

**PORTUGUESE WOMEN'S WRITING
1972 TO 1986**

Reincarnations of a Revolution

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proliferate productively in literary discourse, with heteronomous new aesthetics allowing women as writers, as subjects, as poetically enfranchised bodies to speak their own truths in a polyphony of new accents.

CHAPTER I

Novas Cartas Portuguesas: In Spite of Ulysses

A convinced libertarian – particularly a foreign one – could understandably disapprove of Salazar. But I doubt that Plato would have done so. (Acheson 628)¹

Nós andámos pelo terreno da separação. (Barreno et al. 308)

Chamaremos crianças/Às crianças, mulheres às mulheres e homens/Aos homens. Chamaremos um poeta para governo/Da cidade. (Barreno et al. 75)

Novas Cartas Portuguesas, collaboratively authored by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, took as its starting point the French epistolary text *Lettres Portugaises* which was first published anonymously in 1669. This set of five love letters addressed to a French cavalier, the Marquis de Chamilly, was supposedly written by a Portuguese nun, Soror Mariana Alcoforado, from her cell in the Immaculate Conception Convent in Beja. The theme of the beloved Portuguese nun has been extensively reworked in numerous literary versions in and beyond Portugal as well as engendering academic debate regarding the letters' authenticity and national ownership in the French canon or the Portuguese. The *Lettres Portugaises* are now generally

¹ This was the impression which Salazar made on Dean Acheson, the then US Secretary of State on the occasion of a private meeting in February 1952, at the time of a key NATO summit in Lisbon.

recognized by current scholarship to have been an elaborate fraudulent pastiche, originally composed not by the nun but by Gabriel-Joseph de Lavergne de Guilleragues who, posing as their editor, claimed to have found and translated the letters from Portuguese into French.² As Anna Klobucka has suggested in her study of the Mariana Alcoforado myth, the nun was chosen by the Three Marias not so much for her tragic love story as for the relationship between gender, signature and traditions of authorship which her critical history metafictionally enfolded (2000, 136-50).

In addition to challenging conventional ascriptions of authorship, authenticity and national canonicity, *Novas Cartas* also transgresses rules of literary genre as the American critic, Linda S. Kauffman, has pointed out.³ Combining letters, essays, poems, testimonies, reports, dialogues and citations, *Novas Cartas* is a hybrid, multifaceted project which grew organically through the Marias' twice-weekly meetings and exchanges of work. The ostensibly unpromising story of the lacrimose, abandoned nun presented itself as the perfect candidate for ironic recuperation. In the hands of the Three Marias, Mariana Alcoforado becomes a pretext for debating the very terms and conditions of possibility upon which women, as disembodied subjects under Portuguese fascism, could come to creative and political expression. Kauffman astutely concludes that *Novas Cartas* is a "work of criticism as well as of fiction, one that intentionally subverts the conventions of scholarly discourse that so frequently nullify the female"⁴ (284).⁴ Expanding on this, I read *Novas Cartas* as a new critical discourse on re/presentation, subjectivity and women's desire performing the function of defining feminism, in Teresa de Lauretis's terms, as a "horizon of possible meanings" at a given juncture in history (1988, 4)

² For discussion of the authorship debates surrounding *Letras Portuguesas* see Kauffman C3; and Klobucka 1993, 51-56 and 2000, C5.

³ See de Medeiros for a reading of *Novas Cartas* as postmodern innovation on account of its play with polyphony, simulacra, resistance of genre and deconstruction of origins.

⁴ Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo similarly suggests in her 1980 preface that *Novas Cartas* "inscrevem-se na grande corrente – hoje imensa – da literatura feminina em que a relação da mulher à escrita é um dos grandes temas explícitos ou implícitos" (26).

Locating my reading of *Novas Cartas* at the cross-over of poststructuralist feminist and historical materialist positions, I draw on Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*, in particular her concepts of satirical mimesis and her re-reading of Marx in terms of patrilinear exchange systems.⁵ On the subject of feminine embodiment as anti-epic, I make specific use of the Italian feminist philosopher, Adriana Cavarero, who further develops Irigaray's theories of strategic mimesis in pragmatic, materialist directions drawn from her experiences in Italian feminist and Communist politics. As I will show, her *In Spite of Plato* recuperates the marginal female figures of classical Greek philosophy, affording a particularly productive re-reading of Odyssean myth and epic. The *Novas Cartas* project begins similarly by engaging in a sustained exercise of satirical mimesis, reappropriating the sites of feminine exclusion from phallogocentric humanist discourse, by exposing the mechanisms of this exclusion through ironic, performance (Irigaray 1985b, 76-7). Rosi Braidotti has aptly characterized this as the "practice of 'as if', of mimesis as a political and intellectual strategy based on the subversive potential of repetitions" (1994, 39). The Marias write "as if" Mariana Alcoforado were an authentic biographical entity, with a context, a history, descendants and a family. Decentering the (masculine) false neutral of western humanist epistemologies they thus perform the nun's desire and abandonment as a mode of ironic displacement.⁶ Refusing both patriarchal authority and the maternal phallus they expose the absence of the female body

⁵ *Novas Cartas* was, of course, published in 1972 before the major works of either Irigaray or Cavarero. Kauffman has suggested that the English translation of the text was misread by British and American critics in 1975 because, "no one thought to place *New Portuguese Letters* in the context of either structural, linguistic, or poststructural theories, despite the allusions of the authors themselves" (307). Kauffman herself moved significantly to redress this omission. On discussion of the reception of the English translation in the US, see also Owen 1989 and 1995.

⁶ See Ramalho de Sousa Santos and Amaral who also read *Novas Cartas* "ao denunciarem, como Irigaray propunha mais ou menos pela mesma altura (Irigaray 1974, 1977), a estrutura sexualda, porém, supostamente neutra, do discurso patriarcal" (10).

and feminine desire from Portuguese national literature and history, engaging in a series of playful re-inscriptions which work across various levels.

The Marias' satire on Mariana's family relations effectively dismantles the patrilinear genealogy which is the underlying paradigm for dynastic national history. Their anonymous letters and verses are written from the subject positions of Mariana, her lover and various friends, relations, descendants and contemporary Portuguese "Marias" and "Anas" whom they invent. From the inventions of Mariana's descendants, partial homonyms, and contemporary updates, arise other revised myths and other women whose stories continue. The figures of Joana, Mariana's free-spirited friend who also has an affair with the cavalier, and of Mónica who is driven to insanity, are destined to recur transhistorically. The chronology of the events described in the letters works against the chronological dating of the letters themselves, thus resisting the unidirectionality of historical teleology. The letters trace a story both forwards, through Mariana's successive nieces, and backwards through the family history, which emerges in the letters as a series of implied scandals and secret revelations. Mariana is hated and resented by her mother because the latter has also had a passionate long-term affair of which Mariana is the illegitimate offspring, and therefore not really, genetically, an Alcoforado at all. As Mariana's descendant, Dona Maria Ana asks, "não será lógico que as mulheres utilizem sua descendência sem nome nem propriedade para perpetuar o escândalo e o inaceitável?" (151).

Mariana's confinement to the convent in order to provide a dowry for her sister, establishes an ostensible narrative of rivalry and distrust between mother, daughters and sisters in the same family. As Irigaray writes, "the exchange upon which patriarchal societies are based takes place exclusively among men. Women, signs, commodities and currency always pass from one man to another" (1985b, 192). Through her embittered exchanges with her own mother, Mariana refuses the phallic, maternal authority, which traditionally betrays the daughter in favour of redemption through the son. The Marias refuse their condition as "commodities" and intervene decisively in the patrilinear economy of "hom(m)-

sexual" exchange, in which women as surplus value are always and only traded in relation to, and as an power attribute of, men (Irigaray 1985b, 170-72; 192-7). The aunt-niece relation emerges as a philosophical, intellectual counter-heritage of writing, working against the continuity of dynasty as the aunts are childless, and the birthing legacy is refused through Mariana's abortion. As Klobucka claims, although synchronic and diachronic axes of sisterhood and motherhood structure the text according to what she terms, citing Helena Michie, "the grammar of the family" (2000, 144) it is the diagonal aunt-niece relation which bears the weight of "generational" continuity in the text. Taking Mariana's name, as what Klobucka has aptly termed the "index of an absence" (2000, 135) the Marias thus exploit the power of discontinuity over linearity in favour of ironic horizontal juxtaposition. The name Mariana evokes the mother-daughter relations, left unexplored in the western Christian symbolic, between the Virgin Mary and her mother Saint Ann. The Marias unmake the patriarchal authority of the "proper" name Alcoforado, asserting instead the improper name of Mariana in different combinations of Marias, Anas, Marianas and Ana Marias. The concept of "legacy" or bequest, central to the economy of dynastic succession, is playfully likened to children's plastic "lego bricks" which can be combined in any number of polyvalent directions (310).

A serious threat to patriarchal social order is posed by the "commodities" of the masculine sexual economy ceasing to be a "mirror of value of and for man" (Irigaray 1985b, 177) and setting up commerce among themselves producing "exchanges without identifiable terms, without accounts, without end... Without additions and accumulations, one plus one, woman after woman... Without sequence or number" (Irigaray 1985b, 197). The Marias adopt and extend this subversive gesture beyond their own circle and that of Mariana by speaking in lyric address to the 12th century figure of Dona Tareja whose negative image in national mythology derives from her subversion of the ho(m)mosexual economy. Dona Tareja is described as a "garotinha preferida/ donzel do outro lado" (296). Born the illegitimate daughter of the King of Castile, Dona Tareja was married to Count Henry of Burgundy, bringing with her as

marriage portion Portucalense, the lands which first became known as the territory of Portugal. She is traditionally defamed throughout Portuguese history precisely for perverting the course of dynasticism by attempting to rule Portucalense herself as queen on Henry's death. Her remarriage to a Galician count led her son, Dom Afonso Henriques, to fight and win a war against her thus effectively securing the ascendancy of Portugal's first royal dynasty, the House of Avis. In the Marias' rewriting of her story, Dona Tareja is no longer a treacherous woman carrying her father's dagger in her garter as the myths of "cantiga e invejção" insist, she is simply a girl exploited as a token of inter-dynastic exchange. The closing lines of the poem redeliver her to herself with the words: "que te seja leve o estar/e solto logo o sorriso/ azul dos dias dados/ de bom grado/ e o olhar destapado/para dar" (296).

The patrilinear (sexual) economy past and present is systematically supplanted by tentative discourses of female friendship, rediscovery of the other woman, the aunt-niece connection and the Marias' reinvention of their functionally "orphaned" selves as mothers, daughters and sisters of each other. It is in this context that the Marias enter the text as anonymous "selves/others" who take shape, as in psychoanalysis, through the dialogic process of transference and counter-transference, each alternately the mother and daughter of the others (Kauffman 286). Betrayed by mother and father, the Marias are left without lineage, rephrasing the gospel injunction, "amai-nos umas às outras como nós nos amamos órfãs do mesmo bem" (51). Unauthorized by patriarchal or matriarchal hierarchy, they invoke instead a world of horizontal equality, "porque 'nesta terra que Deus criou, nós somos todas iguais, e isto nos dá a coragem de fazer assim uma aventura!'" (51). The adventure on which they embark is the rediscovery of desire, each in relation to herself and the other, in extended intertextual dialogue with humanist and Marxist master discourses on the body.

The most specific example of this dialectic of female desire and Marxist class revolution is the set of choruses entitled "A freira sangrenta" (67-75). The voice of the nun in this section repeatedly asks "e o que faremos, Made Abadesa, que faremos?" as she tries to possess both body and bread despite the

masculine monopoly on both. Like Irigaray in "Women in the Market", the Three Marias weigh the relative values of the virgin, the mother and the prostitute in this economy, before adding their own images of the transgressive female lover and the feminist rebel as possible modes of escape. The virgin who is "pure exchange value" (Irigaray 1985b 186) becomes here the nun as discarded "corpo inútil [que] no Senhor foi votado" (67). The fertile body of the mother is a "pomar de primeira" (68) woman equated to the appropriation of nature as landed property and "[re]productive of children and of the labor force" (Irigaray 1985b, 185). The hiring of the prostitute's body, which Irigaray sees as combining "usage that is exchanged. Usage that is not merely potential" (1985b, 186) is also intimately connected in "A freira sangrenta" with the body of the woman worker at the mercy of "os senhores de trabalhadoras e prostitutas" (69). Marking a break with Marxism as sufficient by itself to liberate women, the Marias claim that regardless of the class system "das mulheres todos os homens/são senhores" (71). The only alternative is escape into their own desire which leaves them no home in the world and "de imandade/só o convento" (73). The sexual revolution as overthrow of bourgeois kinship structures may serve the Marxist revolution only for their brothers to say, "'Hízesteis os cidadãos/agora a cidade é nossa'" (74-5). The Marias therefore stake their own prior claim to any reterritorializations the nun's anarchic body may effect, as they move towards a provisional *tabula rasa*, a temporarily suspended space of play from which to re-enter discourse as sexually embodied subjects.

In common with most French poststructuralist feminism and with Adriana Cavarero, the Marias' approach to sexual embodiment and mortality rejects the separation of mind/spirit and body, or psyche and soma, which underpins western humanist metaphysics. As Cavarero explains, Platonic philosophy relegates the female, maternal body to the devalued status of pure physical matter or "soma" as opposed to the realm of mind and spirit or "psyche". As a result of this, "a separated and dematerialized embodiedness can more easily conceal its sexual connotation, always marked by difference. Hence the male gender can easily claim to be neutral and universal" (26). In *Novas Cartas*, the letter from Ana

Maria born in 1940 similarly describes a bifurcation of male and female destinies, leading to the cultural imposition on women alone of responsibility for the biological origins and fate of all humanity, as she writes:

Depois que foram bifurcados, irremediavelmente, o destino do homem e mulher — mas quando, mas quando? — sobre a mulher veio cair, além de todas as angústias vivenciais e de todas as repressões sociais que são comuns ao homem e à mulher, sobre a mulher veio cair a angústia do seu destino biológico, feito drama seu e não mais experiência dramática da espécie, e veio cair a repressão de que esse seu destino biológico feito drama individual é instrumento (219).

The enclosure of the convent provides the optimal experimental setting for the Marias to unmask the false neutral by reclaiming embodied desire for the realm of the psyche. They thus explore “the love of other women while sheltered from men’s imperious choices that put them in the position of rival commodities” (Irigaray 1985b, 33). However, the provisional suspension of time, which the play-space of their experiment entails cannot conversely be allowed to re-universalize them as inherently excluded from history, power and agency. As Irigaray asks in terms which closely echo *Novas Cartas*, “might not the renunciation of heterosexual pleasure correspond once again to that disconnection from power that is traditionally theirs? Would it not involve a new prison, a new cloister, built of their own accord?” (1985b, 32-3). The implication in both texts is that the heterosexual pact will eventually have to be renegotiated.

The Marias’ affirmation of the auto-erotic feminine body works on one level to re-inscribe the body *per se* as a living, vital and non-sacrificial entity in the national symbolic of Portuguese literature and history, liberated from the teleology of reproduction and death. The Marias position women’s autonomous desire by way of decentering the phallus in the sex-death equations of the Freudian economy.⁷ In this sense, as a necessary condition of their own re-embodiment, they open space to consider the transformation of heterosexual

⁷ My subsequent references to Freud draw specifically on “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” and “The Ego and the Id” both reprinted in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*.

relations, calling on men to reconceptualize their relationship to their creativity, as well as on women to rethink their relationship to mortality. Women’s refusal to remain complicit with sexually passive roles such as “reponso do guerreiro” (218) threatens to disrupt the sexual economy of warfare. However, in its repeated acts of satirical mimicry and its dialogic projections and interpellations of the masculine voice throughout literature and history, *Novas Cartas* maintains an open dialogue and a negotiation with men, not a definitive split. In the context of the Colonial War, the Marias’ rejection of the connection between sexual passion and mortality, the classic Eros/Thanatos pairing of Freud, effectively exhorts man to reinvent his sexuality as an urgent project to ensure his own survival.

The clearest example of this appeal to reconfigure desire and mortality is the suicide of Mariana’s male cousin, José Maria Pereira Alcoforado. José Maria is deprived of Mariana’s maternal affections when she is sent to the convent and he ultimately hangs himself from a fig tree near the family estate. The cryptic poem which he leaves as a suicide note, sounds the death knell of the “pátria” but also the death of empire as he writes “nem estrangeiro/nem menino/nem varões a assinalar/com o corpo de vosso primo/fazei Mariana um sino/que a Pátria possa dobrar” (171). The negative reference to “varões a assinalar” reverses, of course, the opening lines of *Os Lusíadas*, “as armas e os barões assinalados/Que, da Ocidental praia Lusitana,/Por mares nunca dantes navegados/Passaram ainda além da Taprobana” (71). The Colonial War, which the Cannonian epic ideologically underwrites, has implicitly degenerated into a collective national suicide note. As Mariana remarks in her letter to Dom José Maria, he no longer dreams about the return of Dom Sebastião (167-70). His suicide is linked to his loss of belief in the mythical restoration of the Portuguese fatherland through the resurrection and return of the boy king Dom Sebastião whose death leading a doomed 16th century crusade to North Africa effectively brought the Avis dynasty to an end. The “bell” of Dom José Maria’s body reverberates in the text through the contemporary figure named José Maria, a soldier in Africa. He describes to his friend António his fear of the war and the loss of his girlfriend

Joana, whose love of books and study is being encouraged by Dona Mariana (190-1). Joana's refusal to act as a regenerative force for José Maria, preferring instead the life of the intellect, emblemizes women's refusal to physically sustain and replenish the cult of the absolute which has driven the nation to its present extreme.

Where men can only depart or die, "pastava-vos morrer ou partir" (275) and women no longer accept their passive side of the bargain, the future of the country is deadlocked in a sexual stand-off which can only be broken by the return of the men, but on what terms? The Marias say of themselves in concluding *Novas Cartas* "nós andámos pelo terreno da separação" (308), pointing to the syntax of separation which structures the chain of epistolary and poetic exchanges between partners and lovers across time and space. The myth of Ulysses is recast not as the epic of departure but as the epistolary and lyric voices of lovers' separation. Penelope is also satirically replayed through the endless wives and girlfriends, commoners and queens, left to wait for the return of the husband or lover, as soldier, sailor, exile or migrant, in the culmination of an Odyssean adventure, which neither sex can continue to afford. Subverting the myth of Penelope weaving and unwearing while she keeps suitors at bay and remains faithful to Ulysses, one of the Marias declares, "mas em que teias seremos, se preciso, as três, aranhas astuciosas fazendo de nós mesmas nossa arte, vantagem, nossa liberdade ou ordem" (42).

Adriana Cavareiro's Penelope makes weaving the site of female self-discovery, the "impenetrable space where she belongs to herself" (17) in response to the Platonic disembodiment of the soul, constantly driven to escape the prison of the body in the direction of transcendence and death. Her knowing and subversive Penelope thus dislodges the Odyssean metaphysics of mortality in which, she argues, "death defines its dominion in the wars, the sorrows, and the fury of heroes. It is always present insofar as it is always challenged, functioning as a measure of the challenger's excellence" (21). These unrepeatable moments of heroic action must be preserved in the cultural memory in the form of epic, offering the consolation of a kind of immortality against the terrifying void of

death as ultimate limit. Recasting the epic narrativization of mortality into the lyric forms of balladry, the Three Marias force new relations of symbolic exchange, addressing their heroic men *in absentia* or engaging them in dialogue. Graça Abranches has aptly remarked in this context, that the lack of genealogies and traditions of Portuguese women's writing has translated into a "closer intersexuality [...] with more marked re-accentuations, revaluings or underground interpellations of the alien masculine word, or into a more intimate dialogue with other literary traditions" (1998a, 2).

In the poem entitled "Senhora", the masculine and feminine voices alternate in dialogue. The unobtainable, cold and circumspect woman sends the man on an absurd quest telling him, "vai e traz-me um cabelo/dum dragão enamorado/Pois se me falas de amor/Quero vê-lo feito e provado" (26). She is told, in return, that her place is to embroider and spin, and not to know or to write, "não tem ciência nem prosa" (26). If it is his duty to go and "tombear o setestrela/A um deus mau e zangado", it is hers to remain silently at home reproducing him in childbirth, "deitada a sentir/Tua roda de fingir/Tua cabeça em meu ventre" (27). "Senhora" effectively delineates a Freudian concept of (epic) intercourse bound by the "challenge of an indefinite regeneration, of a reproduction of the *same* that defies death, in the procreation of the *sor*" (Frigary 1985a, 27). Running counter to this and exposing the epic quest as a near necrophiliac obsession, "Balada do Mal Real" shows the queen daring to confront the king with the spectacle of her own death. She lays bare the unequal costs and risks of the maritime enterprise to the king "que traz o mundo à cintura/ e se deita do meu lado" (280). Scornful of the power he derives from the conquest of the waves, the deadly blade which he takes for a defining limit, she tells him, "Senhor rei para manter-vos/não basta este gunne de águas/este choro este receio/de pagar-vos só com mágoas" (280). The gifts the king brings her are fresh and living for him "de sol de riso e de arroz", but for her they are merely stained by his efforts, "o vestido que me dais/ de pena e suor de vós" (281). The queen's home, her life and her ability to love fade away with the years of waiting as she tells him "Senhor rei para amar-vos/não fora erro o lugar/seriam fracós os

bragos/seria velho o falar" (281). He is finally enticed home only to find the queen has died paying the cost of his adventure, leaving him to tell the tale of his rebirth (also in Portuguese a pun on renaissance) from within the queen's skeletal bones. The queen concludes, "Senhor rei de sal e cedro/voltai vossa barca aos vossos/contai vossa renascença/pelo dentro dos meus ossos" (281).

Through their letters and essays the Marias disavow the amorous master narratives of western literature as inherently morbid depicting passion as a death drive which did no ultimate good to Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, Abelard and Heloise. In the exchange of correspondence between the nun and the cavalier as prototypical soldier, the death drive of Thanatos is always at work in the quest for adventure, locked in inseparable relation with Eros, the conquest of the body of woman. The Marias identify man's fear of "um corpo demasiado próximo da natureza" (91) as the age-old pretext for dominating the female body, echoing Irigaray's assertion that "man will be sure as far as possible of achieving mastery, subjugation, by triumphing over the anguish (of death) through intercourse..." (1985a, 27). The thrill of danger in destroying the nun's honour is a tame and cowardly version of the great death-defying adventure, the "diversão de mar alto" (32). Supposedly risking the excitement of the high seas, the cavalier never leaves the safe harbour of his own protective world and his companions. Mariana complains:

É costume nos homens ser seu horizonte de absoluto o jogar com a vida da mulher, mas jogo sem risco aceite, senhor, como jogam as crianças com os sapos, que quando o bicho morre nem é pela mão da criança, é com seu espanto e mesmo com sua ofensa ao bicho que se morre assim. (134)

Where the horizon of the absolute is mapped onto the body of woman the cavalier finds only "le tombeau de ma présence" as he writes of the nun's promise to love him beyond death, "c'est contre cet anéantissement que j'ai essayé de creuser dans vos entrailles un abri" (97). The risk of death is, in any event, conveniently transferred in far greater proportion to the woman where the illicit love affair transgresses the Latin honour code in which the death of the woman must pay for the family honour vested in her vagina (264). Nowhere

within the cavalier's military discourse of courage is there recognition of women's physical risks since "sangue de aborto não é sangue vertido pelo rei, é sempre vertido contra vós todos" (134).

The correspondence between Mariana and the cavalier also affords a series of subtextual resonances with the ongoing Colonial War, as it explores the sexual politics of nationhood and military honour taking up the theme introduced with Dom José Maria Pereira Alcoforado. The French cavalier has come to Portugal with Cardinal Richelieu's troops to assist the Portuguese in their War of Independence against Spain (1640-68). He is scornful of the Alentejan peasantry who he has come to save, and the sexual antagonism between the cavalier and Mariana is expressed in terms of French national superiority, the border being linguistically "performed" in a series of strategic code-switches between the Portuguese and French languages (94-8; 130-35). Where the French cavalier is the macho "colonial" exploiter of Portugal who identifies Mariana with her fellow oppressed Alentejans, "negras à contrahuz do sol-pô" (97) presenting an ironic and unamenable "body" of rebellion, it takes little imagination to perceive the encoded analogy with the African war. The love affair with Mariana leaves the cavalier a weakened and sorry figure. He fears that he has lost for ever his military prestige, "meu lugar entre os meus, meu gosto de ajeitar-me bem à sela, à farda, ao bom comando, à leveza de rendas e casacas, à inteireza de servir com boa pólvora minha honra, meu Rei e meus haveres" (96).⁸ In one of the passages selected by the censors of the text, the Marias take an even more obvious swipe at the death-defying, sexual posturing of a nation that fears collective impotence. They declaim in mock lament "ó meu Portugal de machos a enganar impotência, cobrídores, garantídes, tão maus amantes, tão apressados na cama, só atentos a mostrar picha" (87). In order to save man from destroying himself one Maria imagines writing, but does not write a hypothetical letter to the man of the future.

⁸ See Owen 1999c for a further development of this aspect of *Novas Cartas* in light of Homi Bhabha's theories on the dual strategies of discursive address implied in narrating the nation.

In it she stresses his need to be cured, a recurrent theme in *Novas Cartas*, of his morbidly destructive relationship to his own sexuality and creativity.

(e pensei escrever a carta de amor ao homem que há-de vir a ser, lembrem-se? É preciso curar o homem; dizer-lhe que nem o seu corpo é estéril, e nem só o falo é criador; dizer-lhe que nem sempre é preciso erigir para criar, e que criar primeiro para erigir depois pode deixar de ser um privilégio feminino. Muitas coisas, mas não se sabe ainda como dizê-las) (300-301).

This "dream of a common language" must strive towards non-oppositional embodiment, beyond the mutual trigger mechanisms of mortality and desire bringing men and women to a newly formulated acceptance of both. As the Marias state near the beginning of their project, "esta não é a casa da dualidade. Pobres, pobres os que são apenas dois" (108). In the non-phallic creativity which they imagine for both sexes the body is no longer a site of revenge against mortality. In the final passage, the unnamed "I" seeks her own somatic encounter with death, without endlessly rehearsing and pre-empting its limiting finitude through passion as risk. Hence she says, "Eis, meu amor a morte à qual tu afinal não pertences" (322). However, if man is not part of her death, nor is he totally excluded from the lived reality of a finite life, hence also the ambivalent double negative of the closing line, "não necessariamente meu amor sem ti a liberdade ou a pressa de morte no meu corpo" (322). Woman is mortal, so is man. Neither can escape their fate within the body of the other. It can only be shared.

Mariana's final letter to the cavalier, in which she asserts her mature identity as a respected writer, dismisses her love affair as a foolish youthful adventure. Mariana and the cavalier both ultimately turn back to the life of the soul and the mind. Ironically, what remains of their physical affair for her, are fond memories of him not in bed but in pensive mode, sharing moments of intellectual communication. She has used the experience to script herself as a worthy object of love. He is trapped without bodily passion in a dull conventional marriage and has lapsed into mediocrity and obscurity, neither killed nor liberated by the great passion he inspired. As Mariana remarks, "bastava-vos

morrer ou partir" (275). He has never broken free of the compulsion to depart in search of a new adventure to postpone the fatal one. The final gift of thought and creativity is now hers not his. Not the immortality of the epic, but an acceptance of mortality and a revalidation of living matter inform the newly regenerated voice of intimacy, the epistle, the diary and the lyric, underwriting the possible vision of a new social symbolic at least momentarily at peace with itself.

The radical re-evaluation of heterosexual relations which *Novas Cartas* undertook along with the decisive installation of women writers as subjects of their own erotic and political discourse undoubtedly had a lasting effect on the next generation of women writers. This has recently been extensively recognized in the context of the new 1998 edition of *Novas Cartas* although individual writers, particularly Lídia Jorge, attested to the Three Marias' ground-breaking influence back in the 1980s.⁹ Jorge encapsulated the feelings of many in a 1997 interview when she remarked:

The *New Portuguese Letters* is about female desire. This was considered a crime in the seventies. Through the discourse itself, and the audacity of those amazing women writers, this book became a literary icon. It opened a way for us, which we have all more or less followed. (d'Orey 173)

In the chapters which follow I explore how women writers used the micro-spaces opened by this "ponto de ruptura" to inscribe a more confidently dissident feminine into the newly emerging narrativizations of the past. Faced with the disillusion and political compromises of the revolution, social transformation within stasis and the demise of an engendered imperial nationhood, I ask how women writers used the double-edged sword of representational language to speak to the "man of the future", when the future finally came.

⁹ See Guimarães for the opinions of various women writers, journalists and public figures on the importance of *Novas Cartas* in 1998. See Louro 1983 for recognition of the Three Marias' influence on the new generation of women writers in the early 1980s and Pinto, J. for Jorge paying tribute to them in interview in 1985. See de Sousa 1998 for the Marias' self-perceptions in this regard. See Horra 1982b and 1986 for commemorative tributes to the Three Marias published in *Mulheres* magazine in the 1980s.