with her ladies-in-waiting. He withdrew to his room to languish in the pains of love. He never discovered that Dona Sol sought her brother and did not find him, because she did not speak of it. Her mouth was dry with desire and nothing sisterly drove her on.

Inigo Guerra lived nearby and was famous among Moors and Christians alike. He inspired fear in all who met him. He hunted beasts and infidels alike in placid silence and even the priests condemned such a solitary way of carrying out God's work. However, no scandal attached to him and for this reason he gave no occasion for gossip. He did not even excite curiosity, although he lived in semi-seclusion and occupied himself with very mysterious expeditions. It could not even be said that he was feared, because fear is the fuel for scandal and no scandal circulated about him.

Dona Sol sought the company of the servants but no rumour offered her any information. And she dared not ask, fearful that the question might reveal the depth of her sinfulness.

She was not known to have a brother, nor parents, nor possessions, nor anyone to vouch for her. She was said to have been the prisoner of Moors since childhood, and to have escaped alone on the occasion of the great slaughter, when the women had relaxed their vigilance for a moment. Such things happened. And Don Afonso did not ask for a dowry or family connections, thinking that in that redhead he was carrying all the gold in the world into his bed.

God prevented the encounter between the siblings, which, were it to happen, would turn them into lovers.

Sometimes they were close to one another, so close as they rode through the woods that their horses reared up and touched the emptiness with their hoofs. Yes, emptiness. Because the Lord sent the legions of his angels to thin the air with their wings, turning those places into no-man's land. Sometimes a deep darkness fell between them though it was noon. Very faraway the Lady with Cloven Hoofs stretched her black maw and howled. But she was no match for him.

'You will only be together with him, my daughter', she said to Sol on one of the occasions they met, late at night, on the terraces, 'if you become a Lady with Cloven Hoofs. What we, the damned, do, is no business of that Other One'.

'So why don't you change me, mummy?' She contemplated her bare feet, and the ten toe nails that glowed in the moonlight. Her mother always wore shoes with a low heel, the colour of wine. She always made herself beautiful for her meetings with her daughter. It was that woman with sapphire-blue eyes and alabaster skin who had once captured the soul of Diogo Lopes.

'That would require deeds you could not imagine, not even in your wildest dreams', she replied, and promptly disappeared. It was in the summer and the witches frolicked shamelessly through the heavens, waving their cloven feet and kicking the yellow moons. Dona Sol returned to her chamber where her maids slept on rugs. They, watching her, saw her kneeling and trembling as though a mortal peril threatened her soul.

By now Don Afonso feared her so much that he no longer sought her. Though in reality nothing had happened, travellers kept away, avoiding the vicinity of the castle. A woman sang on the ramparts. They say that she looked at her feet as if she had already gone mad.

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- 11 Paula Rego, *Pendle Witches* (1996). Etching and aquatint on paper, 35.7 x 29.7 cm. Tate, London, all rights reserved, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rego-pendle-witches-p77906> 175

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Smile When You Think about Hell

MARIA MANUEL LISBOA

This book is an urgent and necessary addition to the bibliography on Paula Rego, and an important contribution to scholarship about the artist, but also to contemporary painting, Portuguese art, feminist art, and areas of scholarship relating to the handling of the political and ideological in the visual arts.

—Ruth Rosengarten

In these powerful and stylishly written essays, Maria Manuel Lisboa dissects the work of Paula Rego, the Portuguese-born artist considered one of the greatest artists of modern times. Focusing primarily on Rego's work since the 1980s, Lisboa explores the complex relationships between violence and nurturing, power and impotence, politics and the family that run through Rego's art.

Taking a historicist approach to the evolution of the artist's work, Lisboa embeds the works within Rego's personal history as well as Portugal's (and indeed other nations') stories, and reveals the interrelationship between political significance and the raw emotion that lies at the heart of Rego's uncompromising iconographic style. Fundamental to Lisboa's analysis is an understanding that apparent opposites – male and female, sacred and profane, aggression and submissiveness – often co-exist in Rego's work in a way that is both disturbing and destabilising.

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