



SAINT AND PROSTITUTE: AN ANALYSIS OF MELÂNIA SABIANI IN *A PÉCORA*, BY NATÁLIA CORREIA
SANTA E PROSTITUTA: UMA ANÁLISE DE MELÂNIA SABIANI EM *A PÉCORA*, DE NATÁLIA CORREIA

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ABSTRACT:

This article aims to analyze the figure of Melânia Sabiani, in its two versions, saint and prostitute, immolated by society represented in the play *A pécora*, by Portuguese writer Natália Correia. In the play, Correia portrays the society of Gal, a fictional city that witnesses the rise of a new saint among its residents, Santa Melânia, an event created to protect the young woman's secret affair with the local priest. While being worshiped by the people, Melânia is transformed into Pupi, the prostitute, excluded from the community in order to preserve the religious farce. These two faces of the main character will serve as a basis for our analysis of the feminine and its association with the religious context of the play. As a theoretical contribution, we will base our work on authors who explore the social evolution of women both in the historiographic and mythological realms, such as BARING and CASHFORD (2005), BATAILLE (1987), CAMPBELL (1976) and WHITMONT (1991). In the Lusitanian piece, it is possible to perceive the completely opposite forms of how the feminine is seen within a religious context such as that reproduced in the work. Based on the dogmas and principles of the Christian tradition, we find two antagonistic versions of the woman in the images of the saint and the prostitute. While one is praised and serves as a model to be followed by everyone, the other is rejected and excluded from the social environment for being a reason of shame and degradation. When analyzing the representation of the feminine in Natália Correia's work, we realize that, in Gal, there is only salvation for those who adapt to the models imposed by patriarchal religious power, making empowerment and emancipation in the face of this system virtually impossible.

KEY-WORDS: Feminine; Christianity; *A Pécora*; Natália Correia

RESUMO:

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a figura de Melânia Sabiani, em suas duas versões, santa e prostituta, imoladas pela sociedade representadas na peça *A pécora*, da escritora portuguesa Natália Correia. Na obra, Correia retrata a sociedade de Gal, cidade fictícia que presencia a ascensão de uma nova santa entre seus moradores, Santa Melânia, evento inventado para proteger o caso secreto da jovem com o padre local. Enquanto era cultuada pelo povo, Melânia é transformada em Pupi, a prostituta, excluída da comunidade a fim de preservar a farsa religiosa. Essas duas faces da personagem principal nos servirão de base para nossa análise a respeito do feminino e sua associação com o contexto religioso da peça. Como aporte teórico, fundamentaremos nosso trabalho em autores que exploram a evolução social do feminino tanto no âmbito historiográfico quanto mitológico, como BARING e CASHFORD (2005), BATAILLE (1987), CAMPBELL (1976) e WHITMONT (1991). Na peça lusitana, é possível perceber as formas completamente opostas de como o feminino é visto dentro de um contexto religioso como o reproduzido na obra. Tendo como base os dogmas e princípios da tradição cristã, encontramos duas versões antagonísticas da mulher nas imagens da santa e da prostituta. Enquanto uma é louvada e serve como modelo a ser seguido por todos, a outra é rejeitada e excluída do meio social por ser motivo de vergonha e degradação. Ao analisar a representação do feminino na obra de Natália Correia, percebemos que, em Gal, há apenas salvação para aquelas que se adaptam aos modelos impostos pelo poder religioso patriarcal, tornando o empoderamento e a emancipação frente a esse sistema praticamente impossíveis.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Feminino; Cristianismo; *A Pécora*; Natália Correia

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It is the small fictional town of Gal that Natália Correia uses as a scenario for her play that critically and ironically recounts the events surrounding the phenomena that occurred in the city of Fátima, when three shepherd children may have witnessed the apparitions of Mary, mother of Jesus, important figure to Christians, specially Catholics that have her as one of the main intercessors between mankind and God. These events have triggered a revolution that is not only religious, but cultural and political in Portugal at the beginning of the 20th century because, among other factors, it increased the Catholic belief with regard to Mary, turned the small Portuguese city into a gigantic center of religious pilgrimage and was used as one of the arguments for maintaining Salazarism, an authoritarian regime based on nationalist and fascist principles, founded by António de Oliveira Salazar in 1933, for which religion and religiosity were important bases of support (SIMPSON, 2014, p. 74).

Correia's play presents us with a community whose life is transformed after the farce orchestrated by Melânia and her lover, Father Salata, transforming the town into a center of worship for people in search of the new saint. In the play, Melânia and Father Salata have a forbidden romantic relationship. She is already engaged, and he is the priest of the town. To hide their sin, Salata pretends to be an angel talking to some children that got too close for comfort during one of their secret encounters. Voicing the angel, he says that God sent him to announce that Melânia is a saint, causing the kids to tell everybody about the good news and, all of the sudden, the life in town is dedicated only to the miracles of Melânia Sabiani. The Church sees this as an opportunity to regain power over the population, takes control of the events and sends Melânia to a brothel to ensure that the lie is not discovered. While the image of the saint thrives, the prostitute languishes in humiliation and ends up killed by her own worshipers.

Our intention in this work is to investigate the coexistence and the immolation of two conflicting conditions - saint and prostitute - imposed by society on the main character, Melânia. The character presents us with two contrasting versions of the feminine, the one idealized as a model of purity, worthy of being divinized, and the side considered more demoted, related to sex and degradation. This dualism brings us directly to the theories about the sacred feminine when we examine both representations of the Goddess and essential figures in the history of Christianity, such as Eve and Mary. The Great Goddess, deity worshiped as the creator in traditional societies that thrived before the rise of patriarchalism, carries with her the same duplicity (WHITMONT, 1991) that we found in Melânia / Pupi, her new name when she was relocated to the brothel. She is benevolent and mean, she is the pure young woman and the prostitute, she is light and dark, characteristics that are culturally considered to be directly opposite, but that, to some extent in history, were seen as complementary, part of a whole and not excluding.

The rise of principles that served as a basis for patriarchal traditions ends up separating these attributes, classifying them exclusively as good or evil (WHITMONT, 1991, p. 103). Those who were considered superior were approached by the male gods, the saints and the

faithful who really followed the principles preached. The rest is disowned and associated with the feminine, sin and the Devil. When we approach the representations of the feminine in patriarchal religious traditions, we come across women who, for Judeo-Christian thought, symbolize this duality between sin and grace. Eve, who is said to have introduced sin into the world and condemned all of humanity because of her actions, is the first representative of a type of condemned behavior. She was disobedient, succumbed to temptation and, moreover, corrupted her companion. Mary, mother of Jesus, on the other hand, was worthy to have been chosen among all women to carry the child of God in her womb.

Her obedience to divine precepts, being a virgin before, during and after conception, and kindness were responsible for saving the world from sins and made her worthy of sanctification, even ascending to heaven, body and soul, according to the Assumption tradition to be detailed when dealing with Melânia's assumption. A character of equal importance to explore such concepts related to the Portuguese play was Maria Madalena, who is popularly, in the case of Catholic belief, regarded as the prostitute saved from her life of sin by Jesus Christ, even becoming a saint. Only two of the three women, regardless of the life they could previously have led, are considered examples for having dedicated themselves to God.

In the Portuguese play, for Melânia to be sanctified, she had to "die" and be reborn with a new identity, Pupi, a prostitute in the city's brothel. At the same time, the character is separated into two, the saint and the prostitute, both directly linked to her previous life, but separated immensely. It was not possible for Melânia to represent, at the same time, two characteristics as distinct as these. Contrary to what was accepted as intrinsic to a female divine entity that was believed to be creator until the appearance of male gods, these attributes become opposites in patriarchal religions, as already mentioned. The selective exclusion of certain aspects controls the population and shapes society according to the interests of those who command it and, among such interests, we find the suppression or, at least, the control of sexuality, especially when we take into account the female condition.

Melânia Sabiani can be seen as a character built with two opposing personalities, due to a network of lies initially orchestrated to hide the sinful love between her and the city priest, but which becomes the basis for the control of the whole society. Daughter of a humble family and betrothed to one of the neighbors, Teófilo Ardinelli, whose vines are adjacent to the Sabiani vineyards, the young woman rebels against her parents' will to live her true love. The play's initial motto is the character's failure to wish to live the longed-for freedom and search for ideals that break the customs of a people strongly linked to traditions. Separated from Father Salata after having an abortion as a result of the relationship and placed in a brothel to keep her away from her city, which started to worship her as a saint, especially after being taken by an angel directly to heaven.

If we consider the historical evolution of patriarchy, we will observe the question that, in

order for it to take the power of societies in which culture had women as a central element, it should excise or suppress everything related to them (CAMPBELL, 1976, p. 21 – 22). Whether the Mother Goddess or anyone else who came to succeed her, there was no room for any manifestation of them in a society governed by men. Unless it was a version that served patriarchal purposes. As mentioned, the feminine should be limited to obedient passivity, motherhood and domesticity (WHITMONT, 1991, p. 204), to the perfect representation of someone who would not question their social place and would remain away from power, since it was relegated to residential environment. Of all the faces of the Goddess, the only one allowed is that of the virgin, idealized in the purity of Mary.

In order to be elevated to the category of saint, it is essential that the daughter of the Sabiani was pure, or at least approached it as much as possible. In the exaltations of her faithful devotees, we noticed a glorification of her image, very distant from human and closer to the angelic. The young woman was the “flower of flowers”, “whiter than snow” and “more translucent than water”. There is apparently no sign of stain or relationship with sin, she was, like Mary, the ideal woman for patriarchal society. Thus, in the same way that Magdalene is not sanctified as a prostitute, but as the woman who was saved from her life of sin and joined Jesus, starting to live under the law of God, Melânia also needs to get rid of any mundane aspect to be worthy of worship.

Melânia does not become a saint taking with her all her past life to the apparitions to the shepherds, since this existence is erased and remodeled according to the wishes of those who make use of her divine image. At no point in the play, when the focus is on the sanctified version of the young woman, we are aware of her life before being “chosen” by God, except who her family, the Sabiani, is. In addition, everything was changed, even her academic performance, as shown in the section in which the tour guide responsible for the devotees’ tour is corrected by Zenóbia, a brothel employee, to whom Melânia is taken, who allies herself with the clergy to create the new saint:

GUIA TURÍSTICO: (*em voz de guia*) E agora, senhoras e senhores, vão ver a escola onde a santa em criança revelou uma cultura tão fora do comum...

ZENÓBIA: (*interrompendo*) Ó criatura! Quantas vezes lhe recomendei que ela não passou das primeiras letras porque era curta de ideias? Então não sabe que Deus escolhe os analfabetos para confundir os sábios?[...]³ (CORREIA, 1983, p. 64 – 65)

From this passage, we can develop two analyzes with a focus on Melânia. The first one, and more directly linked to the unfolding of the plot, shows us an aspect of holiness that sometimes

3 TOURIST GUIDE: (in a guide like voice) And now, ladies and gentlemen, you will see the school where the saint as a child revealed a culture so unusual ...

ZENOBIA: (interrupting) Oh creature! How many times have I recommended that she didn't go past the first few letters because she was short of intelligence? So you don't know that God chooses the illiterate to confuse the wise? [...] (Translated by the author)

appears as a recurrent feature for those who dedicate themselves to the Lord's service, social marginality. Humility, detachment from material goods and other conditions that keep man from what can lead him to perdition, are still premises preached as ideas in Christianity, except, of course, in aspects that use financial prosperity as an attraction for the faithful. It was important for Zenóbia that the saint was portrayed as semi-literate, a great justification when the entire intellectual class of the city was converted immediately for witnessing the miracle. The one who had little development in the school was able to bow even the most intelligent and skeptical of Gal's society, a great asset for the faith in this saint of the people. The following section that accompanies the scene explains the meaning of the contradictions that Melânia's story and appearance played for skeptics, giving legitimacy to the unexplainable and supernatural character of the phenomenon:

Vestida de santa e coroada de rosas, Melânia começa a surgir lentamente no ar, por detrás de um troço das ruínas. [...] O Cientista e o Sociólogo lançam-se também por terra, ficando este de quatro patas no chão e rastejando, aquele, como um verme. Nesta posição, espreitam, com terror, para o sítio da aparição. (CORREIA, 1983, p. 116)

Crowned with roses, as a symbol of her sacred greatness, Melânia is taken to the skies by a mechanical system hidden in the ruins where the miracle would happen, causing an immense wave of excitement in all those present, among them, the Scientist and the Sociologist who before questioned the miracles of the new saint and are now converted by the miraculous appearance, in the play science can also be deceived. In lowered positions, one like a four-legged animal and the other crawling like a worm, they watch in terror at the assumption of the one they had doubted. The scene planned to confirm Melânia's sanctity has the effect of placing her above all the community and of reconstructing social standards, at least momentarily. Thus, there is a redefinition of the powers that govern Gal's society which, from then on, gives much more prominence to the Church than to science.

On the other hand, given the focus of the thesis, Melânia's ignorance plays an important role in her position as a woman. Of the saints of the Catholic Church, few are known to have excelled in academic circles, as in the case of Hildegarda de Bingen, or in leadership roles, such as Joana D'Arc. What these examples have in common and is highlighted is their correct lives and their dedication to the service of God on Earth. If we consider female demotion in patriarchal traditions, women are not only deprived of social power, but also intellectual.

If we take the *Malleus Maleficarum*, one of the books that served as a basis for the definition of concepts related to the feminine in the Middle Ages, we note that it was common, at least for part of the Church, to consider them as mentally inferior, weak of ideas and with a lower level of intelligence. This would be the reason that made them more susceptible to demonic influence (CLARK, 2006, p. 163). Even if this theory seems absurd, even today one can observe women struggle to obtain recognition and insertion in the academy and in the job market, still carrying

the stigma of an imaginary incapacity. Melânia not going forward in her early school years not only ensures a false humility idealized for her saintly figure but guarantees her limited position in society.

With the rise of Melânia, there is also a counterpoint to her intellectual demotion that would be disclosed to the public. Whether it was true or not, there is no room for the character to be known as a prodigy or for attention to deviate from what was most important in relation to her, her holy virtues that separate her from what is mundane. The young saint was not intelligent, and there is no other mention of any quality that would make her stand out compared to the other inhabitants of Gal. What is repeatedly exalted is its glorious incorruptible purity. Melânia had been chosen by the Lord for her irreproachable earthly conduct that made her worthy of such grace.

If we have Saint Melânia, perfect in all aspects and a symbol of purity and devotion to God, we also see, on the other hand, his worldly face, is the one who fell in love with the city priest and the prostitute who serves as a disguise so that the sacred farce is hidden. Melânia, Pupi and the Saint form a trinity in one person that reflects the opposite images of the feminine that is under the context of patriarchal dominance. On the one hand, divine integrity, on the other, the lowest and most abhorrent face of its kind. What we see in this character is a clear separation of patterns created by societies centered on a male discourse and by the Church. However, even if separated from its holy form, it still has a recurring relationship with the sacred.

The main character, being she in the form of Santa Melânia or Pupi, reinforces the concepts involving feminine perdition. Turning to the witch hunt manual, *Malleus Malleficarum*, which has relegated perennial understanding of the figure of women throughout the ages. It claims that one of the reasons for them to associate with the Devil lies in their carnal desires, over which they are unable to maintain control (Part 1, Question 7). Karlsen (1988) and Page (2017), point out the fear and the persecution of this supposed condition, especially those considered as witches, by the instituted powers. There are no references to magic in Correia's work, however, we cannot disassociate Melânia from such characters who are responsible for the temptation and debauchery of men who should stay away from such sins, as good faithful God-fearers. In the case of the Portuguese play, Melânia was able to seduce the town's own priest.

Without having a choice and in order to hide the sin committed in her illicit relationship, Melânia is placed in a brothel, in which she adopts the name of Pupi. From then on, her life is controlled by everyone who, in some way, could take advantage of the miracles of her sanctified double. Teófilo Ardinelli, her promised ex-fiancé, is one of the figures who has more power over her, besides, of course, the Church, which is responsible for the exploration of the Saint. Ardinelli's interactions with the character not only emphasizes a relationship of superiority on his part, but also reinforce characteristics associated with prostitution:

ARDINELLI: (*para Pupi, que conserva a cabeça baixa*) Se esse símbolo da corrupção é a que passa por ser a Bem-Aventurada Melânia, o mundo está perdido. (*Faz o sinal da cruz.*) E o pior dos criminosos tem sempre uma razão para se julgar o mais virtuoso dos homens. Pois não exagero, se disser que a Hiena de Chicago tem muito a aprender com os dois nojentos pastorinhos a quem eu hei-de apertar o gasganete para não brincarem com os sentimentos de um homem honrado.

MELÂNIA: Não há no mundo coisa mais digna de ser cuspidada do que eu. Mas os pastorinhos não mentem. Eles viram o anjo.

ARDINELLI: Devo então entender o pior. A peste da terra contaminou os anjos. Porque, nesse caso, o tal anjo tem menos moral que uma proxeneta. Anda a desviar noivas honestas e, com a promessa do paraíso, mete-as no bordel.

MELÂNIA: (*de olhos no chão*) O anjo... é o padre Salata.

ARDINELLI: Olá! Esse padre afinal saiu-se um bom pássaro. Preparou o golpe do milagre para explorar os peregrinos.

MELÂNIA: Eu tinha que vir para a cidade sem deixar rasto. E isto só era possível se pensassem que eu tinha ido para o céu, que é um sítio onde ninguém nos vai procurar. Foi quando o padre Salata teve a ideia de se servir das duas crianças e disse-me: “Chegou a altura de não decepcionarmos os aborrecidos pastorinhos que não te deixam em paz desde que lhes disseste que eu era um anjo.” Estou muito arrependida. Mas aquelas crianças eram tão curiosas. Ouviram vozes nas ruínas e quiseram saber o que se passava. Prometi-lhes que se guardassem segredo, seriam recompensados com a celeste visão. E foram. Quando o ventre começou a inchar-me (*gesto de indignado assombro de Teófilo Ardinelli*), anunciei-lhes: “Chegou o dia. Irei ver o anjo que vem para me levar ao céu. Fostes eleitos para testemunhar o prodígio porque a voz da inocência é o clarim que Deus escolhe para proclamar as suas maravilhas.” E assim foi.

ARDINELLI: (*colérico*) Quer dizer que tu e esse Casanova de sotaina fizeram de mim o maior corno de Gal. Estou pior que um leão e tu vais fazer companhia aos dois Regedores... (*lógico, falando para si*) O que, aliás, é conveniente porque, se os devotos descobrem que a santa é este caixote de lixo, lá se vai o maior centro turístico da Europa⁴. (CORREIA, 1983, p. 54 – 57)

4 ARDINELLI: (*to Pupi, who keeps her head down*) If this symbol of corruption is what passes for being Blessed Melania, the world is lost. (*He makes the sign of the cross.*) And the worst of criminals always has a reason to think of himself as the most virtuous of men. Well, no exaggeration, if I say that the Chicago Hyena has a lot to learn from the two disgusting little shepherds to whom I will squeeze the gas in order not to play with the feelings of an honorable man.

MELÂNIA: There is nothing in the world more worthy of being spit on than me. But the shepherds don't lie. They saw the angel.

ARDINELLI: So I must understand the worst. The plague of the earth contaminated the angels. Because, in that case, that angel has less moral than a pimp. He is dodging honest brides and, with the promise of paradise, puts them in the brothel.

MELÂNIA: (*eyes on the floor*) The angel ... is Father Salata.

ARDINELLI: Hi! That priest turned out to be a good bird. He prepared the miracle coup to explore the pilgrims.

MELÂNIA: I had to come to the city without a trace. And this was only possible if they thought I had gone to heaven, which is a place where nobody is going to look for us. That was when Father Salata had the idea of using the two children and said to me: “The time has come for us not to disappoint the boring little shepherds who haven't left you in peace since you told them I was an angel.” I'm really sorry. But those kids were so curious. They heard voices in the ruins and wanted to know what was going on. I promised them that if they kept secret, they

From the beginning, we see in the words of Ardinelli Pupi's classification as a symbol of corruption, in comparison to the blessed Melânia. While being worshiped as a saint, pure and perfect, the true persona was trapped in a brothel, in direct contact with sin. Even though such an image of corruption and doom was not always associated with the prostitute, its weight is more than present in the context portrayed in the Portuguese play. First, we must consider that, in more remote times of civilization, the term "prostitute" was used to refer to those women who dedicated themselves exclusively to the sacred, they were the ones who allowed humanity to have contact with the divine (WHITMONT, 1991, p. 155). Bataille (1987), in turn, argues that prostitutes, when "*em contato com o sagrado, em lugares consagrados, tinham um caráter sagrado análogo ao dos sacerdotes*"⁵ (BATAILLE, 1987, p. 87). In this situation, there is an apparent female superiority in relation to the sacred, since direct contact with it would be inherent to women, even in times after societies that had the Mother Goddess as the central deity in the belief system.

However, there is no glorification of these women within the Christian patriarchal context. Women who did not fit the required standards, among them prostitutes, women who could have superiority or sexual freedom and those who lived on the margins of society were associated with evil and sin; they were witches and linked to the Demon (CLARK, 2006, p. 184 - 185). According to Bataille (1987, p. 90), they are in the last degree of social demotion. They know that they are human, but they are aware of living very close to what separates us from animals in relation to sexual behavior. In the Christian world, prostitutes are excluded, just as everything that is impure and horrendous is excluded⁶. Another point to be considered about their presence

would be rewarded with the heavenly vision. And they were. When the belly started to swell (*Teófilo Ardinelli's gesture of indignant astonishment*), I announced to them: "The day has come. I will see the angel who comes to take me to heaven. You were chosen to witness the prodigy because the voice of innocence is the bugle that God chooses to proclaim his wonders." And so it was.

ARDINELLI: (*choleric*) It means that you and that Casanova in a cassock made me Gal's biggest horn. I am worse than a lion and you will keep the two Regents company ... (*clear; speaking to himself*) Which, by the way, is convenient because, if devotees discover that the saint is this dustbin, there goes the biggest tourist center of Europe. (Translated by the author)

5 "in contact with the sacred, in consecrated places, had a sacred character analogous to that of priests" (Translated by the author)

6 Richards points out that sexuality, "*segundo os ensinamentos cristãos, era dada às pessoas exclusivamente para os objetivos de reprodução e por nenhum outro motivo. [...] São Paulo enfatizou que o celibato era o ideal mais elevado, a forma mais desejável de vida, mas que o casamento era uma segunda alternativa inferior aceitável. 'É melhor casar do que abrasar', disse. O casamento tornou-se assim o meio cristão básico de regulamentar o desejo sexual, combatendo a fornicação e perpetuando a espécie.*

O sexo não deveria ser usado por mero prazer. Segundo esta definição, todo sexo fora do casamento, tanto heterossexual quanto homossexual, era pecado, e, dentro do casamento, só deveria ser usado para fins de procriação. Os teólogos medievais enfatizaram que era um pecado mortal fazer amor com a esposa unicamente por prazer"(RICHARDS, 1993, p. 34). Although the rules were valid for both men and women, we observed that deviant behavior was admitted by them regarding the relationship with sex and the catharsis of pleasure.

"according to Christian teachings, was given to people solely for the purposes of reproduction and for no other reason. [...] São Paulo emphasized that celibacy was the highest ideal, the most desirable way of life, but that marriage was a second lower acceptable alternative. 'It is better to marry than to burn,' he said. Marriage thus became the basic Christian means of regulating sexual desire, combating fornication and perpetuating the species.

in society is that, although they were condemned by the Church and relegated to the sphere of the profane, they still had a social role, as they functioned as a way of satisfying the male desire to maintain order:

[...] a prostituição era vista como um meio prático de permitir que os jovens e todas as classes afirmassem sua masculinidade e aliviassem suas necessidades sexuais, enquanto evitava, ao mesmo tempo, que se aproximassem de esposas e filhas respeitáveis, desestimulando-os dos estupros [...] e desencorajando-os em relação à homossexualidade [...] Agostinho escreveu: ‘Se as prostitutas forem expulsas da sociedade, tudo estará desorganizado em função dos desejos’⁷ (RICHARDS, 1993, p. 122 – 123)

Although there is this “importance” for the community, they are not part of the group, much less worthy of respect, since respectable women must be kept safe from men and sexuality that they were not allowed to exploit. They are objectified, they are not sexually satisfied, and this can cause disorder in society. This belief may seem comical, but, again, it takes us back to the duality between instincts and the rational. It was not possible for patriarchy to eliminate natural impulses, so it remained to try to control and satisfy them in such a way that they maintained the functioning of the system preached as appropriate and ideal for the population. In the same way that Ardinelli seeks fun in Gal’s brothel, men, and only them, would be allowed this behavior, since, if they were not prostitutes, women should remain pure before marriage and, when already married, be dedicated only to the husband, besides that, sex could only be done with the purpose of procreation.

Transformed into an object as a prostitute, Pupi is abhorred. She herself takes the position that it would be worth spitting out and is classified as a dustbin by Ardinelli. Her position on this stretch reinforces her demotion to society, either as a prostitute or as a woman. Unlike Santa Melânia, which at every moment seems to be more deserving of adoration and is raised to levels previously only reached by the mother of Jesus, its true form starts to be subjugated and humiliated, the target of vexations both in terms of the social and the religious. It is interesting to observe, in this degraded scene, the occurrence of this relationship with Mary, very far from the sacred glorious realm. While the saint reproduces a copy of the image of the mother of the Son of God idealized by the Church, the prostitute reveals the lies involving the miracles witnessed by the shepherd children. Natália Correia explicitly makes use of Melânia as a parody of the apparitions of Our Lady, especially the one that took place in Fatima. When comparing,

Sex should not be used for mere pleasure. According to this definition, all sex outside of marriage, both heterosexual and homosexual, was a sin, and, within marriage, it should only be used for procreation purposes. Medieval theologians emphasized that it was a mortal sin to make love to a wife solely for pleasure” (Translated by the author)

7 [...] prostitution was seen as a practical means of allowing young people and all classes to assert their masculinity and alleviate their sexual needs, while at the same time preventing them from approaching respectable wives and daughters, discouraging them of rapes [...] and discouraging them from homosexuality [...] Augustine wrote: ‘If prostitutes are expelled from society, everything will be disorganized due to desires’” (Translated by the author)

perhaps, the most important event in the religious history of Portugal, the miracles of Our Lady of Fatima used as a basis for the Salazar regime, with the coup orchestrated by the couple of Gal, the author, again, makes the inversion between sacred and profane, as in the case of the protagonist's forbidden desire associated with divine love.

As we have seen so far, Correia makes use of *A Pécora* not only as a way of questioning the religious standards imposed on society, but on all moral customs rooted in the community. Placing Mary on an equal position with Saint Melânia and lowering the miracles of Fatima not only serve as an affront to what is seen as rules imposed by the Church, but mainly to the way the population absorbs these ideas and applies them to their existence. Putting Maria's apparitions in check or her idealization as a perfect female model leads us to question and exclude not only the validity of these principles, but also the real role of control exercised by them. In the same way that Our Lady commands mankind not only to devotion, but to stop offending God with his sins, the miracle in the Portuguese play also serves to curb the infractions of the characters. If the events of Fatima drive the return of conservatism in Portuguese customs, the miracles of Saint Melânia cause a continuous deterioration of her sinful version. This downward movement is repeated throughout the play, always associating the character with what separates her from perfection in the sacred model, sexuality in particular. As a saint, she is welcomed by society, adored and worthy of the highest spheres of the divine. As Pupi, she has no right to belong to the same universe as the followers of her double.

The degradation exposed by the Portuguese author increases in a proportion directly opposite to the devotion for the new saint. Melânia is at the same time in heaven and in hell, a representation of the feminine that can belong to one sphere as well as the other, depending on how she behaves in the face of social demands. If she is accepted and considered worthy by the community, she can, with great effort, ascend spiritually. Otherwise, you will be at the mercy of suffering retaliation for your choices. For those who do not accept the standards preached by society, a life of exclusion remains, without having the privilege of freedom like other members of society, a situation reinforced by the character when she arrives at the brothel: "[...] I have no right to anything. Not even in the sunlight. There is no hole in the world that I can get into. I am worse than a mouse. I do not exaggerate if I confess to them that I am dead" (CORREIA, 1983, p. 43). Gal operates as a reflection of extreme conservatism, based on precepts whose function is to regulate certain standards and repress others. Considering the author's historical context, in which faith and family are the basis of an authoritarian, patriarchal, and Christian government, both Santa Melânia and Pupi can be part of this universe, each receiving its due glories.

It is worth mentioning that this control has as principle, as we have already discussed in the course of the work, the maintenance of the current power. Regulating material and spiritual life ensures that hierarchical positions do not change, especially when there is an erasure of those who would pose a risk to the social structure. Melânia's miracle revives the faith of a community and removes skeptics and enemies from the Church, returning authority to those

who have lost it. With that, Pupi could never come to surface, however, even if she had tried to end the farce years after the apparitions, her revelation would have no effect on the faithful, as we see in the following excerpt:

MELÂNIA: Calem-se... Calem-se, desgraçados. Cada lamento que soltais vai encher a barriga das aves de rapina. Elas engordam com as vossas chagas. O ar está empestado dos seus arrotos. (*Aponta o ar*) Cheirem! Cheirem! Que fedor a sonhos de futuro!

UMA ENFERMA: Cala-te, víbora!

UM ENFERMO: Deixa-nos lamentar as nossas dores!

MELÂNIA: Não haverá futuro! A teta da santa está seca. Para eles, é o fim do mundo. Oh, como todos vão rir! Como todos vão rir! (*Abrindo os braços e exibindo-se canalhamente*) Vejam-na! Vejam-na! Uma cadela das docas.

Recrudescer o burburinho que se estabelecera entre os Enfermos.

OUTRA ENFERMA: Blasfema!

OUTRO ENFERMO: Bruxa!

MELÂNIA: (*que persiste pateticamente na exibição*) Uma puta! A vossa santa é uma puta.

UM ALEIJADO: (*erguendo-se nas muletas e sobrepondo a sua voz à algazarra*) Companheiro de infortúnio! Arranquemos a língua a esta megera.

TODOS OS ENFERMOS: Sim, sim! Desagravemos a honra da santa!

MELÂNIA: (*tentando suster o assalto*) Não! Não me negueis! Eu trago a prova no meu corpo. (*Levanta as saias, baixa as culottes e mostra as nádegas.*) Se não acreditam, vejam a minha nádega... (*De rabo para o ar e dando palmadas na nádega*) Aqui... aqui... A marca que têm no rabo todos os Sabiani, a honrada família onde nasci.⁸ (CORREIA, 1983, p. 164 – 166)

Melânia tries, ineffectively, to reveal her true identity to the worshipers who waited for the procession to commemorate the saint's canonization. Confession seeks not only to denounce

8 MELÂNIA: Shut up ... Shut up, you bastards. Every lament you release will fill the belly of birds of prey. They get fat with your wounds. The air is plagued by her burps. (*Points to the air*) Smell! Smell! What a stink to dreams of the future!

A SICK WOMAN: Shut up, viper!

A SICK MAN: Let us mourn our pains!

MELÂNIA: There will be no future! The saint's teat is dry. For them, it is the end of the world. Oh, how everyone will laugh! How everyone will laugh! (*Opening her arms and showing off scoundrel*) Look at her! Check it out! A bitch from the docks.

The buzz that had been established among the Sick has increased.

ANOTHER SICK WOMAN: Blasphemous!

ANOTHER SICK MAN: Witch!

MELÂNIA: (*who persists pathetically in the exhibition*) A bitch! Your saint is a whore.

A CRIPPLE: (*standing on crutches and overcoming her voice over the racket*) Mates of misfortune! Let us tear the tongue out of this shrew.

ALL SICK PEOPLE: Yes, yes! Let us honor the saint's honor!

MELÂNIA: (*trying to stop the assault*) No! Do not deny me! I have the evidence in my body. (*Lifts her skirts, lowers the culottes and shows her buttocks.*) If you don't believe me, look at my ass ... (*With her buttocks in the air and slapping them*) Here ... here ... The brand all Sabiani have on the ass, the honorable family where I was born. (Translated by the author)

its sanctified version, but to all those who still take advantage of this lie. We can consider some reasons that explain the impotence of the character in the face of the impossibility of convincing others. First, there is the question of the apparent blindness of the faithful with regard to something that went against everything they believed in. We see that devotion is consolidated, after all, it was years influenced by the doctrine that was created around miracles. They are also represented comically with their lamentations and misfortunes, as if they were hoping that only their faith would save them from such a situation. To discredit the figure of Saint Melânia does not seem to be a valid option for them. Second, Melânia is no longer recognizable due to her age and life in the brothel. If the saint had been taken to heaven by an angel, in flesh and spirit, neither would it be plausible that she and Pupi were the same person, even with the birthmark common to all Sabiani.

She is accused of blasphemy and called a witch for defying the religious system that is more powerful than her. Based solely on the question of the faith and devotion of the characters in the scene, it seems almost impossible for the prostitute to convince anyone that her allegations are true. However, the validity of her speech is also called into question by the fact that the revelations come from a prostitute, Pupi, an excluded. Just as it has no place within the society that surrounds it, it would not have the power to have its speech recognized and validated, and thus any form of empowerment is forbidden, making it succumb to the hands of those who worship her double:

UMA ENFERMA: (*dominando o coro cerrado de imprecações*) Corre, corre, sangue sacrílego!...

MELÂNIA: (*voz entrecortada*) Loucos! Loucos! É o sangue de Melânia Sabiani... leite de todos os canalhas...

[...]

UM ENFERMO: (*sobrepondo-se ao praguejar surdos dos agressores*) Rebenta, rebenta, coração imundo!...

MELÂNIA (*voz mais entrecortada, tentando fugir em vão, à saraivada de agressões*): Juro!... Juro!... É o coração de Melânia Sabiani... covil de todos os escorpiões

[...]

OUTRO ENFERMO (*sobressaindo da toada de impropérios*) Estrebucha, estrebucha, carne pestilenta!...

MELÂNIA (*exangue*): Piedade!... Piedade!... É a carne... de Melânia... Sabiani... templo... de todos... os espectros...

Os Flagelantes tomam inteiramente conta dela e justigam-na com as disciplinas, deixando-a coberta de sangue enquanto gritam.

FLAGELANTES: Por nossos pecados!... Por nossos pecados!... Por nossos pecados!... Por nossos pecados!...

Ouve-se um hino entoado ao longe por muitas vozes. Ficam todos com os instrumentos de agressão suspensos no ar. Melânia cai por terra.

UMA ENFERMA: Glória, glória in excelsis!

O furor transforma-se em alegria. Baixam as muletas, as bengalas, etc.

UM ENFERMO: A procissão entrou em Gal!

OUTRO ENFERMO: Saudemos a imagem da santa!

OUTRA ENFERMA: Para festejar a sua canonização ela fará muitos milagres.

TODOS: Vamos!⁹ (CORREIA, 1983, p. 167 – 169)

Melânia is attacked in defense of the saint and as a way of immolating the sins of the faithful. The violence suffered by her is barbaric, there is no pity or compassion on the part of her aggressors who abandon their human side and surrender to the impulses caused by hatred of the prostitute. It is interesting to see how the author presents us with such a downgrade from those who should be more connected to such a strong religiosity. An extremely current action when compared to the increasingly aggressive speeches coming from groups strictly related to the most diverse religions. Both in Correia's play and in today's world, the Christian maxim of loving your neighbor as yourself seems forgotten or replaced. The same happens with Pupi, eliminated for having left the place designated as appropriate and having entered the path of other people's faith, breaking the standards established by society. Melânia Sabiani is, for the last time in the play, demoted, not only for being killed, but her body is portrayed in a degraded way. Her blood is sacrilegious, her heart unclean and her flesh pestilent; adjectives that reinforce the dishonored position before others and unworthy of clemency. In addition, the character herself associates as a source of food for scoundrels and a refuge for specters and scorpions. Her life, at that time and throughout the time she lived as a prostitute, is worth less than the image of wood carried in the procession, immortalized in false perfection (CORREIA, 1983, p. 164), but which will continue to serve as an example for the devotees.

Representing two sides of the same coin, the character is at the same time the idealized and condemned feminine, while being a saint, is a model for the faithful, as a prostitute, is abhorred. However, in none of these versions, Melânia has any chance of getting rid of the social

9 A SICK WOMAN: (*dominating the chorus of curses*) Run, run, sacrilegious blood! ...

MELÂNIA: (*broken voice*) Crazy! Crazy! It is the blood of Melânia Sabiani ... milk from all scoundrels ...

[...]

A SICK MAN: (*overlapping the cursing of the aggressors*) Burst, burst, filthy heart! ...

MELÂNIA (*more broken voice, trying in vain to escape the volley of aggressions*): I swear! ... I swear! ... It is the heart of Melânia Sabiani ... lair of all scorpions

[...]

ANOTHER SICK MAN (*standing out from the taunt of insults*) Suffer, suffer, pestilent meat! ...

MELÂNIA (*suffering*): Pity! ... Pity! ... It's the meat ... of Melânia ... Sabiani ... temple ... of all ... the specters ...
The Lashers take full care of her and punish her with disciplines, leaving her covered in blood while screaming.

LASHERS: For our sins! ... For our sins! ... For our sins! ... For our sins! ...

A hymn is sung in the distance by many voices. They all keep the instruments of aggression suspended in the air. Melânia falls to the ground.

A SICK WOMAN: Gloria, glory in excelsis!

Fury turns to joy. They lower their crutches, canes, etc.

A SICK MAN: The procession entered Gal!

ANOTHER SICK MAN: Let us salute the image of the saint!

ANOTHER SICK WOMAN: To celebrate her canonization she will perform many miracles.

ALL OF THEM: Let's all go! (CORREIA, 1983, p. 167 - 169)

bonds imposed on her and regulating her life. Melânia Sabiani may present several moments of satire against the religious order and the powers that control the life of the community, but the character turns out to be a caricature even in her few attempts at empowerment. When she tries to follow her feelings and challenge her parents for love, she ends up being trapped in a brothel as a punishment for her sins. In her life as a prostitute, she is exploited by everyone around her, losing her loved ones and any hope of dignity. Finally, when she reveals herself to the world as the real Melânia, she is killed by those who worshiped her under the sacred image.

Natália Correia creates in this character a mirror of a society in which the people, especially women, are subordinated to a system of power that has the capacity to shape it according to the interests of a ruling and discriminatory class. Men can govern and have momentary pleasures that are outside the prescribed norm. Women, on the other hand, have a life left in search of perfect sanctity, following the patriarchal ideal built with the intention of subjugating them, granting them the choice of roles that can be accepted by the group, such as that of an obedient woman, mother of a family or devotee of the Lord, as destined for withdrawal and vexation. In this Portuguese play, there is no happy ending for Melânia, whose figure is always at the service of the patriarchy.

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