
Refuting the Myth of Motherhood in Portuguese Literature: A Study of Agustina Bessa Luís' *Vale Abraão*

CAROLYN KENDRICK
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

How many times have we all heard that age-old notion that no woman is complete until she bears a child? Even today, in the supposed modern and enlightened times of a politically correct and gender sensitive world, this idea is still encountered all too often, especially in the Lusophone world. This simplified version of the motherhood myth has continually reappeared throughout Portuguese popular culture as well as in political agendas, especially during Salazar's *estado novo*¹ dictatorship which idealized the maternal figure as part of his visionary plan for the reconstruction of the Portuguese nation.

The maternal figure has been, and still continues to be, idealized throughout the entire Western tradition. Many scholars have studied the myth of motherhood in the Portuguese context from a historical and theoretical perspective, but very few scholars have studied its presence in literature. The novel *Vale Abraão* (*The Valley of Abraham*) by one of Portugal's greatest contemporary women writers, Agustina Bessa Luís, takes a unique approach of demystifying the idealization of motherhood by reinterpreting the nineteenth-century classic *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. Flaubert's Emma revolts against societal traditions in a reckless search for adventure to alleviate the boredom that plagues her. Bessa Luís' Ema, however, revolts against societal traditions because she, unlike Emma Bovary, can see the injustice of the patriarchal order that has forced her into such an unsatisfying existence.

Patriarchy, an ideology that guarantees male dominance over women and thereby subsequently denies women access to power and authority, holds the myth of motherhood as one of the principle mechanisms to preserve traditional gender roles and the distribution of power. This myth claims that any woman who chooses not to mother is a failure both as a woman and as a citizen. Maternity is believed to be the natural state for women and that it should be the ultimate aspiration of their lives. Hence, any woman who chooses not to bear a child is a traitor to her very own femininity.

Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* mockingly refers to the myth of motherhood as it is frequently referred to in patriarchal language: “The sacred calling” (41-55). Throughout her study, she demonstrates how patriarchy depends on motherhood for its continued survival and concludes that maternity equals self-sacrifice in the patriarchal system, and results in the total destruction of the woman as a woman. In other words, any mother who does not exchange her identity as a woman for a purely maternal identity is condemned as a “bad mother” on the basis that she is selfish and narcissistic. Society requires that a woman consider herself, before everything else, a mother and that this one aspect of her life determines her entire existence. Her children and her family should be the organizing element of her life and she should not look to satisfy herself or affirm her identity outside of her domestic and parental duties. In Rich’s own words:

Typically, under patriarchy, the mother’s life is exchanged for the child: her autonomy as a separate being seems fated to conflict with the infant she will bear. The self-denying, self-annihilative role of the Good Mother (linked implicitly with suffering and with the repression of anger) will spell the “death” of the woman or girl who once had hopes, expectations, and fantasies for herself—especially when those hopes and fantasies have never been acted on. (167)

Luce Irigaray goes even farther than Rich to proclaim in *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* that the situation is so severe that women are living in a time of matricide because a mother’s desire and her potential to express herself as a woman are being destroyed. She fights for a new concept of maternity in which woman and mother can peacefully coexist. Irigaray affirms what the goal of all women, independent of whether or not they are mothers, should be: “the maternal function must be prevented from strangling their existence as women . . . they are not exclusive choices women must make” (qtd. in Grosz 120). Within the patriarchal system, it is not just the potential of the mother herself that suffers, but her daughter’s as well because the daughter has no model of a whole, undivided woman to serve as inspiration with which she can identify.

The result of seeing motherhood as the “sacred calling” of women is the idealization of the maternal figure, a tradition heavily linked to the Catholic Church and its perpetuation of the cult of the Virgin Mary. To this day no critic has better analyzed the relationship between the Church and marianismo than Kristeva. In fact, Julia Kristeva titled her famous essay *Stabat Mater* after the Latin hymn dedicated to the suffering of the Virgin Mary at the crucifixion of Christ (Crownfield 29). The Catholic Church, Kristeva contends, uses the figure of the Virgin Mary to idealize motherhood as the sacred state of women. The more a woman suffers for her children, the nobler she has become in the eyes of God. Kristeva further

explains that women cannot participate in the community of the Word. Men can speak directly to God while women are left without access to the divine Word: “Her function is to assure procreation—the propagation of the race. But she has no direct relation with the law of the community and its political and religious unity: God generally speaks only to men” (140). Only as mothers are women “good enough” to participate in the community of the Christian Word. Therefore, their only remaining possibility of participation is to give birth to future generations of Christians and prepare them to enter the community of the Word with baptism (139-147).

Marina Warner in her study *Alone of her Sex* takes a different approach from Kristeva as to what the Virgin Mary represents. She argues that the cult of the Virgin Mary extends further than simply idealizing motherhood. Warner states that the Virgin Mary has become the very ideal of womanhood (336). Both subservient and humble, she is here first to serve God’s will and then the men in her life: duties which, of course, she graciously accepts.

Feminists have long struggled to redeem the Virgin Mary as a positive symbol for women, which is what Els Maeckelberghe traces in her work *Desperately Seeking Mary*. Maeckelberghe points out that the feminist struggle has been so great because the Virgin Mary represents the classic conundrum for women. While womanhood was elevated in Mary, no woman could ever be like Mary since Mary was the ultimate ideal of womanhood. She was able to satisfy the holy requirement of motherhood and yet remain “pure” while all other women are condemned to soil and stain themselves eternally in the process. The task has proven so great that many critics, such as André Feuillet, ultimately resort to repeating the myth of motherhood through a discourse of “natural difference” despite their liberal intentions. He argues that natural differences have been instilled in men and women since the very first pages of Genesis. The feminist problem has arisen because men see woman’s place as inferior (which is, he contends, far more noble since women are bestowed with the privilege of childbearing) and male arrogance has driven women to “disown the spiritual riches of the feminine world” as opposed to any inherent sexism or injustice in the religious doctrine (196-214).

In the specific context of Portugal, the State has a long history of thinking like Feuillet although its intentions, unlike Feuillet’s, were certainly not to redeem the status of women. The idealization of motherhood can be observed officially for the first time in Portugal during the Enlightenment when women’s education began to be debated and recognized as a necessity by the writer most associated with that period, Luís António Verney. He hoped to inspire reforms in the Portuguese educational system with his didactical writing, *O verdadeiro método de*

estudar (*The True Method of Studying*). One of the main issues on his agenda was women's education. Verney emphasized that children spend the majority of their time with their mother, at least in the early stages of their lives, and it is, after all, the mother who teaches children their first skills. It would then follow that a woman should be able to at least read, write, and have a rudimentary knowledge of Portuguese history to better prepare her children to enter school. At the same time, Verney also advocated that women learn basic arithmetic in order to control more efficiently the household budget rather than "jeopardizing" the household funds with unwise decisions and frivolous purchases. Verney's attitude not only degrades and belittles women's intellectual capacities, but also defines the real purpose of feminine education not as enlightenment for women, but rather to better serve her husband, strengthen the family, and ultimately better fulfill her "womanly duties" (216-217).

"Diz-me a mãe que tiveste, dir-te-ei o destino que terás" ["Tell me the mother you have had, and I will tell you the future you will have"], asserted Portugal's greatest nineteenth-century writer, Eça de Queirós, in *As farpas* (108).² Eça returns to Verney's argument a century later, but goes much farther than Verney by stating that the morality of an entire nation depends on the mothers that rear the children. Therefore, a mother should transmit the values that will make the nation grow, such as religion, love, and dedication to one's work, honesty, and obedience (107).³

This same ideology as seen in the works of Verney and Eça reached its peak during the Salazarian dictatorship. Salazar wanted to unify the nation under a supposed national identity and the feminine body became the instrument used in his political game. Ana Paula Ferreira analyzes the way the Salazarian dictatorship used the concept of "natural differences" between the sexes to determine the "proper" gender roles of the newly reconstructed Portugal. Salazar organized his ideology around one central metaphor in which he considered the new Portuguese nation as one large family. Everyone was expected to act in the best interest of this great new family. Salazar authoritatively used the domestic space to enforce his fascist, national agenda. Within Salazar's regime, the space reserved for women was again the domestic sphere where she should graciously perform her "feminine" chores and uphold the social and moral values of the family. In Ferreira's own words: "Women are assigned a far-reaching education but, above all, economic mission. Bound exclusively to the role and consequent duties of the savvy mother-housewife, they are ultimately held responsible for the economic welfare and the entire Portuguese nation-family; and also for the behavior, if not the very thoughts and desires, deemed appropriate for its members" ("Home Bound" 135).

Salazar justified his ideology by identifying with a “natural order” which incorporated popular myths of gender. His favorite myth was, of course, the myth of motherhood. Many state-controlled social organizations began to appear in order to help promote and disperse this myth, such as *Obra das Mães para a Educação Nacional (OMEN)* de 1937 e a *Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina* de 1938.⁴ OMEN was in charge of instilling all the values that a young girl should have, such as being well versed in home economics, taking care of the family, and educating the future men of Portugal (Sadlier 120).

Many women resisted, however, and tried to organize against the Salazarian oppression despite the difficulties and censure imposed by the repressive government. For example, Elina Guimarães was the leader of the National Council of Portuguese Women, a movement that had 2000 members at its height.⁵ This movement challenged the *estado novo*'s philosophy, especially the idea of family and maternity. Unfortunately these groups were not very successful due to the oppression and authoritarianism of the dictatorship as exemplified by the fate of the National Council of Portuguese Women. The *estado novo* abolished the organization and forced Elina Guimarães into exile (Sadlier 121).

The Portuguese people finally won their freedom of expression with the abolition of the *estado novo* in 1974. Women were now able to freely speak out and denounce the oppression that had silenced them for so long. Much work was left to be done, though: women were still a long way from establishing their equality, and many of the social myths about gender remained in place, especially the myth of motherhood so celebrated by Salazar. Numerous feminist organizations formed to challenge these myths and women for the first time began to win literary recognition (Sadlier 124-125).⁶

The late 1970s and the early 1980s marked the beginning of a boom of women writers, such as Lídia Jorge and Teolinda Gersão, who sought to represent women's reality and to undo the oppression and silence imposed by gender myths.⁷ Motherhood naturally became one of the central questions that these writers struggled to redefine. Agustina Bessa Luís is the writer who has most openly pursued and questioned the idealization of the mother to conquer a new space for women. Bessa Luís is considered the first feminist voice in Portuguese literature, primarily due to her novel *A sibila* (*The Sybil*) from 1953. This novel, although written during the *estado novo*, sought a new feminine identity that was not, in the very words of the main character, Quina: “Um parasito do homem” [“A parasite of a man”]. The search for an alternative feminine identity has continued to be highly visible throughout Bessa Luís' works, yet *Vale Abraão*, published in 1991, is the novel that most clearly rejects the ideal feminine prototype purposed by Salazar.

Vale Abraão is a modern parody of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* that questions the philosophy of Flaubert and the previously mentioned nineteenth-century author Eça de Queirós. Eça denounced Portuguese morality as decadent in many of his novels, yet the novel that best exemplifies his concern with female indecency is *O primo Basílio* (*Cousin Basílio*). In this novel Eça specifically criticizes the decadence of the family, which he attributes, in large part, to feminine adultery. Many critics, such as Duarte Mimoso Ruiz believe *O primo Basílio* to be a Portuguese version of the classic novel *Madame Bovary*. Eça, just as Flaubert, believed that the bourgeoisie was enticed by the lure of adultery from the romantic novels of the day that glamorized and romanticized adultery. According to Ana Paula Ferreira, Eça sees the romanticization of feminine adultery not as a "feminine problem" in and of itself, but an indication of the decadence of the times in general, since society should help a woman to control her impulses instead of encouraging them. Ultimately Eça is implying that women do not have either the spiritual nor the intellectual strength to resist moral corruption and thus, a society must morally educate its women to help them control their "femininity" ("Nationalism" 126-130).

The fact that Bessa Luís reinterprets Emma Bovary's story naturally raises the question of motherhood due to the amount of scholarship this theme has received in *Madame Bovary*.⁸ In most novels of adultery, the adulterous woman is portrayed as a bad mother (Johnson 12). Nowadays Emma Bovary is considered the literary archetype of the female adulteress throughout the world. As stated in Janette Johnson's research, Emma Bovary rejected motherhood and never felt the sacred calling that patriarchy demanded of her.

Like her French counterpart, the Ema from *Vale Abraão* is also an extremely discontent and unsatisfied woman who seeks to distract herself from the boredom and frustration of a banal existence with a series of love affairs. She, like Emma Bovary, never wanted to be a mother. Ema considered motherhood to be "Um acidente de trabalho" ["An on the job accident"] (165) and in a separate occasion referred to motherhood as "A maior das vulgaridades" ["The greatest of all vulgarities"] (99). However, there is an essential difference between the two women. Madame Bovary, although she resents motherhood, pretends to have the maternal instinct of a "good mother" to protect her image in the bourgeois society that surrounds her or when she has a determined self-gratifying reason. Emma worries about appearances and what people will think of her. She wants the outside world, including her husband, to think that she is a good mother (Brooks and Watson 30).

To illustrate this, one only has to look at an interaction between Madame Bovary and her infant daughter Berthe. In an effort to get some attention from her mother, Berthe interrupts Emma's romantic daydreams. Emma loses control of herself and begins to yell uncontrollably at Berthe. She forcefully pushes Berthe away with her elbow, which causes Berthe to fall and cut her cheek. At that precise moment, Charles enters the room and Emma, attempting to cover up what she had done, pretends to be greatly distraught about the incident and claims that Berthe has fallen all by herself while playing. As soon as Charles leaves the room, Emma, instead of feeling regret or guilt about what she had done, thinks how ugly Berthe seems (124).

The Portuguese Ema, on the other hand, never pretends to have the sacred maternal instinct. She doesn't bother to put up a front for her husband Carlos, who on several occasions, requests that Ema become more interested in their children and serve as a better example for them (99). I agree with Laura Fernanda Bulger who interprets the entire novel as an act of rebellion against the patriarchal system, or in her own words: "Um ajustar de contas... da raiva acumulada durante séculos contra o criador de um mundo vil e hipócrita" ["A settling of scores, of anger accumulated over centuries against the creator of a vile and hypocritical world] (184). In addition to Ema's total lack of preoccupation with appearances and public opinion, she even goes as far to enjoy shocking the residents of the valley. Following this line of thought, one can then naturally interpret Ema's rebellion against maternity as an act of rebellion against the patriarchal system and a challenge to the myth of motherhood that has plagued the experience of all women for so long.

It is the emphasis on the patriarchal element that distinguishes the stories of the two women. Even though both novels are very similar in terms of the events and the narrative details, the final message is distinct. Flaubert, as well as Eça, criticizes society and the lack of bourgeois morality while Bessa Luís criticizes patriarchy, which has culturally determined Portuguese society. As if in response to Eça de Queirós' famous novel *O primo Basílio*, Bessa Luís argues that a woman's sexuality and weaknesses do not need to be controlled, rather it is patriarchy that needs to be controlled and undone. Bessa Luís leaves no doubt that the society in which Ema lives is one of patriarchy, and defines it as: "o mundo mais hipócrita que há" ["the most hypocritical world there is"] (162). The people of the valley are furthermore described as "descontente do mundo e das suas leis" ["discontent of the world and its laws"] (7). The fact that the author has not only named the valley in which Ema resides, but the entire novel after Abraham is extremely sig-

nificant because it automatically invokes patriarchy due to the biblical history of Abraham.

For all cultures influenced by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Abraham is considered the first patriarch. Abraham's name means "father of nations," and his history begins the so-called "patriarchal narratives" (Delaney 17). Bessa Luís evokes the biblical imagery of Abraham when she begins the novel with the story of Abraão de Paiva who is considered the first resident of the valley and therefore the founder. Abraão de Paiva's very name invokes the "great father of nations" since the first three letters of the last name Paiva spell "Pai", which means "father" in Portuguese. Abraão de Paiva made his wife, Sara, a sexual object when he offered her to other men in the valley in return for favors and money. Sarah is the name of the biblical Abraham's wife, and the story about offering her to other men in exchange for favors is also part of the Bible as revealed by Henri Gaubert. He says: "Once again to avoid harsh treatment at the hands of the authorities of the country, Abraham declared that Sarah was not his wife but his sister. As on arrival in Egypt, Sarah, directly entered Gerar, was noticed by the king's men and shortly afterwards was on her way to the royal harem" (151). To place Ema in the geographical space of Abraham, Bessa Luís illustrates that the personal history of the protagonist and even the conditions of her very existence cannot be explained without reference to patriarchy, just as Andre Perrot has stated that nothing can be explained in the history of Israel without reference to the patriarchal epoch (1).

Throughout the text are numerous examples of the patriarchs, but it is no mere coincidence that the best example is present in the thoughts and beliefs of Ema's father. In one such instance, the narrator informs us that Ema's father "a considerava sujeita a um mandado de prisão; tinha-a à sua mercê, prolongava o momento de manifestar o seu poder sobre ela" ["Her father considered her subject to a sort of prison term, he had her at his mercy, and he prolonged the moments to exercise his power over her"] (25). The only activities permitted to her were those that would prepare her for marriage, while Ema considered marriage to be "uma nova condenação, como uma injustiça mais elaborada" ["a new condemnation, a more elaborate injustice"] (27). The sole injustice that Ema's father saw, however, was that "Mercadoria lhe saísse mal aviada" ["His merchandise had been damaged"] (15). Ema had been born with a limp in her left leg. Her father therefore concluded that the limp would limit the profit he could obtain from her marriage.

The biblical references to Abraham not only evoke the tradition of patriarchy but also the question of maternity and the sacrifice of one's children. Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, to demonstrate his faith in God. God re-

wards Abraham for his obedience by guaranteeing him the preservation of his bloodline through many prosperous and reproductive generations. In an act that inverts the biblical mythology, Ema sacrifices her two daughters to demonstrate her lack of faith in the patriarchal system that has made her so unhappy. Contrary to the biblical story, the sacrifice is not physical but emotional; Ema emotionally abandons and rejects her children. In fact, the very names of her daughters reveal her lack of affection for them. The suffixes, *ona* and *lota* used to form the daughter's names, *Luisona* and *Lolota*, are typically used in Portuguese to give a negative connotation (Bulger 186).

Motherhood inhibits Ema from realizing herself as a woman and does not bring her personal satisfaction, thus contradicting the tenants of the motherhood myth. Throughout the novel, Ema challenges maternity as the sacred calling of women and what is called the natural argument of motherhood. Theorist Nancy Chodorow has provided the two most recognized explanations of motherhood. The first theory is called the natural argument and has two elements: the bio-evolutionary element and the maternal instinct. Bio-evolution is based on the sexual division of labor. Women have always been associated with tasks that require less brute strength. It follows then that traditionally a woman's task was to cook lunch instead of hunting for it. Women have ultimately been associated with "easier" tasks according to the masculine point of view. Maternal instinct insists, as we have seen, that every woman is born with a strong maternal instinct and she must produce a child in order to satisfy this instinct (11-30).

The other maternal theory presented by Chodorow is the role-training argument. This is a slow social process of brainwashing in which a young girl is trained and prepared for motherhood since childhood. Therefore, when the girl reaches her childbearing years, she will "naturally" conform to what is expected of her without challenging or questioning maternal and gender stereotypes (31-54). Simone de Beauvoir uses the same concept in *The Second Sex* to explain motherhood. She uses the example of the doll to demonstrate the brainwashing process. Dolls are believed to be a girl's favorite toy when, in all reality, girls are actually subtly forced to adopt dolls as such. Layered in pink flowers, frills, and bows, dolls are placed in their arms even at the infant stage and little girls are heavily encouraged to play with them. Throughout their childhood little girls learn to imitate their own mother thinking it most "natural," and ultimately prepare for their future role as mothers (465). As Adrienne Rich warns, "Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self" (42).

Sadly, the natural argument of motherhood has been the most commonly evoked and believed throughout Portuguese history. It is after all the very argument used by Salazar. Ema's behavior throughout the text obviously denies this argument, but Ema is not the only one to reject it. Maria Semblano, another resident of the valley, rejects the supposed "natural" state of maternity by stating that "estar prenhe é para as gatas, e cheia para as vacas" ["pregnancy is for cats, and fullness for cows"] (54).⁹ However, the clearest example of this rejection is when Ema expresses the desire to be a princess because she believes they are naturally feminine without having to prove or demonstrate their femininity (109). In other words, for Ema a princess represents the possibility to express one's femininity without having to conform to patriarchal standards of femininity, of which maternity is such a principle factor. Support for the role-training argument is visible in *Vale Abraão*. Pedro Lumiares, Ema's confidant, correctly summarizes the role training argument in a conversation with Ema in which he states: "Não se nasce mulher ou homem: aprende-se" ["One isn't born as man or woman; it is learned"] (208). Later in the same conversation with Ema, Pedro speaks of the "empty spaces" in popular beliefs, one of which is the popular expression: "A mulher é o útero" ["A woman is her uterus"] (209).

Even though Ema revolts against the patriarchal system and the mystical maternal figure, she fails to overcome it and ultimately conforms to the destructive dichotomy that has marked mothers for so long. If the patriarchal options are to sacrifice oneself as a woman or sacrifice one's children, Ema chose the second option instead of freeing herself from the repressive system altogether. It is for this reason that Irigaray proposes the word as the only solution against the patriarchal tradition. What a daughter most needs from her mother is not maternal milk, but language and a voice to be able to establish herself as a woman and as a mother.

Ema does not offer her daughters anything that Irigaray suggests. Rather she chooses to remain on the sidelines and passively watch her daughters begin to repeat the same sad cycle that Ema so wanted to undo. Ema's weapon of choice against the oppression of a patriarchal society is her own body, which she offers to numerous men, thinking she is participating in an act of rebellion. This plan, of course, is destined to fail and only adds to the growing list of dissatisfactions in her life. In Bessa Luís' own words:

Ema adivinhava que, nela, a obsessão do prazer era muito mais do que uma história de costumes. Subitamente entregou-se a uma espécie de doença que estava enraizada na insatisfação profunda do seu ser. Julgou que a libertação sexual a ia curar, mas durou pouco esse convencimento. mas o sentimento se manifesta mais na frustração que ela sente ao reconhecer a insignificância da sua vida.

["Ema supposed that her obsession with pleasure was much more than a question of habit. She subtly surrendered to a sort of illness that was rooted in the deepest dissatisfaction of her very existence. She judged that sexual liberation would cure her, but this conviction lasted but a short while. The feeling began to manifest itself in the frustration she feels upon recognizing the insignificance of her life."] (78)

Ema, just like Flaubert's Emma Bovary, never finds what she seeks. Ema's failure is corroborated when compared to the previously mentioned character, Maria Semblano. She is the resident of the valley who does successfully challenge the patriarchal system. Maria Semblano is a writer and also the editor of Ema's husband's short stories. Carlos frequently requests Maria's advice in all aspects of his literary escapades from basic editing to plot and character development. Maria, like Ema, rejects the patriarchy of the valley, but the weapon she chooses is the written word instead of using her own body against the very system that has exploited the feminine body for so long.

Maria Semblano achieves what Ema most desires but does not obtain, and that is why there is so much tension between the two women. It is the narrator who informs the reader that the two women are extremely similar, but each woman guards a certain amount of cynicism or harsh feelings toward the other (177). Maria looks down on Ema because she recognizes the futility of her resistance while Ema dislikes Maria because, deep down inside, she recognizes that Maria has achieved what she couldn't (Bulger 189). Furthermore, Ema is jealous of the relationship that Maria has with Carlos. Through the editing process, Maria and Carlos form a legitimate relationship of respect and intellectual sharing. Ema, with her system of rebellion, would never be able to have such a relationship with anyone because she would never be more than an object. To her numerous lovers, Ema is merely a fascinating play object and to her daughters, Ema is a distant, foreign object.

It is Maria Semblano who has the voice and power that Ema desires. Currently we want to believe we are in a new, modern age of cultural sophistication and gender sensitivity, but Bessa Luís, by returning to Flaubert's classic nineteenth-century tale, *Madame Bovary*, demonstrates that opportunities for women have not necessarily changed that much from Flaubert's times, even over a century later. As long as patriarchy continues to limit feminine and maternal identities through suffocating mechanisms such as the myth of motherhood and the idealization of the maternal figure for political and religious agendas, women like Emma Bovary will continue to exist. The myth of motherhood is one of the many injustices that causes Ema's dissatisfaction, a dissatisfaction that women learn early in the Valley

of Abraham. In the words of Bessa Luís: “A mulher, aos cinco anos, percebe o que há de exasperante e triste na vida, em todos os detalhes” [“Women, at five years of age, realize what is enraging and sad about life, in all its details”] (266). ✱

Notes

¹ In English this term could be translated as *The New State* and refers to the period of 1933-1974.

² Since many of these documents still have not yet been translated into English, I will provide English translations throughout the text, especially those of Agustina Bessa Luís in order to include the poetic language and style so typical of her writing. Unfortunately, much of the poetic language is lost when translated into English.

³ This is not to say that there were not women’s organizations fighting for a place for women in the educational system. Groups such as the members of the journal *A voz feminina* (*The Feminine Voice*) of 1868 encouraged feminine education for the betterment and enlightenment of women as opposed to pleasing one’s husband or educating one’s children. See Sadlier’s article for more information.

⁴ The Mother Project for National Education and Young Portuguese Women, respectively.

⁵ This number is especially impressive if you take into consideration the relatively small population of Portugal. Portugal’s current population is estimated at approximately ten million.

⁶ O Movimento da Libertação da Mulher (The Women’s Liberation Movement) was the largest feminist organization and had approximately two thousand members. For more information on this movement or other feminist organizations, see Sadlier.

⁷ For more information, see Ana Paula Ferreira’s article, “Reengendering History: Women’s Fictions of the Portuguese Revolution.”

⁸ See, for example, Kuzucu’s article or Johnson’s thesis.

⁹ This expression is especially awkward in English. Basically Maria Semblano is using adjectives frequently used in Portuguese to describe a pregnant woman and saying they should be applied only to animals and not to women.

Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone de. "The Mother." *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. New York: Bantam, 1952. 456-496.
- Bessa-Luís, Agustina. *A sibila*. Lisbon: Guimarães, 1998.
- . *Vale Abraão*. Lisbon: Guimarães, 1999.
- Brooks, Marilyn and Nicola Watson. "Madame Bovary: Becoming a Heroine." *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Identities*. Ed. Walder-Dennis. Routledge: Open University Press, 2001. 29-47.
- Bulger, Laura Fernanda. "Configurações e transfigurações em *Vale Abraão* de Agustina Bessa-Luís." *Coloquio-Letra* 131 (1994): 178-90.
- Chodorow, Nancy J. *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1978.
- Crownfield, David. *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva: Religion, Women, and Psychoanalysis*. Albany: State University Press, 1992.
- Delaney, Carol. *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Eça de Queirós. *O crime do Padre Amaro*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, 2000.
- . *O Primo Basílio*. São Paulo: Atelie, 1998.
- . *Uma campanha alegre*. Vol II. Porto: Lello & Irmão Editores, 1979.
- Ferreira, Ana Paula. "Home Bound: The Construct of Femininity in the Estado Novo." *Portuguese Studies* 12 (1996): 133-144.
- . "Nationalism and Feminism at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: Constructing the 'other' (Woman) of Portugal." *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies* 3 (1996): 123-143.
- . "Regendering History: Women's Fictions of the Portuguese Revolution." *After the Revolution: Twenty Years of Portuguese Literature*. Ed. Helena Kaufman and Anna Klobucka. Danvers: Associated University Press, 1997.
- Feuillet, André. *Jesus and His Mother: The Role of the Virgin Mary in Salvation History and the Place of Woman in the Church*. Trans. Leonard Maluf. Still River: St. Bede's Publications, 1984.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Trans. Mildred Marmur. New York: Signet, 1964.
- Gaubert, Henri. *Abraham, Loved by God*. Trans. Lancelot Sheppard. New York: Hastings House, 1968.

- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*. Montréal: Pleine Lune, 1981.
- Johnson, Janette Suzanne. *Mother Love and Mothers in Love: The Novel of Adultery*. Champaign: Chicago University Press, 1983.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." *The Kristeva Reader*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 160-186.
- Kuzucu, Hamza. "Deux conceptions de maternité: Madame de Rênal et Madame Bovary." *Edebiyat Fakeultesi dergisi* 17 (2000): 151-159.
- Maeckelberghe, Els. *Desperately Seeking Mary: A Feminist Appropriation of a Traditional Religious Symbol*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991.
- Mimoso, Duarte Ruiz. "Luisa et Ema: Deux Bovary portugaises?" *Voix de l'écrivain*. Ed. Jean Louis Cabanes. Toulouse: PU du Mirail, 1996. 302-312.
- Perrot, André. *Abraham and His Times*. Trans. James H. Farley. Neuchâtel: Delchaux, 1962.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1976.
- Sadlier, Darlene Joy. Appendix. *The Question of How: Women Writers and New Portuguese Literature*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989. 113-129.
- Verney, Luís António. *O verdadeiro método de estudar*. Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1949.
- Warner, Marina. *Alone of her Sex: The Myth of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. New York: Alfred & Knopf, 1976.