

DEFIANCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS:
NÉLIDA PIÑON'S *A CASA DA PAIXÃO*

O Estado é a eterna visita em minha casa,
mesmo quando dela se ausenta.

[The State is the eternal visitor in my house,
even when it's not present.]

—Nélida Piñon
"O Jardim das Oliveiras"
O Calor das Coisas

It is no easy task to try to describe Brazilian writer Nélida Piñon's position with regard to politics. For example, questions have been raised regarding her supposed ambivalent position vis-à-vis the military regime (1964–85). On the one hand, she has had to respond to charges of complicity with the regime, making public statements denying any involvement with IPES (Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais—Brazilian Institute for Research and Social Studies), a civilian organization that was an arm of the dictatorship.¹ On the other, she has been hailed as "a militant writer" and sees literature and language as ethical and politically charged spheres.² With regard to gender politics and women's writing, things seem easier to define. In an interview just before she was to be elected to the prestigious Academia Brasileira de Letras, Piñon observed candidly that the literary establishment along with its artistic models and aesthetic criteria are masculine and that a woman writer must be doubly competent to succeed in such an environment.³ As one of the most recognized and prolific contemporary women writers of Brazil, author of over ten volumes of narrative, Piñon has succeeded, in spite of the problems faced by women who write, in spite of being termed by some a "difficult" writer.⁴ When asked, on another occasion, if she is a feminist she responds that she is "naturally" a femi-

nist, that her feminism is merely a consequence of her being a woman (interview with Clarice Lispector 193).

Certainly, gender plays a significant role in her writing. At least one reader has suggested, for example, that her 1972 experimental novel *A Casa da Paixão* [The House of Passion] is an allegory of the interplay of the masculine and the feminine.⁵ But, if this is indeed the case, the ending of the allegory, the virtual "moral" of the story, would seem particularly difficult to take for the feminist reader. Throughout the novel, between *bildungsroman* and psychosexual fable, the protagonist (Marta) struggles for her sexual autonomy, forming a sensual relationship with the sun, rebelling against her incestuously desirous father (pai), and resisting the father's understudy and supplanter (Jerônimo). After a complex series of transformations, however, Marta ends up entering into a mythic sexual union with Jerônimo and finally promises him: "Sou sua mulher, vou para onde você quiser . . ." / "I am your woman, I will go wherever you wish" (122). Both this formulaic final line and the harmonious conclusion in general seem shockingly contradictory and traditional if one has read the novel as promoting woman's radical reappropriation of her own body and sexuality. Yet, interpretations of the text have been surprisingly positive and uncritical in this regard, reading the final outcome as the plausible result of the mystical textual and sexual transformations of the novel.

Naomi Hoki Moniz, for example, explores the cosmic enterprise of *A Casa*, reading the process of writing as well as Marta's psychosexual development from within a Jungian and, to a lesser degree, Lacanian framework. Moniz remains, for the most part, uncritical of the final outcome, seeing it in positive terms in that, first, it does not elide sexual difference or collapse the masculine and feminine in order to attain liberation and that, second, it shows that woman must develop her "masculinity" (her *animus* in Jungian terms) in order to achieve a certain "reconciliation" with her partner.⁶ In other words, Moniz reads the ending of the book as a culmination of the utopian impulses in the text, seeing this "reconciliation," this restoration of harmony, as the natural and desired outgrowth of the recuperative strategies of the narrative. In a similar way, Sônia Régis, in her *Posfácio* [Postscript] included in *A Casa*, also takes a positive view of the outcome, pointing out—but not problematizing—how the female body becomes the site of the textual/sexual fecundation that takes place at the end of the novel (143). Régis also sees the ending in terms of the novel's utopian project, finding the mythical union to be a rebirth and, evidently, the groundwork for new beginnings.⁷

Both of these readings seem on target in their appraisal of the utopian function in this text. Piñon's novel certainly does propose a salvation through sexual union. The heterosexual pair becomes a metaphor for the harnessing of the most fertile of human energies; and sexuality is construed as a path for the redemption of the human being, heretofore divided against itself through the binary split between masculine and feminine, mind and body, word and thing. The fusion implied in the sexual union at the end of the novel thus comes to signify a union of two seemingly opposite forces (masculine and feminine)—not only in the carnal joining of Marta and Jerônimo but also in Marta's realization of her masculine side (through her contact with the sun) and Jerônimo's affirmation of his femininity (symbolized by his immersion in the river, a feminine element in the novel). Hence, sexual union becomes an allegorical figure for harmony and a sort of dynamic symmetry. Furthermore, as we shall see, this erotic coupling becomes a mystical ritual, a medium for reaching transcendence.

In my view, however, this positive hermeneutic is not sufficient. As we shall see, Piñon's text also launches a vehement denunciation of the patriarchal system and the workings of the "law of the father." In Lacan's psychoanalytic model, the "law of the father" refers to the system of social and psychosexual prohibitions by which the social subject is discursively formed and governed. In Piñon's novel, such a conceptualization of the "law of the father" is implicated, as we shall see, as the unnamed father attempts to control Marta and determine how she becomes a woman. The "pai," seen this way, virtually personifies the father function; indeed he is quite literally "*the name of the father*" in which "we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan 67). The utopian goal implicit in denouncing this patriarchal ideology would include the freeing of the feminine subject to take hold of her own desire and sexual pleasure and, therefore, her own subjectivity. Moniz has pointed out this important aspect of the novel: "Piñon affirms and vindicates a woman's right to sexual pleasure and she creates a vocabulary that violates cultural taboos and gives expression to feminine sexuality" ("*Ética, Estética*" 138). Yet, in this regard, the ending of the novel would seem dystopic in that it is emblematic of the very appropriation of the female body that is endemic to the patriarchal structure. We must ultimately ask ourselves about the relationship between *A Casa's* critique of the patriarchal structure and its utopian impulse, or, to put it in Fredric Jame-

son's terms, we need to strive for a "simultaneous recognition of the ideological and Utopian functions of the artistic text."⁸

I agree with Jameson that effective cultural analysis must practice a negative hermeneutic function (uncovering the ideological functionality of a text) while also engaging in a positive hermeneutic (paying close attention to the text's utopian postulations). I disagree, however, with his assertion that marxism is the only critical method that currently assumes this negative hermeneutic.⁹ Both deconstruction and feminisms are involved—in different ways—in such a methodology. I do think, however, that the negative hermeneutic function in feminism is often most active in feminist readings of male-authored texts. Indeed, my view of the interpretations of *A Casa da Paixão* is that up to now they have analyzed the utopian projections of the novel without focusing extensively on the ideological critique and the possible ideological contradictions embodied in the text. As Paul Ricoeur has put it, hermeneutics involves a "double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen: vow of rigor, vow of obedience" (27). When reading texts authored by women, it is especially important for us to be willing to suspect because our *own* utopian projections make us more than willing to listen.

For *A Casa da Paixão*, then, I propose a certain will to suspicion. While acknowledging (listening to) the utopian impulse involved in the realization of the creative possibilities of the feminized body, we must also ask whether the male's realization of his "feminine" side, the celebration of the corporeal on the altar of the female body, is actually any different from patriarchy's traditional use of the woman as sacrificial mediator.¹⁰ Furthermore, the sexual liaison at the end of the novel, touted as a utopian reconciliation of differences, ultimately posits sexuality as "natural" and as somehow outside the social forces against which Marta rebels. Thus, there seem to be conflicting views of the sex/gender system here: one that sees sexuality as social product and thus changeable and another in which masculine and feminine are timeless, essential archetypes beyond sociopolitical context. The possibilities for a female and feminist agency are obviously quite different in these two models. Hence, my goal is twofold: to disentangle the seemingly conflicting strains of the narrative—simultaneously a critique and a utopian foundation for a "new order"—and ultimately to explore the political implications of the resolution posited by Piñon's text. To accomplish this I focus on both *A Casa's* ideological critique as well as the contradiction between this critique and the novel's harmonious conclusion.

To my mind, *A Casa da Paixão* involves a blatant critique of the status quo regarding the process of gendering. The story of Marta and her sexual development radically transgresses various patriarchal patterns of narrative, undermining many of the "scripts" that ideologically govern how one "becomes a woman".¹¹ Piñon's particular allegory of sexual politics defies and delegitimizes several narratives that place women in passive roles: the traditional gendering sequence where the female is successfully socialized in the image of male desire, the exchange plot where women are traded amongst men, and the transformation myth plot where the hero rescues his woman from the clutches of an evil, powerful female figure.¹² Even though, as we shall see, this text ends up reinscribing the status quo in its contradictory and conservative finale, it *does* manage to enact, along the way, a surprisingly radical series of transgressions that serve as emblems of resistance to patriarchal authority and that promote woman's reappropriation of her own body and sexuality. Such defiance of the father's law indeed becomes a way to open a new narrative space, to attempt to write what has rarely been written: a feminine erotics where the female body is not merely an instrument of male pleasure.

But there is also another area where I suggest a certain will to suspicion. As my discussion so far attests, *A Casa da Paixão* seems to be a "political" text principally with regard to gender. There is hardly any explicit reference at all as to a specific sociopolitical context. This undoubtedly has to do with Piñon's literary concerns at the time, that is, her preoccupation with language, with myth, and with creating new forms of expression. It may even have to do with the level of state censorship in effect in the early 70s when the military regime was clamping down on any form of resistance to its authoritarian policies.¹³ Whatever the cause, politics is often only obliquely present in much of Piñon's earlier narrative. As critic Lúcia Helena Costigan points out, Piñon had usually been noted for linguistically transgressive, "intimist" and "poetic," but not necessarily politically engaged, prose (148). Even so, Piñon insists on the political and ethical implications of literary language in interviews. She explicitly associates the literary avant-garde with "a permanent critique of the social and linguistic system" and an "intransigent ethical attitude in the exercise of the means of expression" (interview with Lispector 189). Her experimentation with language is thus far from apolitical.¹⁴ For her, language and power are very closely aligned (interview with Lispector 192). Nonetheless, sociopolitical themes and specifically the Brazilian dictatorship are

even more explicitly explored in her later narrative when, it must be pointed out, state repression had been considerably relaxed. For instance, her collection of stories *O Calor das Coisas* [The Heat of Things] (1980), which contains representations of political repression and torture; the historical saga *A República dos Sonhos* [The Republic of Dreams] (1984), which narrates four generations of a Brazilian family; and *A Doce Canção de Caetana* [Caetana's Sweet Song] (1987), which takes place in a small town in Brazil during the military dictatorship's supposed "Economic Miracle" of the 1970s, are all directly engaged with the sociopolitical context of authoritarianism.¹⁵ Compared to these somewhat more "realist" texts, *A Casa da Paixão* seems far less historically referential and far more aesthetically preoccupied. Yet, without trying to reduce or bracket the aesthetic complexities of the text, we must also consider what happens when we read *A Casa* in its political context, when we read its indictment of the gendering process as well as its linguistic experimentalism *within* the context of Brazil's oppressive military regime. What happens, in other words, when we read the private, even intimate "house" of the "House of Passion" as an allegorical figure for the public "house" of the nation under authoritarian rule?

In this chapter, then, we will see how transgression—manifested in this novel as daughterly defiance or rebellion against paternal law—provides a means of imagining both a female sexuality not predicated on the phallus as ultimate signifier of desire and a women's writing not subject to the same old narrative patterns. Such a challenge to patriarchal law not only deauthorizes dominant sexual and textual codes but also, as I will suggest, obliquely questions the authority of the dictatorial, paternalistic political regime in Brazil at the time. Finally, we will turn to the troubling ending of Piñon's work, to that place where her radical disarticulation of oppressive patterns bumps up against ideological constraints that necessarily provide the context for her text.

Defying the Patriarch's Plots: Transgression as Narrative Strategy

The narrative of *A Casa da Paixão* seems at once strikingly original and eerily familiar. It is, on the most basic level, the story of how Marta strives to "become a woman," how she struggles to assume a subjectivity and sexuality of her own, through and against the various "scripts" laid out by masculine dominated systems of

representation. In this way, Marta's story retells a very old and well-known tale: the drama by which we become gendered subjects. Told without the euphemism and adornment of mimetic description, Piñon's often abstract rendition of this sequence lays bare the very political nature of the gendering process itself. As the father plots out the path for Marta to follow, she, in turn, repeatedly rebels against this preordained order, frustrating the father in his attempts to take control of her body and sexuality. As we shall see, Marta defies her father's will to control her destiny by enacting a transgressive, antipatriarchal sexuality, thus attempting to seek out her own sexual autonomy and, ultimately, to write her own story.

Certainly, *A Casa* details Marta's struggle to assume a sexuality and a subjectivity of her own. But the narrative path of the first five sections of the novel is plotted not by Marta but by the father. During the first part of the novel, Marta hardly speaks and we are informed of her attitudes and behaviors through a third-person narrative. Indeed, Marta is seen and observed but rarely heard until she reacts to Jerônimo in the sixth (and central) section of the book. At that point, as we shall see, Marta takes control of events, stops reacting and starts acting, forcing the father and Jerônimo to follow in her footsteps. In other words, Marta takes up the plotting prerogative, becoming the one who determines the direction of the narrative.

But, in the beginning, while Marta is hardly passive, her *modus operandi* is mainly to escape, to defy, and to negate the father's plot. The goal of Marta's defiance is, in a sense, to attain signifying power, to assume the subject (rather than object) position in her narrative. Indeed, as Moniz points out, "Marta's appropriation of sexuality in the initiation rite and her becoming 'a person,' is an act similar to the one that Lacan denominates the 'initiation into the symbolic'" ("*Ética, Estética*" 138–39). Yet, her entry into the symbolic is especially treacherous. The relationship between the father and daughter is, as Moniz observes, tense and dependent, due to the tradition that governs their interaction: "the tradition established between them, for one to be the shadow of the other."¹⁶ Marta attempts from the beginning to take an active part in this specular, mimetic relationship:

Marta reconhecia-o sua sombra e construiu aquela silhueta como quem levanta uma casa, projeção de sua vontade, iam crescendo portas, paredes, telhados mil, disfarçados em outros telhados, enigmas soltos, todos abrigando intimidades (15).

[Marta recognized him as her shadow and constructed that silhouette as one builds a house, projection of her will, doors, walls, roofs were emerging by the thousands, disguised in other roofs, unfettered enigmas, all sheltering intimacies.]

The "house" here refers to Marta's symbolic house that she herself constructs, using the father's shadow in order to project and encode her desires and create her own imaginary.

Yet, try as she may to project her own desires and to plot out her own sexual and textual meanings, the father, authority figure that he is, strives to design surreptitiously the very paths she would construct as her own. Indeed, the father's attempts at dominating Marta are enacted as endless chase scenes where he tries never to lose sight of her and to keep her always on paths constructed by him:

O pai aprendera a deslizar como índio, embora algumas vezes perdesse Marta e aquela perda, ainda por horas, doía-lhe pelo corpo. . . . Marta surgia horas mais tarde, até o pai compreender com os anos que antes da filha criar novos caminhos, devia ele inventar outros que fatalmente ela percorreria, sendo ela filha da sua carne (15).

[The father learned how to slink like an indian, although sometimes losing Marta and that loss, even just for hours, caused him pain throughout his body. . . . Marta would appear hours later, until the father understood with time that before the daughter created new paths, he should invent others upon which she would inevitably, fatally travel, her being the daughter of his flesh.]

Space here is entirely abstracted and nonreferential, thus making the father's and Marta's actions all the more symbolically resonant. The paths inscribed here by Marta or the father can thus be read as narrative paths, as ways to make meaning, as plots "written" to be followed. In this passage, it becomes particularly clear that the struggle is one for path-making or plot-tracing control, for signifying authority. By keeping her on *his* tracks, the father assures himself of Marta's being "daughter of his flesh"; that is, he maintains control over her ability to signify and can consequently, as we shall see, use her as a mirror in which to see himself.

This key scenario, of prime importance in understanding the father/daughter dynamic in the novel, is also an eloquent expres-

sion of the most basic challenge facing women's writing: how to make new meanings, how to trace new paths ("novos caminhos"), when, as Irigaray would put it, all the subject positions are being appropriated by the masculine.¹⁷ Indeed, Marta's struggle and *A Casa da Paixão* itself are emblems of this dilemma: in short, how to write *against* and *through* current systems of representation.

So, Marta's struggle is against what I have called the patriarch's plot, both the father's particular plans for her *and* the dominant mode of scripting women as Woman. Summarizing recent feminist theorists, Sally Robinson provides an excellent and succinct account of what is at stake in the distinction between Woman ("a discursive figure most often constructed and mobilized according to the logic of male desire") and women ("actual female persons engendered by and engendering social and discursive practices") (4–9).¹⁸ Of course, women's literature often puts into discourse the contradictions faced by "actual" girls or women as they grapple with the construct Woman. Meanwhile, what I have called the patriarch's plot makes it appear that the only way for girls to become women is through adopting the primarily passive role of Woman. In this way, the patriarch's plot marked out in *A Casa*, the "master narrative" that the father attempts to enforce, is not of his own invention but rather forms part of an already established cultural norm. Referred to only as "pai" [father] throughout the novel, the father in the text virtually personifies the abstract "law of the father," the idea or function of paternal authority according to governing psychosocial codes. Indeed, the father/daughter positions are inscribed here as predetermined—"desde sempre lutaram" / "they had fought since forever" (12)—and their respective roles as pre-established—"ela em oferta, sobre altares que o pai não construía mas respeitava" / "she in offering, on altars that the father had not constructed but respected" (15; emphasis added). That is to say, in many ways, the relationship between Marta and the father is the concretization of abstract cultural laws perceived as always already in place.

But, even though the father's plot is as old as the hills, it nonetheless serves his own immediate psychosexual purposes. Indeed, the father's efforts at marshaling Marta along the road to an appropriate marriage are revealed by Piñon to have little to do with Marta and everything to do with *his* own self-affirmation. The father's incestuous desire is ultimately a desire for a means to knowledge, for a medium between himself and the world, for a conduit to the most inaccessible parts of himself. For the father, Marta embodies at once a treasure and a mystery. When he comes upon her sun-

bathing, the narrator tells us "O pai fingia não ver a rapidez com que fechava as pernas, escondendo tesouros, sabedorias raras. . . . Ela escondia daquele homem seu precioso segredo" / "The father pretended not to see how quickly she closed her legs, hiding treasures, rare wisdoms. . . . She hid from that man the precious secret" (10). The "seu" here is ambiguous; the secret is both "hers" and "his." In fact, the treasure, the knowledge, and the secret are all at once hers in that her body encloses them and yet also the father's in that he views her as embodying the answers to his own enigma. He speculates that Marta, as his offspring, is the very embodiment of the mystery of life, she is "to whom he owed the certainty of all mystery" (20). She is, for the father, mystery incarnate, doubly mysterious in that the mother has died. As such, Marta is both his potential savior (as a connection to his own seeds of life, his own fertility) and his perdition (as an embodiment of that very schism between himself and the immortal origins of life itself). While he refers to her explicitly as "the daughter of his perdition" (29), the father also sees her as his salvation, crying out, after contemplating his desire for his daughter: "it is not for desire, I well know, it is for fear, people like her save our soul. Or one never comes to know God" (18). From the father's point of view, then, Marta becomes the means to know God, his path to reach the divine. She is, in Simone de Beauvoir's terms, his Other.

Indeed, the patriarch's plot here is the very one Simone de Beauvoir has described and critiqued in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir shows how the function of woman as man's Other is similarly one of mediation: between man and nature, man and divine inspiration, man and the gods. It is through the Other, materialized in Woman, that Man seeks to know himself (Beauvoir 139). She is established as everything he is not, timelessly ambiguous, chaotic, and yet mediator between man and nature. Essential to this process then is projection: "he projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates" (Beauvoir 197). This mechanism alienates woman from herself for, as Beauvoir puts it:

She is All, that is, on the plane of the inessential; she is all the Other. And, as the other, she is other than herself, other than what is expected of her. Being all, she is never quite *this* which she should be . . . (197-98).

One could also say that as his Other, the woman's body and sexuality are never her own, but rather are appropriated as a foundation for

patriarchy's symbolic house. As Catharine MacKinnon says specifically of women's sexuality: it is that which is most her own yet most taken away.¹⁹ The father's struggle to maintain control over Marta effectively lays bare the very tactics of appropriation of the female body that feminist theorists have also denounced. Seen in this light, the relationship the father strives to have with Marta is revealed to be a very old (and oft-repeated) story: he is trying desperately to make her Woman, his most complete Other, which involves laying claim to her body and sexuality. So, the struggle in *A Casa da Paixão* is a territorial battle with the terrain in dispute being Marta's body: the very "house of passion" itself.

The conflict arises since Marta's body becomes, as we have seen, the site for the father's self-realization and yet also the source of Marta's own salvation, as she herself had realized even as a young child: "the salvation of the soul is between my legs, I sensed it even as a child" (60). Thus, Marta's quest is in direct conflict with the father's since both involve power and control over Marta's body.²⁰ The father, prisoner of his own passion, pursues Marta incessantly in a mythical and repetitious chase, driven by his desire for the Other, for that which embodies all that he is not. His pursuit of Marta is propelled by an essentially insatiable desire to possess his own truth, not hers. It is not that he desires her or wants to possess her as much as he desires her recognition, which is ultimately the ground upon which he constructs his own subjectivity. As Lacan puts it: "Man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (58). This seems to be precisely the nature of the father's desire in *A Casa*. After the father chooses her horse for her, imposing his will in this seemingly insignificant way, Marta realizes:

Mais lhe parecia que o pai selecionando os animais se reservava o direito de também um dia colocar em sua cama de espinhos um homem vizinho ao seu corpo e a haveria de abraçar, para que invocasse entre gritos de amor o nome do pai, e não por desejar sua carne, mas somente aquela figura era viva e palpitante em cada hora de sua vida, e a que deveria reverenciar mesmo no amor. Olhava-o com raiva (40; emphasis added).

[More so, it seemed to her that by selecting the animals the father reserved for himself the right to also someday place a man in her bed of thorns neighboring her/his body and he

would have to consume her by fire, so that she would invoke between cries of love the name of the father, and not for carnal desire, but only that figure was alive and palpitating in every hour of her life, and she should revere it even in the act of love. She eyed him with rage.]

Again the "seu" of "seu corpo" is ambiguous; the man elected by the father would not only lie next to "her" (Marta's) body but would also somehow be an extension of "his" (the father's) body. Furthermore, as Marta sees it, it is not that he wants her in the flesh; he wants to be the name on her lips at every moment of her own desire, he wants to be ever-important, ever-present to her because he can, in this way, affirm his own transcendence. She is his mirror—"the daughter was the only mirror, [the father] admitted, offering her animals, epic dogs, and jewels" (41)—and he ultimately desires her, pursues her, and strives to control *her*, to affirm *himself*.

In effect, the patriarchal script of gendering, the father's designs on Marta's body, would remake and socialize Marta according to male desire. In this way, Piñon's narrative shows gender identity to be not static and essential but to be constructed with great difficulty through an eminently political process. But the patriarchal plot is ultimately threatened by Marta's relationship to the sun, by her insertion into the masculine lineage (the symbolic), by her insistence on owning her own body, by her appropriation of her sexual pleasure for herself, and, ultimately, by her tutelage of Jerônimo, through which she encourages him to delve into his own body.

The first challenge to the father's dominance is her insertion into the masculine lineage through her very imitation of the father. The father is puzzled and troubled by Marta's willful behavior. He views her, ultimately, as the product of his creative energies ("daughter of his flesh" 15) and is thus alarmed by her own will to creative power. In his despair he consults a physician, demanding an explanation for Marta's inclinations (16). The doctor discovers, in fact, that Marta is copying the father, that she is following in his footsteps even more closely than the father had bargained for: "he discovered that daughter copying what the father concealed, like a slave chained to the slaver's ship" (17). He explains this to the father, "wanting to insinuate that Marta was of the same domain as the father" (17). By her very mimicry, by imitating the father too closely and by aspiring to his signifying powers, Marta challenges the father's dominance and transgresses the father's authority. According to traditional scripts, such a position of signifying power is closed to her

because of her femaleness.²¹ Yet to become a subject of her own story, she must usurp that position. The problem for Marta, ultimately, is how to develop a representational economy of her own while still so limited, "like a slave chained to the slaver's ship."

In spite of the antagonism between them, Marta is obedient to her father in attending mass. The church, in turn, becomes the site of the initiation of the exchange rituals involved in marriage rites yet also the first site of active resistance on Marta's part. The ceremony as enacted in Piñon's narrative tellingly reveals the power relations and "policies" of our sexuality as constructed by social contract.²² This system is portrayed as already in place with the father merely carrying out the role assigned to him: "O homem que era seu pai sabia-se parte da cerimônia e concedia" / "The man that was her father knew himself to be part of the ceremony and conceded" (22). The construction of the sentence emphasizes that the man (the biological male) occupies the social and symbolic position of her father; he is merely acting out his part in the psychosocial script. Marta, however, rejects the men who look upon her as an animal at market. Indeed, it becomes clear that she has come only to express her sexual preference for what Annis Pratt has termed a "green world lover": "The men understood that she came there only to proclaim her disdain, exchanging their flesh for the flesh of the tree" (23). Marta thus prefers the sensuality of the earth and the elements to that of the men offered to her, and insists repeatedly on her sexual autonomy: "I look after the honor of my house" (25), "I look after my own body" (20). So, while the father is concerned about her body as the depository of his family honor ("The father feared for the familiar destiny" 24), Marta claims her house, her body, as her own and takes charge of its well-being. Her will to autonomy, her identification with the sun and the natural world, and her refusal to be initiated into the patriarchal structure as an object of exchange all threaten the very specular dialectic relied upon by the father for his own self-affirmation.

This patriarchal structure is further threatened by the relationship between Antônia, the old maidservant, and Marta. Moniz describes the protean nature of Antônia, how she assumes the many different manifestations of the Magna Mater: she is the destructive Lilith, the protective maternal figure, a cross between human and animal, the primitive mother with ties to the earth, the midwife with overtones of witch or sorceress (Moniz 133). Nonetheless, for all her feminine traits, Antônia is described as androgynous (33), and the relationship between her and Marta is predicated on forces of both

sex and power. What Marta most desires in the old woman are her powers: her knowledge of the earth's secrets, her "virility" (32), her contact with sexuality and powers of reproduction. When Marta goes to the barn to see Antônia, she recalls the time she observed Antônia in the henhouse, picking up eggs and enacting a sort of fertility ritual (32–36). After the highly erotic scene with Antônia and a recently laid egg, the old woman fries the egg for Marta and insists that she eat it. In this way, Antônia's role is like that of a high priestess in Marta's sexual indoctrination.²³ Later, in the barn, Antônia touches Marta sexually and promises her that her salvation lies in her own sexual pleasure: "Antônia slid her hand over and touched Marta's sex and told her with a voice like barbed wire: I am old, ugly, but from here will come your happiness: Marta raised herself up, anointed with Antônia's consecration . . ." (37). Antônia thus initiates Marta to her bodily sexuality and Marta wants this contact to continue, feeling the fertility and sensuality of the egg still in her body, desiring the same type of fiery, transformative sexual experience with Antônia that she has with the sun (37). But Antônia feigns sleep and admonishes her at the end of the chapter in a threatening tone: "Do ovo, nós sabemos. E de teu sexo de sol?" / "About the egg, we know. And what about the sun of your sex?" (38). This line is quite ambiguous and could be read many ways. Yet, by all accounts, this comment indicates Antônia's function of indoctrinating Marta into her carnality, of drawing attention to Marta's sexual relationship with the sun, and, ultimately, of insisting that she look for sexual fulfillment in a more conventional or earthly sexuality. Antônia is, then, priestess in Marta's initiation into a more mundane and specifically feminine sexuality, beyond or in addition to her relationship to the sun.

Just as the father looks to Marta for the key to his secrets, Marta, in turn, looks to Antônia for the answers to her own mysteries: "She tracked Antônia to discover in her the secret, her unsubmitiveness in the face of any virtue" (27). Furthermore, Marta's desire for Antônia is for her powers and for the power Marta herself could have over such a body: "A desire to mount the woman, not to touch her body, . . . but to dominate her . . ." (30). Indeed, the relationship between the two women mirrors the relationship between the father and Marta, as the father's initial thoughts on the matter reveal:

O pai via a aproximação das duas mulheres, uma quase excremento de animal, a outra a filha da sua perdição, compreen-

dendo que a união dos seres raros era uma destinação natural, também ele seguia a filha, fiel e desonrado, . . . Marta perdia-se em Antônia e em quem também ele se perdia? (29).

[The father saw the closeness of the two women, one almost animal excrement, the other the daughter of his perdition, understanding that the union of rare beings was a natural destination, he also followed the daughter, faithful and dishonored, . . . Marta lost herself in Antônia and in whom did he lose himself?]

Yet the father's view on their relationship becomes more negative as he gradually loses control of the situation. He feels threatened by the feminine solidarity between them and views their relationship as a conspiracy: "'For years you and Antônia have been conspiring, I will never forgive you.' The father denounced the lack of order in the house, of which he had never spoken before" (80). Thus the joining of forces of Antônia and Marta precipitates the "disorder" in the father's house, the patriarchal structure is upset by the "goods" getting together, by the women speaking among themselves.²⁴

The threat to the father's authority reaches its climax in the fourth section of the novel, where the father observes Marta communing with the sun. He becomes enraged and at that point decides to bring Jerônimo into the picture. Indeed, Marta's sensuous and mystical relationship to the sun is what most threatens the patriarch's plot.²⁵ The narrator minces no words, clearly telling us that although Marta is her father's daughter, her "longing for the sun reduced him to ashes" (44). Obsessed, the father follows her into the woods where she, the primeval woman, "the first creature after the creation" (44), goes to the river to bathe in a feminine ritual. For him, this ceremony is going to reveal her truth to him once and for all and he will no longer be possessed by his desire for her or for knowledge of the feminine (44). After coming out of the river, Marta lies out in the sun, exposing her nude body to its rays while the father looks on. Her act of sexual autonomy becomes an act of aggression against the father: she removes her clothes "until she exposed the sex, covered with dark grass, and laid down on the ground, nude and white, condemning the father" (45). In seeing her offer herself this way, the father becomes alarmed, taking her challenge as an affront to his authority, vowing to take his revenge and be the one to determine her sexual partner: "He remembered the man in the church, the hand of a tree, he had then judged him

severely. 'If it is a male she needs, I will give her one'" (47). This man (Jerônimo), who has "the hand of a tree," had approached Marta in the church and she had let him touch her because he was neither her father nor one of the other participants in the market/ceremony.²⁶ The father had looked upon Jerônimo severely then, as outside the patriarchal economy. But now the father thinks of bringing him to the house so that he (the father) will be the one to give Marta a man. The father thus decides, in light of Marta's threatening sexual autonomy, to call for Jerônimo as a desperate attempt to maintain his authority over Marta. This, of course, is the same strategy employed before by the father: plotting out even the trails Marta herself would blaze in an effort to control meaning, to be the author of Marta's destiny, and, ultimately, to retain all (signifying) power for himself.

The series of transgressions and affronts to authority we have just examined, in addition to constituting an effective narrative strategy, also bear, I suggest, an oblique critique of the Brazilian political context. Between 1968 and 1974, in response to worker and student protests, the Brazilian military tightened its grip, using increasingly repressive tactics to terrorize and control the country (Alvarez 8). So in 1972 (the year *A Casa da Paixão* was published), the authoritarian regime was at its most restrictive. An authoritarian figure such as the nameless "pai" takes on a sociopolitical significance given the patriarchal dictatorship in place, and indeed at its oppressive worst, when the novel was published. Asked in an interview whether literature's task is to undertake political critique, Piñon affirms her commitment to provoking a change of consciousness but in an indirect way: "The writer denounces, but not in a direct way. If not, he or she will produce a text which is everything but a literary or artistic text. The writer has a commitment to arouse the rage born of consciousness" (interview with Moraes Neto 8). Likewise, in *A Casa da Paixão*, Piñon's explicit attack on sexual and textual authorities, enacted by writing the body in such transgressive ways, can also be read as an indirect critique of an authoritarianism that tried to silence dissent in Brazil in the late 60s and early 70s. In any case, an overt attack at this point would have been out of the question and, as it was, the novel encountered difficulties with state censors because of its unconventional, sexually explicit episodes.²⁷ Piñon herself has the following to say about writing in times of censorship:

Aunque se haya establecido la censura sobre nuestras cabezas, es difícil admitir su existencia. . . . De algún modo u otro

venceremos. Si nos prohíben hablar del cuerpo, . . . significa entonces que pasaremos a discutir lagartos y sus equivalentes históricos. Sabiendo, sin embargo, que los lagartos sólo expresan lo que no podemos asumir públicamente. Las fábulas son un ejemplo de la falta de libertad del hombre. Se esconde detrás de algún subterfugio para engendrar una verdad mejor aunque difícil (interview with Farida Issa 137).

[Even though censorship has been installed over our heads, it is difficult to admit its existence. . . . In some way or other we will triumph. If they prohibit us from speaking about the body, . . . then this means that we will turn to discussing lizards and their historical equivalents. Knowing, nevertheless, that the lizards only express what we cannot assume publicly. Fables are an example of the lack of freedom of man. One hides behind some subterfuge to engender a better, if more difficult, truth.]

Clearly, Piñon views allegorical technique as a viable form of resistance to censorship and lack of textual freedom. Without belaboring the point, I suggest that the power struggle in *A Casa* against a suffocating, authoritarian patriarch as well as against limiting social discourses can be read as an allegory of political resistance. Such a correspondence between the questioning of the father's authority and resistance on a wider, more public level seem to be what Marta herself intimates when she says: "o que se fizer em minha carne se estará fazendo no mundo" / "what is done to my flesh will be done in the world" (68). Seen this way, Marta's defiance of the patriarch's plot takes on not only sexual but social resonance; her resistance to the paternal signifying authority becomes—by reading in context—an indictment of an authoritarian system that sought to remake Brazilian society in its own image.

The Patriarch's Puppet: Jerônimo and Marta's Critique of Masculinity

The transgressions examined earlier are strategies Marta uses in her quest for a sexuality outside the patriarchal economy. Gaining sexual pleasure from the sun, rejecting her role as object of exchange, engaging in a same-sex sensual relationship with Antônia are all transgressions of the traditional gendering sequence and ultimately open possibilities for rewriting the script. Jerônimo's entrance on

the scene considerably complicates Marta's search for sexual autonomy and, in many ways, constitutes the ambiguity and complexity of Piñon's novel. Jerônimo is an ambivalent figure in *A Casa da Paixão* precisely in that he occupies a key role in the patriarch's plot and yet also in Marta's attempted rewriting of the script. While she desires Jerônimo's body, she patently rejects his position within the father's plan. Indeed, her complex ambivalence regarding Jerônimo textually figures a critique of traditional masculinity and becomes a way of calling for a different, more bodily male sexuality.

Jerônimo's role at first seems to have much more to do with his relationship to the father than to Marta, who immediately pegs Jerônimo as a slave to her father, as a mere puppet of the patriarch's plot; "servo do pai" / "servant of the father", "escravo do meu pai" / "slave of my father" Marta repeats over and over. Indeed, Jerônimo follows the movements of the father, obedient to his signals, and the initial scene in the father's house appears to be one of male bonding: "Jerônimo accepted the cigar, he was imitating the father's movements" (51). The meal the father invites Jerônimo to share is akin to a medieval challenge and exchange. Jerônimo rejects the invitation at first on the grounds that eating from a stranger's table would be poison. Yet the father challenges him again, and the younger man, after declining the overtures of the elder, finally agrees to accept the deal. The "contract" involves, however, not only the ritual exchange of a woman between men traditionally used to bind the men to each other (i.e., kinship structures), but also the generational confrontation where boys come up against paternal authority (i.e., the oedipal crisis). Jerônimo agrees to obey the father's desire not only because he will get the daughter or because he can thus associate himself with the powerful father, but because the father promises him his own freedom as well: "Jerônimo obeyed in view of the promise: more than the daughter, you will have freedom afterwards" (54). Here the younger man agrees to his role in order to become subject of his own quest for autonomy, to attain his own degree of signifying power; in short, to "become a man."

Thus the relationship of Jerônimo to the "law of the father" is ambiguous; he feigns obedience to phallic law but simultaneously strives for his own independence and scripts himself into the position of saving the daughter from that law.²⁸ At dinner Marta entertains thoughts of saving herself, of not having to accept this stranger, this representative of her father's will: "The slave of the father would not be her master, thought Marta . . . she could save herself however without depending on the stranger" (52). Later in the same dinner

scene, Jerônimo's textual function becomes even more ambiguous. Antônia brings a towel and water and Jerônimo proceeds to wash Marta's face, removing the wild scent from her skin. All the while he is whispering to Marta, ordering her to open her eyes, asking her to comprehend the ritual to which he is submitting himself in order to save her. Throughout this scene he appears to be engaged both in domesticating Marta (removing her wild scent) and in helping her to revolt against the father. Jerônimo feigns compliance with the father's agenda ("Jerônimo, smiling, pretended to be submissive" 55) and at the same time establishes his own program for convincing Marta of his independence from the father. He is effectively playing both ends against the middle. Marta, in part seduced by the gentleness of his touch, listens to him sympathetically, although she continues to resist him as the "slave of my father" (53). She remains convinced that he forms part of her father's designs on her body and hates him for being an instrument of the father's will. Jerônimo, in turn, is ambivalent; he finds himself taken by Marta such that he is tempted to abandon his preconceived plan in order to please her.

So while Jerônimo's position is complex and ambiguous, it is further complicated by Marta's attempts at re-writing the sexual script. Marta's autonomous sexuality is an affront to phallic law from the beginning of the novel. While Marta is seen in a passionate rapture with the sun in the very opening scene of the text, it is in the middle chapter of the book (59–68) that Marta's unsettling *jouissance* is given full expression as both sexual and textual pleasure. In this section of the narrative, Marta articulates her view of the events up to this point, her relationship to the father, her sexuality, and her dilemma vis-à-vis the arrival of Jerônimo. Beginning and ending with "eu," the chapter breaks even further with traditional syntax; there are no sentences, no paragraphs, only phrases that continually open out onto the next. In this way, the discourse presses onward, yet is circular and never unified under one thesis, thus bearing resemblance to what Cixous and other feminists have denominated *écriture féminine*. Remaining multiple and elusive, this writing explores the complexities and disruptions of feminine *jouissance* and its problems with the "men of this world."²⁹

While it would be both time-consuming and of dubious value to attempt to synthesize the entire chapter, certain themes do emerge that merit close attention in order to understand Marta's critique of traditional masculinity. For example, throughout the chapter, Marta reiterates her view of her sexual relationship to the sun. Marta begins the chapter by celebrating her sexual relationship

to the sun and vowing her fidelity to a sexuality that is otherworldly: "I will sacrifice myself to the sun" (59). Specifically, she articulates her body as sacrificial altar through which and upon which the sun becomes man: "ventre meu, falo teimosa para não esquecer, é de altar, para sol virar homem e me penetrar" / "womb of mine, I speak stubbornly so as not to forget, is like an altar for the sun to become man and penetrate me" (63). While, through the mediation of her body, the sun is embodied in man in order to make love to her, Marta also views herself as an incarnation of the sun's sensual energy: "I am the body of the sun" (65) Thus, both man and woman are articulated as carnal manifestations of the sun. So, even though the sun is often construed as a masculine element, in *A Casa* it signifies primarily a sexuality beyond sexual difference but not obliterating the differences within it: "sol é o meu ventre, sol é o pênis precioso da minha terra encantada . . ." / "the sun is my womb, the sun is the precious penis of my enchanted earth . . ." (62). In this way, the revolutionary sexuality Marta embraces is based on the sun as an erotic energy common to both a masculine and a feminine libido.

It becomes increasingly clear that the light of the sun is absolutely necessary for Marta to formulate a new feminine sexuality, for any revolutionary sexual union to take place. Indeed, I would argue that the insistence on the realm of the elements, on the power of the sun to give sexual pleasure, becomes a strategy for deauthorizing the law of the father, for calling into question the patriarchal structure and its usurpation of all rights in the deployment of sexuality. Marta declares:

Odeio os homens desta terra, amo os corpos dos homens desta terra, cada membro que eles possuem e me mostram, para que eu me abra em esplendor, mas só me terão quando eu ordenar, homem que for herdeiro do meu corpo eu acusarei em via pública . . . (63).

[I hate the men of this earth, I love the bodies of the men of this earth, each member that they possess and show me, in order for me to open myself in splendor, but they will only have me when I ordain it, a man who will be heir to my body I will denounce in public.]

In this way, she rejects the law of the father, the patriarchal system whereby a man "inherits" his right to a woman by virtue of his