

Female Voice/Male Perspective: The Uneasy Task of Revisiting Cultural Image Repertoire in *Antes que a Noite Venha* (1992)

Inês Alves Mendes

There are a multitude of examples for the way women writers today turn back to their heritage of cultural image repertoire, to repeat, invert and re-invent in the duplicitous gesture of miming and disclosing, of complying and resisting.

—Elizabeth Brofen. *Over Her Dead Body*

While in the context of the Salazar dictatorship Antigone embodied a veiled means of addressing the lack of freedom and civil rights, throughout the 1990s Antigone no longer voiced a political cause in Portugal. The shift to an interest in gender issues in the making of Antigone took place in a post-revolutionary and democratic society, where redefinitions of gender roles became a wider social concern. This was particularly true in the theater scene, as illustrated by the founding of the company Escola de Mulheres (Women's School). This feminist project, created in 1995 by women of different generations, aimed at overthrowing the subalternization of women in the Portuguese theater scene, whether in the conducting of creative processes or in the selection of repertoires and in the relationship with institutionalized powers.

Even though *Antes que a Noite Venha* (1992) cannot be properly said to be a feminist play, the text for theater, written by Eduarda Dionísio, systematically pays attention to women's corporeality and experiences, while avoiding the trap of fixing femininity within the limits of an essentialized category. This article explores the strategies

Dionísio uses in order to convey a new cultural figuration of Antigone while keeping within the imposed limitations of her work, commissioned by the actor/director Adriano Luz. I will illustrate how Dionísio and Luz's joint work is mutually contradictory: on the one hand, Luz maintains the cultural image repertoire and, on the other hand, Dionísio inscribes moments of resistance in her text for theater, paving the way for a redefinition of the stabilized cultural heritage and gender normativity.

Antes que a Noite Venha was performed in 1992 at the Teatro do Bairro Alto in Lisbon from March 13 to April 12. The play exhibited four mythological figures—Juliet, Antigone, Inês de Castro, and Medea—in the intimacy of period underwear (see fig. 1). Even though this is not a play exclusively about Antigone, it is worth acknowledging how this figure was interpreted in the 1990s in contrast with other mythological figures (and literary ones such as Juliet, or even historical characters with mythological contours, as is the case with the Portuguese Inês de Castro).

The performance was the joint work of the left-wing intellectual Dionísio¹ and the director Luz. It turned out to be a hybrid work. On the one hand, Luz conceived four female characters as prostitutes/mythological figures getting ready for a work shift before the night falls; hence the title, which can be translated into English as *Before the Night Falls*. On the other hand, Dionísio wrote four extremely poetic monologues, using a complex syntax and an eloquent tone, not matching the setting of prostitutes and drunken sailors intended by the director.

The female characters were supposed to be prostitutes recounting the grand narratives of mythological characters to entertain themselves to the extent that they would assume the narrative as theirs. Therefore, the text (also published in 1992) and the performance disagree in the outlook they propose for Juliet, Antigone, Inês de Castro and Medea. Nevertheless, both text and performance start with the monologue of Juliet and come to completion with Medea, thereby proposing a reading that goes from the youngest woman (the teenaged Juliet) to the oldest (the almost middle-aged Medea). This choice matches the director's idea that each of these mythological figures encapsulates different stages of a woman's life (Ferreira 7). For that reason, one might assume that Juliet stands for the role of girlfriend/bride, Antigone for the sister/bride, Inês for the mother/lover, and Medea for the mother/rejected wife. Luz summarizes the character's most relevant traits in an interview. According to the director, Antigone's role was to stand for an almost incestuous type of love (Ferreira 7), even though this motive is not significant in Dionísio's text. As for Inês, Luz defines her through her love for an absent man. The relationship between Medea and Jason is described as hate-filled, and only Juliet is presented as standing for a positive type of love, albeit a in tragic form (Ferreira 7). As can be inferred, the female characters are defined by their relation with a

masculine Other and all of them are the protagonists of tragic love stories, in keeping with tradition.

Furthermore, Luz declares in the same interview that his creative idea derived from his belief that “todas as mulheres têm um bocadinho de todos os mitos femininos” (Ferreira 7) (all women have a little of all the feminine myths). Even though his statement immediately resonates with an essentialist perception of femininity, this idea shaped the performance’s output and therefore is highly relevant here. How does a female author position herself and her contribution in the framework Luz set out to work with? Dionísio distances herself from Luz’s proposal in the play’s program:

É sempre assim: alguém que chega com uma ideia que nunca nos teria passado pela cabeça. À partida, mete noite, pouco ou mal dormida, copos e talvez ressaca; prostituta e marinheiro; amor e morte; música, provavelmente de acordeon. . . . Terá sido mais ou menos assim a encomenda, mais tudo o que a memória deitou fora. . . . Coube-me uma parte da incomodidade, ainda aqui: a responsabilidade pelo que não cola com os neons das entradas dos bares e com a indiferença de um marinheiro que no dia seguinte está a milhas do porto onde o conhecemos. (*Antes que a Noite Venha*)

(It is always like this: someone comes up with an idea that would have never crossed your mind. To start with, it involves night, [having] barely slept, drinks and maybe a hangover; a prostitute and a sailor; love and death; music, probably from an accordion. . . . The commission must have been more or less like this plus all the rest that memory trashes. . . . I was given part of the discomfort: the responsibility for what does not match with the neon of the bar’s entrance and the indifference of a sailor who will, the next day, be miles away from the port where we met him.)

This excerpt (afterwards recycled in the preface to the published version of *Antes que a Noite Venha*) clearly states that Dionísio’s composition was written as an assignment for Luz. This task was not performed without uneasiness, given that her four monologues hardly match the director’s vision of drunken sailors and prostitutes meeting in a port.² And this is all the more so when taking into account that Dionísio’s text is rooted in the Portuguese and European dramatic and lyrical canon. The intertextual dialogue engages with metaphors and arguments from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, from Sophocles’ *Antigone*, from the Camonian Inês de Castro in *Lusíadas*, canto III, from the Portuguese classical play *Castro* by António Ferreira, and the Euripidean *Medea*. Furthermore, the text dialogues with the static play *O Marinheiro* (1915) by Fernando Pessoa, fashioned in a symbolist manner, while Pessoa still admired and rivalled the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck.

Dionísio is quite aware of the contradictory languages she and the director put forward. In the preface to the edition of the text for theater, Dionísio accurately points out: “Se continuarmos a pensar que é preciso um qualquer conflito para que o teatro exista, o conflito aqui (e porque assim era a proposta que me empurrou para o delito destas *remakes*) não está no interior dos textos, mas deverá nascer da luta entre o texto e a encenação” (emphasis in the original, 11) (If we insist on thinking that some kind of conflict is necessary in order for theater to exist, the conflict here [because the assignment pushed me to the misdeed of these *remakes*] is not inside the text, but rather should emerge from the struggle between text and staging). This statement demonstrates Dionísio’s strategy to distance herself from the director’s perspective by highlighting the tense relationship between text and staging. By stripping canonical characters from their familiar setting and by opting out of conflict, Dionísio and Luz’s joint work illustrates the fraught relationship of double authorship on different levels, as shall be demonstrated.

Moreover, the dismissal of the dramatic conflict shows Dionísio’s familiarity with contemporary theater praxis. In fact, the 1990s can be characterized as a period of “post-dramatic” theatrical experimentation in Portugal.³ Within this context, the English term she uses to define the sequences or monologues she created, *remakes*, points precisely to the reworking of tradition in a contemporary (and postmodern) world where terms from the film and television industry pervade the language.

The overall ambiguity of the play is rooted in its the genesis as, on the one hand, it is a female author that consolidates Luz’s fictional construction and, on the other hand, it is the work of a female author recycling characters long established by the male canon of Western dramatic tradition. The epigraph to this paper, an insightful statement by Elizabeth Bronfen, accurately conveys the way in which women writers often revisit canonical texts “to repeat, invert, and reinvent in the duplicitous gesture of miming and disclosing, of complying and resisting” (Bronfen 66). *Antes que a Noite Venha* further confirms Bronfen’s assertion as Dionísio’s literary task consists in repeating and reinventing the heritage of the cultural image repertoire and, in doing so, she too leaves traces of compliance and resistance.

The chosen female characters deal with female oppression on different levels as they all illustrate the perils and vulnerability female protagonists face when romantic love is involved.⁴ One might assume that, to a woman author, the reappraisal of canonical female protagonists means first and foremost an effort to do justice to characters who have often conveyed an essentialized perspective of femininity. In Dionísio’s case, she skilfully performs this task by revisiting feminine representation through the embodiment of cultural models, which she ultimately transgresses.

The psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell, having written prolifically on psychoanalysis and feminism, has argued that women authors forge their

subjectivity in the context of a phallogentric cultural system that they simultaneously interiorize and subvert (Mitchell 405). Assuming that female authorship is, like the formation of female subjectivity, shaped in a patriarchal discursive context, then the representation of women by women authors will incorporate both elements of submission to and rebellion against the context in which it occurs. The intrinsic contradiction in the process of female authorship becomes, in the case of female authors' rewriting of canonical female characters, all the more challenging. With regard to *Antes que a Noite Venha* in particular, revisiting literary and dramatic female characters is a work of revisiting and rewriting male imagination as recorded throughout the centuries and as later conceived by director Luz.

Thus, within the limitations imposed by the commissioning of *Antes que a Noite Venha*, it turns out to be a work that nonetheless voices a feminine and an insurgent perspective. This is achieved by subverting authority through its embodiment, as Dionísio's intertextual work clearly illustrates. In the play, there is a man dressed as a sailor, playing an accordion on stage throughout the representation (see fig. 1). The music and the stage are the only elements connecting the four women and the sailor, since there is no exchange between them. The sailor, in fact, could be said to embody a ghostly presence, that of the absent men whose presence was mediated through the women's storytelling (Romeo in the case of Juliet, Haemon and Polyneices in the context of Antigone's monologue, Dom Pedro in Inês de Castro's section, and Jason in the case of Medea). The selection of a sailor and four women evokes the drama *O Marinheiro*, with which this play establishes a privileged dialogue.

O Marinheiro was written in 1913 and first published by Pessoa in 1915, in the first issue of the modernist magazine *Orpheu*. The play touches upon one of the most recurrent of Pessoa's themes: the difficulty in differentiating between life and dream, between the real and the unreal. There are four female characters in this drama: three of them are keeping watch over the corpse of a fourth while they tell each other stories to pass away the night.

In the 1915 play, the border between the real and the unreal, which is questioned immediately at the start of the drama, attains a new dimension when the second watcher tells her story about a mariner lost on an island, and suggests that they could all be in this mariner's dreams and not the other way around (Pessoa 28). Could the watchers be characters that the sailor has dreamed up or, on the contrary, are they dreaming about him? The absent (yet present) sailor sets them off on an interior journey that ends as soon as the morning arrives and a watcher says "sim, acordou alguém" (Pessoa 32) (yes, someone woke up). Therefore, the ending implies that the four women were the products of someone's imagination, most likely the sailor's. In this drama—characterized as "static" by Pessoa (20)—it is suggested that the four women are the construct of a male mind, a sailor lost on a desert island

who entertains himself by inventing a substitute country and substitute past in order to deal with the pain of the lost homeland. In Dionísio's 1992 work, these elements are recovered: the four women are in the presence of a sailor who does not dialogue with them. Furthermore, the action takes place at dusk (an intermediary space between day and night), which corresponds to the inverse option of the Pessoaan play, located between the end of the night and the break of day.

The choice of the four female characters, the selection of a moment "in between" temporalities and, moreover, the presence of the absent (yet present) sailor, unquestionably points to a dialogue between the two plays. Nevertheless, a crucial difference must be pointed out. Pessoa's sailor can work in parallel with the emasculated Portugal of the aftermath of the British *Ultimatum*: both sailor and the country look desperately for a new identity and it is through fiction (the sailor's and the country's nostalgic return to the glorious past) that they find alienation and relief from the present. As is widely known, looking back in time to avoid the present was a recurrent strategy of the *Renascença Portuguesa* and of the young Pessoa, who was a part of this literary and cultural movement for a short while.⁵

In *O Marinheiro*, the sailor, in his efforts to forget his much loved homeland, invents a new one for himself: he creates a "falsa pátria" (Pessoa 19) (fake homeland). The rejection of the present and the recreation of a new country through imagination can be read in the context of the wider attempts at national renovation carried out by Pessoa, particularly in *Mensagem* (1934), where the myth is presented as a means of overcoming the straightened times.

As for *Antes que a Noite Venha*, the sailor has a different symbolic dimension. He recalls not only the post-imperial sailor, but he also embodies the evoked absent men. Moreover, the sailor embodies the visible face of the men that soon will look for prostitutes, conveying a specific sociologic context; that of the mercantile exploration of the feminine body. Thus, even though the emasculated figure of the unoccupied sailor can address a problematic post-imperial national identity, in the 1990s, it addresses primarily the instrumentalization of the feminine sex and the embodiment of absent characters.

If the sailor haunted women's imagination in the play from 1915, in the later work he has a body (he is an embodied being). Forged in the palimpsest of the Pessoaan sailor, the later play conveys a masculine Other that must listen to the feminine narration. Therefore, the sailor remains on stage throughout the representation and embodies a spectral interlocutor to whom it is granted to listen but not to intervene, to witness but not to interfere in the feminine world recreated on stage. In other words, the sailor works as the privileged site for fantasy and projection and therefore might stand as a trope of empty masculinity. He embodies the absent yet present spectral male figure and, by doing so, exposes (post-imperial) masculinity as an empty category.

The parallels between *O Marinheiro* and *Antes que a Noite Venha* are extended to the structure of the compositions. In both, the dramatic action evolves from narrative to narrative. In Pessoa's play, the static quality of the drama expands into the characters' motion on stage, as the watchers twice think of getting up but twice decide against it. Therefore, the drama evolves around a woman lying in a coffin with the other three standing by, watching over her:

SEGUNDA VELADORA. . . . Só viver é que faz mal . . . Não rocemos pela vida nem a orla das nossas vestes . . . Não, não vos levanteis. Isso seria um gesto, e cada gesto interrompe um sonho . . . Neste momento eu não tinha sonho nenhum, mas é-me suave pensar que o podia estar tendo . . . (*Marinheiro* 11)

(SECOND WATCHER. . . . Only life is harmful . . . Better not even to brush it with the hems of our dresses . . . No, don't get up. That would be an action, and every action interrupts a dream . . . I wasn't having a dream right now, but it's nice to imagine I could have been . . .). (*Marinheiro* 20)

Even though the watchers' immobility can be read in the wider context of Pessoa's work (where the inner journey is preferred over an external journey and life itself), in both plays narration becomes an escape to the present reality or to what shall come: the night and the daybreak which are, in other words, the end of fiction. In Dionsio's play, however, immobility does not restrict the performance, as the characters move freely—but it does affect the text for theater. Effectively, the characters suffer from a claustrophobic isolation similar to that of the watchers:

INÊS DE CASTRO. Estou fechada neste sonho de lobos e leões e nesta sala, incapaz da alegria que tenho quando ele chega. . . . Estou mais quieta que um cadáver frente a ti, espelho onde já me sequei. A morte não pode mais que eu na imobilidade que tenho. (Dionísio 46)

(INÊS DE CASTRO. I am locked in this dream of wolves and lions and in this room, unable of the joy I have when he arrives. . . . I am quieter than a body in front of you, mirror where I have already buried myself. Death cannot exceed me in the immobility I have.)

In Dionísio's text, immobility becomes an augur of impending death. And death is used as a means of empowerment, as we can see from the cases of *Antigone* and *Medea*.

According to the published text, Antigone's monologue comes second, after the teenager Juliet and before the fully-grown Inês de Castro. The text for theater is structured in four different monologues, each matching one female protagonist (Juliet, Antigone, Inês, and Medea). Each character has her monologue divided into three subsections and each of these is addressed to a separate interlocutor, human or not. This arrangement has been compared to operatic arias, given the suspension of action, the emotional and lyric intensity of each monologue, and the cohesion of imagery of each section and subsection (Serôdio 44).

In *Antes que a Noite Venha*, Antigone's three subsections and three absent interlocutors are as follows: "Address to the resigned sister," "Address to the (not) forgotten lover," and "Address to the dead brother." Antigone does not address Creon or the Choir, the privileged interlocutors in the Sophoclean play. Thus there is a shift from the traditional confrontation between Antigone and the king to the intimate environment of her closest and dearest ones. The confrontation between Antigone and Creon would enable a questioning of the state and raise questions about Antigone's role within the community. By leaving this matter aside, Dionísio portrays Antigone in the intimate sphere of her closest affections, focusing instead on the family crisis and on personal relationships. In fact, the distancing from a political plot takes place in a period (the 1990s) characterized as neo-Brechtian (Vasques 8) insofar as the political elements only surface on stage in an oblique manner, in this case through the politicization of domestic relationships.

Unlike the remaining feminine characters of the drama, who voice their pain, terror and feeling of abandonment as they wait for the arrival of a desired male lover, Antigone keeps both her fiancé and her dead brother waiting for her in "Fala ao amante (não) esquecido" (Address to the [not] forgotten lover):

Eu o arrastei até à água da fonte que tinha perto.
 Eu o lavei.
 Eu o estendi nas ervas tenras que crescem da lama.
 E ele esperou, como tu esperavas, e mais que tu esperou.
 até que a noite fosse manhã,
 e a cova tivesse o tamanho certo onde só ele só e nenhum outro
 coubesse. (Dionísio 40)

(I dragged him to the water of the fountain nearby
 I washed him.
 I laid him in the tender grass that grows from mud.
 And he waited, as you waited, and more than you he waited,
 until the night was morning,
 and the hole would be the right size where only him and no one else
 could fit.)

This is not the only element presenting Antigone in proximity to the absent male characters. Antigone, like Medea, is associated with a warrior male *ethos* as she claims her thirst for revenging her dead brother. Indeed, her decision to die by her own hands can be read as the death of a warrior on the battlefield, as can be inferred by the second section of her monologue, “Address to the (not) forgotten lover”: “Que a morte verdadeira chegue aqui muito depressa e seja igual à tua, meu irmão” (Dionísio 41) (May true death come in haste and may it be equal to yours, my brother). The identification with the dead brother prevails over the identification with Haemon, a stance which Antigone defends by paraphrasing the classical argument (Sophocles 92): “e sabe que o que fiz por ele [Polinices] / Nunca por ti faria” (Dionísio 39) (and know that what I have done for him [Polyneices] / I would never do for you). By distancing herself from Haemon, Antigone expresses a performative self-consciousness that draws her to warn her fiancé of the uselessness of his own suicide. This warning gesture is a significant break from the classical argument:

Aqui estou no teu palacio . . .
 Desobediente
 no maior amor que a noite viu.
 Banhada na alegria da minha imensa teimosia.
 Que a tua morte não seja posta sobre a minha,
 ó doce príncipe
 que não conhece nem razão nem força bastante
 para ter vida assim. (Dionísio 40)

(Here I am in your palace . . .
 Disobedient
 in the greatest love the night has seen.
 Bathed in the joy of my immense stubbornness.
 May your death not to be laid down over mine,
 O sweet prince,
 who does not know reason nor enough strength
 to have such a life.)

In fact, Antigone’s performative self-awareness permeates her monologue from the beginning. The self-referential incorporation of the denouement points to an ironic reappraisal of the canon. Furthermore, drawing attention to the male suicide tones down women’s victimization, as female protagonists also have the ability to victimize. This not only destabilizes the highly patriarchal context recreated here, but it also proves that men might find patriarchal structures similarly oppressive.

The last subsection, dedicated to the dead brother, matches the Sophoclean *kommós* (Sophocles 90–91). Antigone says farewell to existence and mourns the life and the fiancé she chooses to leave. The

truly original character of this passage is, nevertheless, not connected to the *pathos* of leaving life, as recreated here in accordance with the Sophoclean drama, but is found in the way in which Antigone is presented as an embodied being. In this context, the senses acquire a very expressive value enabling a depiction of an embodied Antigone. In “Fala ao irmão morto” (Address to the dead brother), the last sub-section of Antigone’s monologue, hearing is the first sense to be stirred, as Antigone describes the closing of the cave’s entrance with a heavy stone (Dionísio 42). Subsequently, vision and hearing are brought to the forefront; the tactile perceptions of the cave’s humidity, the texture of her clothes, and her body’s temperature, also play a part in the recreation of Antigone’s experiences in the cave (42), before dying by her own hands:

Tenho os pés molhados e um tecido fino entre os dedos.
 Com os dentes e as unhas em sete tiras estreitas o fui rasgando. . . .
 Não mais as vestirei.
 Desfaço as tranças, desprendo o cabelo, cubro-me com este pequeno calor. . . .
 Procuro as pontas e dou os nós como me ensinaram em menina.
 (Dionísio 42)

(I have wet feet and a thin tissue between my fingers.
 With my teeth and nails, into seven slim strips I have torn it. . . .
 No longer shall I wear it.
 I undo my braids, I loosen my hair, I cover myself with this little warmth. . . .
 I look for the ends and I tie the knots as I was taught as a girl.)

The focus on Antigone’s corporeity draws her nearer to a contemporary spectator (or reader of the text) who, conscious of the dramatic tradition, can now see it with fresh eyes by picturing an embodied Antigone and, what is more, the gendering of a feminine Antigone. Antigone’s tearing of her tunic into seven strips in order to tie the knot with which she will later commit suicide is a key element to the forging of a subversive feminine identity. Indeed, the feminine clothes can be transformed into a lethal weapon. If cutting and assembling cloth has been a task traditionally assigned to women, then this same task can be reinterpreted within a new frame of reference. Nicole Loraux has demonstrated how the appropriation of signs culturally defined as feminine frequently encapsulates an ironic remark in classical tragedy (64). Similarly, in the contemporary text, feminine clothes can be used to subvert the learnt codes of femininity to the point of annihilation. What is more, the contemporary Antigone describes her death self-reflexive awareness:

Abraço-me no linho até que a garganta rompa,

não passe o som, se rasgue o respirar
 neste grande segredo onde me hão-de encontrar
 julgando-me ainda viva
 e roída de muitos medos. (Dionísio 42)

(I hug myself in the linen until my throat is ripped,
 [until] there is no sound, [until] the breathing is torn apart
 in this great secret where they shall find me
 thinking I am still alive
 and a bundle of nerves.)

Dionísio's contemporary Antigone slyly winks at her classical counterpart as she performs her own death with self-reflexive awareness. By commenting her death, Antigone directly interpolates literary tradition and subverts it through the use of irony, as happened beforehand in her address to her suicidal groom. Therefore, death is repeatedly exposed as a literary convention more than the tragic outcome of a series of misfortunes.

In order to renovate and rewrite tradition, Dionísio opts for recording Antigone's sensations, bringing flesh to her body. If the text for the theater and the play are not political in their outlook, Dionísio's work is nonetheless political in the sense that the experiences of a feminine body are voiced. Antigone's monologue records its experiences from a markedly gendered point of view and this alone constitutes a political gesture that would have sufficed to grant a feminist viewpoint to the play—if only the director had not drowned this out by casting Antigone in the homogenous category of the prostitute/woman in period underwear.

The last monologue (Medea's) mirrors the way in which Dionísio resists and reworks the cultural heritage she sets out to work with. In the framework of the limited creative freedom Dionísio had in the theatrical context, the publication allows her to start afresh with a separate cultural production. It is my contention that keeping Medea's monologue as the last in the published text, as happened in the performance, is a decision imbued with meaning. By presenting Juliet, Antigone, Inês, and Medea at the same level, as if illustrating a fixed category (or the feminine experience of love, according to the director), the play depicts women's vulnerability and essentializes femininity. Nevertheless, by having Medea's section as the last published monologue, the text inscribes a new meaning while keeping with the play's structure.

There is a parallel in the way the young Juliet commits suicide because of love and in Antigone's act of killing herself because she is faithful to her brother. The same applies to Inês, who is killed because she loves the king's son. In fact, all these characters must die because they loved a male Other and, thus, they render explicit the sociocultural dangers of a romantic liaison with a masculine Other. Medea, on the other hand, kills because she loves and her love is betrayed. Even though

she can easily be seen as a monstrous Other herself, especially as an almost middle-aged woman and a mother, she is nevertheless the only one who eludes death brought about by a romantic affair with a masculine counterpart. From the literary and dramatic canonical characters selected here, Medea is the one who best expresses female empowerment, perhaps in an even more radical fashion than Antigone herself. Therefore, regardless of whether she can be perceived as a monstrous mother (or precisely because of being such) Medea survives, contradicting a global reading of the text as an illustration of female martyrdom.

The cultural figuration of the woman mother as a monstrous Other to the male norm (Braidotti 79–80) magnifies an ambivalent reading in the context of this drama. If it is true that Medea stabilizes the cultural figuration of an excessive maternal Other, it is also true that it is precisely this trait that allows an overcoming of female martyrdom.

Antigone's self-reflexive comments on her death, while she hangs herself, present dying as an empowering performative act that enables a parody of the Sophoclean text. By commenting on the surprise she will arouse in those who find her body, Antigone's gesture is emptied of tragic grandeur. Moreover, the contemporary text highlights how Antigone's suicide is perpetuated through the knots she "was taught as a girl" (42). This works as a metaphor for what Dionísio does: by incorporating the canon she uses it as weapon that destabilizes canonical structures. Dionísio's incorporation of and dialogue with canonical texts, such as the Sophoclean *Antigone*, Euripidean *Medea*, and Pessoa's *O Marinheiro*, to mention but a few, shows how Dionísio engages with the Western male canon by mimicking it, parodying it, and ultimately reinstating new possibilities in the liminal zone of rewriting with and against the canon. On the empirical grounds of external constraints, the commissioning of her work by a male director also fostered the resorting to a liminal creative space. Therefore, the work of Dionísio illustrates how the appropriation of the Western andocentric imagination can be an act of nonconformity, even under the most extreme circumstances.

Finally, by embodying Antigone and grounding her experiences in a feminine body, Dionísio's reappraisal of this figure brings to the forefront the feminine body as a location from which canonical figures can be revisited. Nevertheless, her work does not consolidate femininity in the voicing of the body. Rather, Antigone's self-reflexive death, with its clear ironic dimension, directs us to reading it as an escape to gender normativity. It is my contention that death brings not only agency to Antigone; it allows her to pave the way for a fluid gender identity.

Notes

1. Dionísio is a left-wing intellectual and the daughter of the well-known neo-realist painter and writer Mário Dionísio (1916–1993). She has cooperated with

amateur and professional theater companies (Ateneu Cooperativo de Lisboa, Cornucópia, O Bando e Contra-Regra) as a cenographer, a translator, and author of texts such as *Dou-che-lou vivo*, *dou-che-lou morto* (1981) and *Primavera Negra* (1993).

2. Dionísio also highlights how it is not her own project in an interview to newspaper *Público*, *Fim de Semana*: “Estas quatro personagens femininas—que talvez não escolhesse, porque não fui eu que as escolhi, e é bom que se repita que se trata de uma encomenda” (Ferreira 9) (These four feminine characters—that maybe I would not choose, because I have not chosen them and it is good to repeat that this is a commissioned work).
3. As the acclaimed German critic Hans-Thies Lehmann states, “When the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality, but as an imposed ‘manufacture,’ as a mere sham of a logic that only serves clichés . . . then theater is confronted with the question of possibilities beyond drama” (26).
4. On the contrary to the other female characters selected for the play, Medea has been unequivocally appropriated by women’s studies as an emancipated figure, as illustrated by McDonald (297–323).
5. This friendship is established in 1912, but the following year Pessoa immediately distanced himself from *Renascença Portuguesa* as its organ, the magazine *A Águia*, refused to publish his play *O Marinheiro*. This detachment is rendered visible in 1914, in a letter to Álvaro Pinto. See Quadros and Costa (145–47).

Works Cited

- Alves Mendes, Inês. “Do texto para o palco: Antígona no teatro português do século XX (1946–1993).” PhD Dissertation. University of Oxford, 2010.
- Antes que a Noite Venha. By Eduarda Dionísio. Dir. Adriano Luz. Teatro do Bairro Alto, Lisbon. 13 March–12 April 1992. Program of performance. Archive nr. 219971. Archives of Museu Nacional do Teatro. Print.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Print.
- Bronfen, Elizabeth. *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006 [1992]. Print.
- Dionísio, Eduarda. *Antes que a Noite Venha*. Lisbon: Cotovia/ Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, 1992. Print.
- _____. Preface. “Em Flagrante Delito.” *Antes que a Noite Venha*. Lisbon: Cotovia/ Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, 1992. 11–14. Print.
- Ferreira, Ana Gomes. “Um acesso de ‘voyeurismo.’” *Público Fim de Semana*. 13 Mar. 1992: D5. Print.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theater*. Trans. Karen Jürs-Munby. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Lorax, Nicole. *Façons Tragiques de Tuer une Femme*. Paris: Hachette, 1985. Print.
- Mateus, Rui. *Antes que a Noite Venha*. 1992. Stage photograph. *Cornucópia*. Teatro do Bairro Alto. Archives of Cornucópia. Item not catalogued. Print.
- McDonald, Marianne. “Medea as Politician and a Diva: Riding the Dragon into the Future.” *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*. Ed. James Clauss and Sarah Johnston. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. 297–323. Print.

- Pessoa, Fernando. "Carta a Álvaro Pinto, 12-11-1914." *Obra Poética e em Prosa*. Eds. António Quadros and Dalila Pereira da Costa. Vol. 2, Prosa 1. Porto: Lello, 1986. 145-47. Print.
- _____. *O Marinheiro: Drama Estático em um Quadro*. Porto: Arte e Cultura, 1960 [1915]. Print.
- _____. *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa*. Trans. and ed. Richard Zenith. New York: Grove, 2002. N. 20. *Google e-Books*. Web. 25 Aug. 2011.
- Serôdio, Maria Helena. "De Encontro a uma Poética do Trágico: Antes que a Noite Venha, de Eduarda Dionísio." *Texto e Imagem: Estudos de Teatro*. Eds. Maria Helena Werneck and Maria João Brilhante. Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2009. 29-48. Print.
- Sophocles. *Antígona*. Trans. Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira. 7th ed. Lisbon: FCG, 2008 [1958]. Print.
- Vasques, Eugénia. *9 Considerações em Torno do Teatro em Portugal nos Anos 90*. Lisboa: Ministério da Cultura/ Instituto Português das Artes do Espectáculo, 1998. Print.

Alves Mendez, Inês. "Female Voice/Male Perspective: The Uneasy Task of Revisiting Cultural Image Repertoire in *Antes que a Noite Venha*." *Whose Voice Is This? Iberian and Latin American Antigones*. Ed. Jennifer Duprey. *Hispanic Issues On Line* (Fall 2013): 205-218. Web.



Fig. 1. *Antes que a Noite Venha* (1992). Stage photograph by Rui Mateus (20,70 x 13,84cm). Cornucópia. Teatro do Bairro Alto. Courtesy of Cornucópia (item not catalogued).