

## THE ILLUSTRATIVE LIFE OF MARIANA ALCOFORADO <sup>1</sup>

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*Cortaram os trigos. Agora  
A minha solidão vê-se melhor.*  
Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen,  
“Soror Mariana — Beja”

In 1669, Claude Barbin published in Paris the *Lettres Portugaises traduites en françois*, presenting the epistolary novel of five love letters supposedly written by the Portuguese nun Mariana to her French lover, a soldier who abandoned their love and left her in a state of absolute despair. While Mariana was forsaken by her French military lover, her story of transgressions — a nun breaking her vows, a woman articulating desire, a Portuguese willing to abandon her homeland — would be adopted and adapted for years to come by critics and translators along a literary axis of interest between Portugal, France and England. Perhaps even more telling, her image would attract the attention of illustrators and artists. Mariana represented themes that were captivating, but her story and her persona also became the *tabula rasa* that would be inscribed with the desires and fantasies of those interpreters who sought inspiration for their themes of love and passion in seventeenth-century Portugal. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay could not have been written without the material acquired by the Special Collections Department of the University of Birmingham Library, the personal libraries of Dr. Odber de Baubeta and myself, and the technical assistance provided by D.W. Baubeta. This article is dedicated to Roger S. Berry.

<sup>2</sup> Since Prestage published the third edition of his translation of the *Lettres portugaises* in 1903, it has been generally accepted that the letters were not in fact written by Mariana Alcoforado. This paper is not concerned with questions of authorship, but will focus on visual representations of the fictional Mariana.

The original manuscript of the *Lettres* was presumed to have been written in Portuguese, but has never been found. The first edition of the *Lettres* was presented as anonymous and supposedly translated by Gabriel Joseph de Lavergne de Guilleragues (1628-1685). From the moment they were published in France, the letters became very popular and editions and translations soon appeared in several different countries. Sir Roger L'Estrange (1616-1704) became the first English translator of the *Lettres* in 1678 with the London publication of *Five love-letters from a nun to a chevalier. Done out of French into English*.<sup>3</sup> As Elisabeth Campbell points out:

The novel was so popular and so influential in England and France that the title of the book lent its name to a new genre simply called *portugaises*, a novel of emotional letters from a woman abandoned by her lover.<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons for this popularity — and undoubted sensationalism — may have been the fact that the intense passion shown in the five letters was believed to come from within the walls of a convent in southern Portugal and that they were the true expression of the deepest feelings of desolation of a Catholic nun in love.

The illustrated editions of the *Lettres* appeared earliest and most frequently in French.<sup>5</sup> The illustrations in the French editions, beginning in the seventeenth century, represented Mariana in increasingly sexual terms and presented her both as desiring subject and an object of desire. The French tradition would directly influence the English illustrated editions which are first seen in the nineteenth century with a sexualised portrayal of the nun. From outside Portugal, the story of Mariana has remained an emotional tale of desire and sexuality. Works by such artists as Joanna Gill and Richard Kennedy in England, and Modigliani, Carlegle, Mariette Lydis, Matisse and Marianne

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<sup>3</sup> See "Travels (and Travails) of a Portuguese Nun" (in press), where P.A. Odber de Baubeta examines the English translations of the *Lettres* from the seventeenth century to the present day.

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Campbell "Re-visions, re-reflections, re-creations: epistolary novels by contemporary women, in *Twentieth Century Literature: a scholarly and critical journal*, Hofstra University Hempstead, NY, 41:3 (1995), p. 348, note 4 (332-348).

<sup>5</sup> Information concerning the different editions of the *Lettres* is taken from the second edition of Luciano Cordeiro, *Soror Marianna: A Freira Portuguesa*. Segunda Edição. Ilustrada, correcta e augmentada sobre novos documentos (Lisboa: Ferin & C.<sup>a</sup>, 1891), in which he catalogues the publications of the *Lettres* from 1669 to 1891.

Clouzot in Switzerland and France are used to enhance the *Lettres*, transforming Mariana into an item to be marketed, purchased and kept in a collection.<sup>6</sup>

The story and illustrations of Mariana have played quite differently in her homeland of Portugal where her character became the subject of an intense debate about cultural identity, national pride and respect for the ideals of Portuguese womanhood and Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> The *Lettres* were first published in Portuguese in the nineteenth century, but the Portuguese were intent on reclaiming Mariana as their cultural icon and the pride of the country, depicting Mariana as a virginal nun and a victim of foreign seduction. The conservative Portuguese claims on Mariana did not go unchallenged. In 1969, Eugénio de Andrade, one of Portugal's greatest poets, translated the *Lettres* for a luxury edition with a highly sexualised portrayal of Mariana, following more closely the adventurous French language tradition and challenging the conservative Portuguese views of the nun. It is interesting that in the last decade of Portuguese dictatorship, the character of Mariana would become a focal point for a debate over the definition of Portuguese culture, character and national identity.

This essay will examine the history of Mariana's life in illustration and how her image has been appropriated in different ways for her various national audiences. The exoticism found in the letters has attracted the interest of artists and translators who portray Mariana as a virginal nun, an allegory of love, a cultural and patriotic icon, a sensual woman, and an object of desire to be enjoyed in fantasy. The history of how illustrators have exploited the image of Mariana is indeed varied. Mariana's powerful story of forsaken love continued to captivate readers and viewers long after she was left to her own despair.

## **17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Illustrations in French Language Editions**

Although the nun is identified as "Marianne" in the *Lettres*, her full name and historical identity would not be known until

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<sup>6</sup> In her book *Mariana*, Katherine Vaz points out that "Matisse drew portraits of her. So did Modigliani. Dozens of other artists painted representations, including Georges Braque", p. 323. There are no proofs to support the theory that Modigliani drew portraits of Mariana or that Braque was inspired by her when he painted *Le Portugais*. See William Cloonan, "Braque's *Le Portugais* and a Portuguese nun" in *The French Review*, vol. 63, no. 4, March 1990, pp. 607-616 where the author posits the influence of Mariana on Braque's painting.

<sup>7</sup> See Anna Klobucka's, *The Portuguese Nun: Formation of a National Myth* (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2000) for an account on the debate surrounding Mariana.

the early nineteenth century. If questions about Mariana's identity left readers without an historical portrait of the character during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the mystery of "Marianne's" identity granted illustrators the artistic licence to invent their own visual images for the nun.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 1:** *Lettres d'amour d'une Religieuse portugaise écrites au Chevalier de C. Officier François en Portugal.* The Hague: Jacob Ellinckguyseen, 1696.

The first illustrated edition of Mariana appeared in 1696 in the French edition published at The Hague with the title *Lettres d'amour d'une Religieuse portugaise écrite au Chevalier de Chamilly Officier François en Portugal*. There is only one engraving in this book; it comprises three different elements and an

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<sup>8</sup> I am using the term portrait with a narrative meaning. As António Belard da Fonseca points out in his book *Mariana Alcoforado: A Freira de Beja e as "Lettres Portugaises"*: "não existe, todavia, qualquer retrato da freira bejense, porque a humildade e a clausura de Regra franciscana não se compadeciam com as vaidades das damas fidalgas, que então se faziam retratar por pintores famosos" (Lisboa: Bertrand, 1966, p. 20).

inscription that identifies the engraver as "Harrewyn". The use of the three elements — the nun at her desk, the ship in the background, and the bed scene — would provide the basis for the first and future illustrations. The composition summarises the key points of the *Lettres* obviating the need for additional illustrations that would have increased the cost of the book.

The narrative of the illustration previews the narrative of the letters and guides the viewer in how to understand the text. In the foreground of the picture there is a nun writing at her desk. On the left, in the background, there are a number of ships and a boat pulling away from the coast. On the right, Mariana is sitting on her bed accompanied by Chamilly, the French officer. The composition utilises a triangular formation and the position of the characters to show that the three elements are in fact related to each other and part of one story line.

The three elements of the composition are partially framed by curtains as if the illustration is a stage on which three acts of the same play are simultaneously being performed. Mariana is the *centre* of the stage or composition, although not placed exactly in the middle.<sup>9</sup> She is the most salient element of the engraving and receives the greatest amount of light. Our attention is focused on her because she is the protagonist of the illustration and the viewer can see displayed on her *escritoire* the motto: "C'est ainsi que l'amour s'alume dans le Coeur". While Mariana is prominent in the foreground of the composition, she sits on the far side of what appears to be a stairwell, creating a distance between Mariana and the viewer.

The other two elements are the *margins* of the composition, less well lit and placed in the background. The margins create a horizontal axis, with the ships positioned on the left and the couple on the right. The left margin with the image of the ships setting off from the coast is framed clearly by the window. The right margin with the image of the nun and Chamilly on the bed is framed by the vertical line formed by the column. This process of framing creates a disconnection between the centre and the margins. The centre represents Mariana's real world in the convent, whereas the two marginal elements belong to her memory, to the past she is reliving through the letters.

Gunther Kress states that the elements presented on the left of an image represent the *given*, something the viewer already

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<sup>9</sup> This essay utilises the technical terms used by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996).

knows, whereas the elements presented on the right are the *new*, something which is not yet known. Kress's analysis is applicable to the three elements used in the illustrations of the *Lettres de Mariana*. The image of the ships in the left margin, when taken in combination with the element of Mariana writing her letters, shows the viewer that there has in fact been a departure and therefore the ships on the left constitute our *given*. With the knowledge of the departure, the viewer can now understand the image of Mariana and Chamilly seated on the bed in the right margin as either a memory of the past or as a hope that has not yet been realised — in Kress's framework the *new* or unknown. This composition represents a deliberate ambiguity between past and future. Although the love affair represents the past, the structural composition implies that Mariana could be thinking of it as the future, expecting the return of the French officer.



**Figure 2:** *Lettres d'amour d'une Religieuse portugaise écrites au Chevalier de C. Officier François en Portugal.* The Hague: Antoine van Dole, 1742.

In 1742, the publishing house of Antoine van Dole at The Hague released the edition of the *Lettres* with the same title as the one printed in 1696. There is a frontispiece signed by D. Coster, which closely resembles the Harrewyn engraving. An illustration almost identical to D. Coster's engraving is found in a 1760 French language edition, published by C. G. Seyffert in London. Both the 1742 and 1760 illustrations contain the same three elements already described in the 1696 engraving. Mariana appears as the centre and even though she is again framed, this time by the line created by the shadow on the floor rather than a stairwell, she has been brought much closer to the viewer. She is also at her desk and, although she is holding a pen in her hand, she is not writing. Rather, she is looking up and resting her head on her hand, as if she were meditating or thinking of her love affair with the French officer (right hand margin) and his abandonment of her (left hand margin). As the margins are also closer to the viewer, a much more personal relationship between image and viewer is created. The use of the vase of flowers as a vector gives the reader another perspective of the image that differs from the 1696 illustration. The imaginary diagonal line drawn from the flowers to the ships forces the viewer to look directly at the ships and to consider the visual metaphor of the storm as the representation of the tempest in her mind.

The abandonment is more important than the love affair, which takes place outside the angle, in another frame. Compared with the Harrewyn engraving, these two eighteenth-century illustrations present a much more feminine woman, more beautiful and with more delicate features that make Mariana an object of desire to the presumably male viewer. These two engravings mark the beginning of the tradition of representing Mariana as an object of desire. Although Mariana is still shown as a nun, she is becoming more sexualised. The illustrator has detailed the rope around her waist and a veil covering her hair in order to ensure that she is seen as a nun, but the clothes she is wearing, in spite of their modesty, have some characteristics of eighteenth-century fashionable costume. The short sleeves that end just before the elbow and are wide enough for the chemise-sleeve to peep through, the ruffles of her chemise covering her breast, and the thin and pointed shoes, all transform Mariana into a graceful woman of the eighteenth century.

The first image that explicitly represents Mariana as an object of titillation is the one created by Eisen to illustrate the imitations of the *Lettres* in verse by Claude Joseph Dorat

published in 1770 at The Hague with the title *Lettres d'une chanoinesse de Lisbonne a Melcour, officier français*. Mariana is no longer represented as a nun, but as a beautiful woman. Luciano Cordeiro's description encapsulates the scene: "Marianna, sob a figura de uma formosa mulher, chorosa e afflicta, em desalinho, um dos seios descoberto".<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 3:** Claude Joseph Dorat, *Lettres d'une chanoinesse de Lisbonne à Melcour, officier François precedes de quelques réflexions*. The Hague: Lambert, 1770.

Eisen's illustration omits some of the elements found in the earlier versions. While Eisen continues some of the earlier traditional forms, such as placing Mariana as the centre of the composition, he does not use three different frames, shows only half of the window thus playing down the theme of the departure, reveals Mariana only in her despair and removes the image of her

<sup>10</sup> Cordeiro, p. 334, n. 62.



writing at her desk. The dramatic tension of the illustration, as well as Mariana's pose, suggests sexual desire and consequently the loss of Mariana's virginity. As Philip Stewart points out:

The departing ship visible through the window is a literal, though temporally contrived, aspect of his departure; the bed from which she appears to have just arisen, like the tattered garlands strewn about the floor, allude back to the virtue she earlier willingly sacrificed to him; Cupid, finally, still hiding under the covers though his sorry flame has fallen to the ground, is wholly symbolic.<sup>11</sup>

There is a sense of movement and dynamism provoked by the centre of the illustration, her two outstretched hands directing attention to the active scenes, which converts the scene into a melodrama. The viewer follows the image of Mariana as if she were the conductor of the illustration, her right hand leading our attention to the bed scene and her outstretched left hand pointing to the window and the view of the boats departing. Eisen's Mariana is a woman in torment and despair transfixed in a moment of high drama. His heightened motifs would be taken up by many interpreters to follow in depicting Mariana's abandonment.

### **19th Century: English and Portuguese Illustrations of Mariana**

In 1810, the French scholar Jean-François Boissonade revealed the nun's full name from a note he had found in his 1669 edition, which read:

A religiosa que escreveu estas cartas chamava-se Mariana Alcoforada, religiosa em Beja, entre a Extremadura e a Andaluzia. O cavalleiro a quem estas cartas foram escriptas era o conde de Chamilly, chamado então conde de Saint-Léger.<sup>12</sup>

Only when Jean-François Boissonade made his revelation did "Marianne" cease to be a mere character in the book and

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Stewart, *Engraven Desire: Eros, Image & Text in the French Eighteenth Century* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Cordeiro, p. 84.

become Mariana Alcoforado, a real person and possible author of the letters. Nonetheless, the fact that the original manuscript has never been found, along with the weight of traditional male criticism that a woman could not have written the letters — let alone a nun — created a heated debate and discussion among scholars about the question of authorship of the text.

The history of nineteenth-century illustration of Mariana Alcoforado also reflects a tension over how Mariana should be portrayed in illustration. The English tradition would substantively follow the French tradition of portraying a love story. In Portugal, the discovery of the “true” Mariana would prompt the first publication of the text in Portuguese and initiate a strong national reclamation project to recast the nun in the clothes and poses of virginity, chasteness and symbol of national pride.

### English Illustrations

Mariana’s story and her text were quite popular in England. The text had been translated by Sir Roger L’Estrange and first published in 1678, only nine years after its first appearance in France.<sup>13</sup> Different editions of the L’Estrange translation were published in 1689, 1693, 1701, 1702 and twice in 1716. However, no illustrations were included in any of these editions. It was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century — England’s Golden Age of book illustration — when the first illustrated edition of the *Lettres* appears in England.<sup>14</sup>

The first illustration in an English edition represents a very sexualised Mariana. This frontispiece is the work of Craig and Mackenzie in an 1808 edition translated by W.R. Bowles, with the title *Letters from a Portuguese Nun to an Officer in the French Army*. The book is illustrated with a copper plate and it shows Mariana interrupting her writing in order to contemplate Chamilly’s portrait. There is a caption that says: “I look incessantly at your portrait, which is a thousand times dearer to me than life”. (In this edition, this sentence belongs to the second letter

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<sup>13</sup> From the first translation to modern times, many editions of the story appeared in the English market with titles such as *Love without affectation, in five letters from a Portuguese Nun, to a French Cavalier* (1709), *Letters from a Portuguese Nun to an Officer in the French Army* (1808), *The Love-Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1890), *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1893), *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1903), *The Portuguese Letters* (1941), *The Portuguese Letters: love letters of a nun to a French officer* (1986).

<sup>14</sup> Edward Hodnett, *Five Centuries of Book Illustration* (Aldershot: Gower, 1988), p. 107.

PORTUGUESE LETTERS.



Orang del.

Machinist sc.

*I look incessantly at your portrait  
"which is a thousand times dearer to  
me than life"*

*London: Published by S. A. & H. Oddy Feb 10 1806*

**Figure 4:** Letters from a Portuguese Nun to an Officer in the French Army. London: S.A. & H. Oddy, 1808.

of the five). The combination of the title with the caption and the illustration give the reader enough information to understand the plot of the book. Mariana gazes upon Chamilly, the supposed object of her desire, just as the reader or consumer of the book gazes upon the representation of Mariana.

Male readers could identify with Chamilly and enjoy that adoration at second hand. Mariana is the only character in the image. Unlike the earlier illustrations there is no image of the window with the departure of Chamilly's ship nor any allusion to the bedroom scene with the lovers either in memory or in a future liaison. The darkness of the background contrasting with the brightness of Mariana's dress makes her the salient element of the illustration, the primary focus for the reader. She is wearing an empire-line dress, very fashionable at the time, revealing all her womanly attributes. The viewer knows that underneath her clothes she is completely naked. It seems that Mariana is not wearing shoes, and her toes symbolise an erotic promise.

The English illustration takes up the French language tradition of a sexualised Mariana, but delves deeper into her own expression of that sexuality by focusing on Mariana and her feelings. She is overtly portrayed as a nun; she is set in a church building, her cross lies prominently on her chest. However, she is also portrayed as a very womanly figure who is enjoying her own sexuality. The simultaneous representation of her religious vocation and her obvious expression of desire create a dramatic tension in the image, replacing the previous use of the three elemental scenes that had been used to create a dramatic quality.

### Portuguese Illustrations

The exiled intellectual Filinto Elísio translated the letters into Portuguese in 1819 and although they were first published in Paris, they soon made the journey to Portugal. Soon after, Elísio's fellow exile Morgado de Mateus also produced his own translation in Portuguese. The Elísio and Mateus translations, along with the ongoing debate about the authorship of the letters, inaugurated a new era of Portuguese attention to the figure of Mariana. According to Anna Klobucka, the Portuguese debate about Mariana would represent "an independent process of reception and interpretation, which gradually led to the development of one of the country's most cherished cultural myths".<sup>15</sup>

Portugal's warm reception of the story of the nun ushered in an era of illustration that would counter the French and English traditions and present Mariana as a symbol of national pride and respect. The first Portuguese illustrated edition of the letters

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<sup>15</sup> Klobucka, p. 13.



Soror Mariana (na edição do Morgado de Mateus)

**Figure 5:** *Cartas Amorasas d'uma religiosa portugueza*.  
Porto: Lello & Irmão, 187\_.

appeared early in the nineteenth century in the Mateus translation with the title *Cartas Amorasas d'uma religiosa portugueza*. The drawing represents a nun, “uma freira moça, muito mal desenhada”, in Cordeiro’s judgment.<sup>16</sup>

For the first time in the history of the nun’s illustrations, Mariana is placed in an open space, outside the walls of her convent cell. While the English and the French illustrations were keen to represent her trapped and in despair, the Portuguese illustration depicts a much more contented Mariana, one who is comfortable in the garden of the convent and appears free in her own world. She is still the centre of the image, but the focus of the image is no longer her despair but rather her dignity in

<sup>16</sup> Cordeiro, p. 340, n. 76.

mourning her loss. The lack of drama and passion, along with the nun's black robes that clothe her from head to foot, leave no space for seeing Mariana as a sexual object. The choice of clothing is notable because the Portuguese present her in a traditional black Catholic habit whereas the English and French stretch the limits of imagination by portraying the nun in clothes that more closely resembled fashionable dress of the time.

The Portuguese began the task of not only recovering the text as part of the national literary canon but also emphasising the dignity of Mariana. It is interesting to note that most of the editions in Portuguese were not accompanied by illustrations, and when she was the subject of an illustration the Portuguese were careful to treat their icon with care and respect.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century: Modern French, English and Portuguese Illustrations**

The popularity of Mariana's story and illustrations in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made her a common point of literary and artistic reference. In the twentieth century, Mariana would continue to be a compelling subject capturing the attention of famous artistic figures ranging from Matisse to the Portuguese poet Eugénio de Andrade. The French and English tradition of portraying Mariana in the context of her sexuality and emotional conflict would continue and become more daring as she will frequently be depicted without clothes. In Portugal, Mariana would become the subject of further cultural struggles as the dictatorship seeks to fashion her story in the country's conservative religious and cultural traditions while the nation's most famous poet Eugénio de Andrade would import the French trend of portraying Mariana in her sexual and emotional despair. The conflicting traditions of illustrating Mariana would come in direct conflict under the Portuguese dictatorship.

### French Illustrations<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, publishers saw commercial advantages in associating the *Lettres* with the work of prestigious artists. Thus, in 1917 Pichon of Paris used five drawings by

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<sup>17</sup> The French illustrations merit close attention in their own right and will be the subject of a more extensive study.

Carlègle<sup>18</sup> to illustrate their edition of the *Lettres*. The work came to be considered as a collectable item, a rare book with a limited print run that naturally raised the price of the edition. In this period, Mariana is presented as a clear object of desire. The task of the illustrator was no longer to summarise the content of the text; rather, the illustrator was given the freedom to proclaim the sexual and emotional desire of the nun. Typical editions would include drawings and lithographs used with decorative intentions to embellish the story of Mariana. She is portrayed naked, explicitly showing sexual desires and acting as the object of titillation for the viewer: Mariana is undoubtedly the target of the gaze.

In 1946, a very fine edition of the text appeared in Paris with fifteen portraits of Mariana drawn by Henri Matisse.<sup>19</sup> It seems that Matisse was struck by the content of the *Lettres*, as can be appreciated in the careful designs of Mariana made to adorn the text:

Matisse se passionne pour *Les Lettres de la Religieuse portugaise, Mariana Alcaforado*. Toute son illustration consiste en un accompagnement visuel de la passion amoureuse, un équivalent plastique de la tension tragique et passionnée que vit la religieuse à travers ses lettres d'amour écrites au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il choisit de faire des variations sur le portrait imaginaire de la jeune femme, illumine chaque page de fleurs et de fruits lithographiés en violet et invente des letrines enrubannées.<sup>20</sup>

One year later, another French artist, Mariette Lydis was commissioned to illustrate the *Lettres*.<sup>21</sup> Lydis was an artist and illustrator of fine books. Her main works include titles such as *Sapho*, *L'Art d'Aimer* and *Beggars' Opera* among others. During the second period of her artistic career she specialised in nudity including in her illustrations a great series of transgressive characters such as *femmes fatales*, lesbians, female criminals and prostitutes. Her awareness of transgression made her the ideal illustrator of the *Lettres*. Surprisingly, Lydis did not choose to use nudity in the illustrations. Rather, she stimulated the gaze of the viewer by exposing one breast completely and detailing the contours of her body through the veil of her habit.

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Émile Egli (1877-1937), known for his art-deco posters and who illustrated fine books from 1908.

<sup>19</sup> *Marianna Alcaforado: Les lettres portugaises* (Paris: Tériade, 1946).

<sup>20</sup> <http://victorian.fortunecity.com/stanmer/591/matteriade.htm>, viewed 4 September 2003.

<sup>21</sup> *Lettres de la religieuse portugaise* (Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1947).

In one French language edition published in Switzerland in 1948, the editors again used illustrations, this time a series of nudes by Amadeo Modigliani, to heighten the public's interest in Mariana's story.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in the twentieth century, several of Europe's greatest artists, Henri Matisse included, developed the sexualised tradition of portraying Mariana, doing away with her habit and fully revealing her sexuality. Mariana is elevated in status as famous artists draw upon the popularity of her tale in order to suffuse their images with a narrative and historical power. Mariana transcends her own history and becomes a modern symbol for lost love and despair.

### English Illustrations

In the twentieth century, several important English art critics, translators and artists continued to focus attention on Mariana. In 1929, the *Lettres* were illustrated for the first time by a female artist, Joana Gill, born in 1910. Gill designed and painted the frontispiece of *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, which was published in 1929 in Wales by Francis Walterson.<sup>23</sup> The engraving was done by R. J. Beedham, who had learned his craft with Eric Gill, Joana's father. Eric Gill had been well known sculptor and engraver who is equally remembered as a fervent Catholic convert. It is interesting that his daughter should have chosen the famous Catholic Mariana as her subject matter.

Gill represented Mariana as a nun, in habit and sandals, an approach which is quite distinct from previous sexual appropriations of the character. Gill also refrained from portraying Mariana in the conservative, nationalistic Portuguese tradition. Rather, she sought a compromise between these sexualised and conservative traditions and presented Mariana as an attractive woman dressed in a nun's habit.

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<sup>22</sup> Modigliani had died more than two decades before the publication of this edition. The publishers of the book presumably purchased some of Modigliani's sketches from his estate. This probably explains the close resemblance between the drawing of a female bust chosen as frontispiece for the *Lettres* and Modigliani's sculpture *Tête*, exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Coincidentally, the other three drawings included in the main text share similarities with some of the many female nudes that Modigliani painted during his lifetime. Examples of this could be *Sleeping Nude* (1916), *Sleeping with Arms Open (Red Nude)* (1917), and *Reclining Nude* (1917), among others. Nonetheless, this edition marked the beginning of Mariana's nudity in illustration, which would be followed in France, England and even Portugal.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Walterson was the pseudonym of Donald Attwater, a close family friend who married Eric Gill's sister Enid's daughter and published some of his writings.

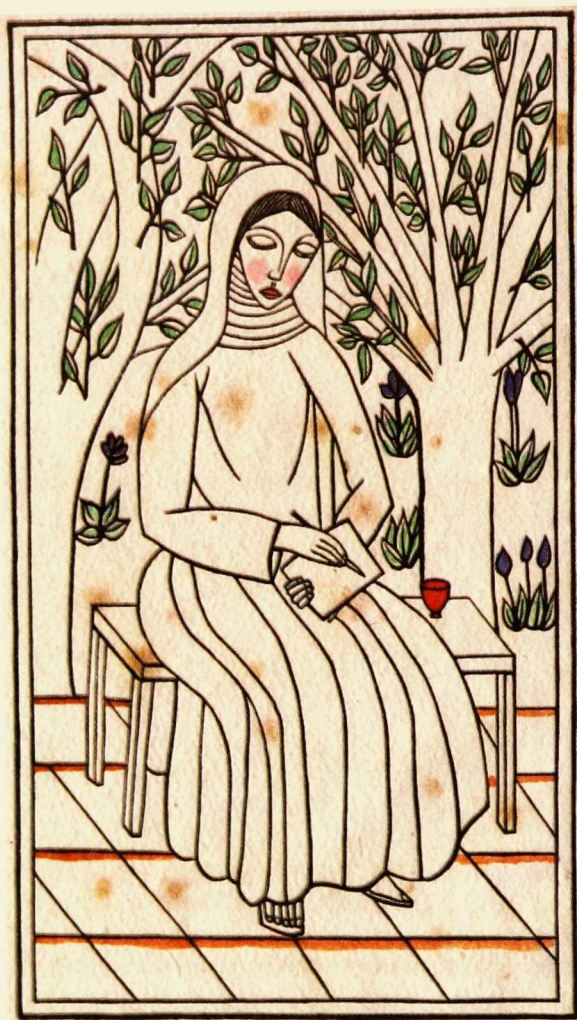




**Figure 6:** *Lettres de la religieuse portugaise*. Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1947. With thanks to Oliver Hazan.

Gill takes Mariana out her cell and places her in the garden of the convent. She is shown writing one of her letters. Setting her in the outdoors recalls the illustrations utilised by the Portuguese editions of the *Lettres*, emphasising her “freedom” and dignity. In writing her letter, the narrative of the illustration shows the sadness and submission of a young attractive nun. A major characteristic of the design is its simplicity, which reflects the simplicity of the character herself. In order to create a sense of drama in the simplistic image, Gill turns to another device used for the first time in the portrayal of the nun; she employs a red colour in her cheeks and lips adding to her sexual appearance. Gill also picks up the motif of colour in the natural setting linking the character to her environment.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hodnett, p. 239.



**Figure 7:** *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun*. Talybont Dyffryn, North Wales: Francis Walterson, 1929.

In February 1956, the well-known art critic Raymond Mortimer joined the publishing house Hamish Hamilton and the translator Lucy Norton in putting forward *Letters from a Portuguese Nun*. Mortimer had been quite keen on including the illustrations of Mariana's writing and pictures from her home town of Beja that he wished to take from Manuel Ribeiro's *Vida e morte da Madre Mariana Alcoforado* (1640-1723) and reproduce in the new English translation. Mortimer, who would write the preface to the translation, sent the publishers a letter advocating



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HAMISH HAMILTON LTD.

90, Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.

Raymond Mortimer,  
5, Canonbury Place,  
London, N.1.

February 28, 1956

Dear Mr. Mortimer,

Many thanks indeed for bringing in the copy of Ribeiro's book on the Portuguese Nun.

We have all been discussing the illustrations in it here, and have decided finally against reproducing any of them in our edition. The plates of the nun's autograph letters are too untidy looking and also difficult to reproduce well from; and though there are specimens of her signature earlier in the book, we could not see one of these fitting easily into the text.

We are most grateful to you for letting us see the book, which I am enclosing. And we still await page proofs from the hamstrung printers.

Yours sincerely,

*Richard Brain*

RTB/BC  
Encl.

DIRECTORS: HAMISH HAMILTON (Managing Director), D. W. BROGAN, ROGER MACHELL, H. J. EASTWELL.

**Figure 8:** Letter from Hamish Hamilton Publishing House to Raymond Mortimer, 1956.

the use of the illustrations and revealing the depth of his interest in the subject matter of Mariana's story as well as her personal history. They turned down his proposal (see letter reproduced below), but did go forward in publishing the new translation.<sup>25</sup>

In 1986, Mariana would become the subject of a speciality book published by the Whittington Press, including a series of

<sup>25</sup> The original letter was discovered by Sonia Perez Villanueva and Dr. Odber de Baubeta in a second-hand copy (presumably Mortimer's own) of Manuel Ribeiro's *Vida e morte da Madre Mariana Alcoforado* (1640-1723) (Lisboa: Sá da Costa, 1940).

simple yet sexual drawings that adorned this luxurious edition. The English artist Richard Kennedy was inspired by Matisse's interest in Mariana.<sup>26</sup> Through a series of ten different illustrations, Kennedy portrays Mariana either on her own or accompanied by Chamilly. He also makes use of two of the three elements that appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century illustrations. In the first, fifth, and eighth images, Mariana is portrayed as a nun, writing at her desk or contemplating her situation. In these images she is the only and central figure of the composition. There is no setting for these images; she is taken out of space and time. In the second image, she is on her bed, but on her own and dressed in her nun's habit. In the third and the seventh images, she is portrayed naked in the bedroom and in the company of Chamilly. The fourth image is of Chamilly alone, on his horse, proud and powerful following the bed scene. This is the first time that an illustrator dares to draw Chamilly, breaking the perspective of the female writer who is supplying the narrative of the story. None of the images presents the departure scene; there is no window; there are no sailing ships.

The illustrations are intended to tell in pictures the story of Mariana; however, the illustrated story differs substantially from the details included in the letters. The images, for example, exaggerate the bedroom scenes. Kennedy's third and seventh images portray Mariana in sexual dalliance with Chamilly, taking the romance much further than the details included in the text or in previous illustrations which merely showed the two talking on a bed. The bed scene that had been traditionally relegated to the background, has been moved to the foreground and the scene carries much more erotic weight. The sensuous portrayal of Mariana and the embellished story told in the images reflect the exclusive nature of the edition: a specially produced book utilizing fine quality paper and intended for the owner to have on display.

### Portuguese Illustration

In Portugal, the Salazar dictatorship began in 1926 and his successor Caetano would remain in power until 1974. As pointed

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<sup>26</sup> In a catalogue provided by the Whittington Press we find the following information: "The idea for this book had been sparked off by seeing a copy of Teriade's edition of the text, illustrated by Matisse and published in 1946, at the *Hommage à Teriade* exhibition in London in 1975. Richard Kennedy did the illustrations, his wife Olive the translation and foreword, but sadly our enthusiasm for the book was never justified by the sales."



**Figure 9:** Third image of Mariana in *Letters from a Portuguese nun*. Andoversford, Gloucester: Whittington Press, 1986. Reproduced with the kind permission of John and Rosalind Randle at The Whittington Press.

out by Klobucka, while the dictatorship would see cause to remove Mariana's letters from the national curriculum, "Mariana was hardly banished from the historical pantheon of celebrated heroines".<sup>27</sup> The image of Mariana displayed in the 1940 World Exhibition in Lisbon is a striking symbol of national and patriotic sentiment.

In the 1940's, Mariana is the symbol *par excellence* of the *Estado Novo*. Jorge Barradas' image presents Mariana as a powerful representation of superiority, adoration and success, becoming the allegory of the regime. Under the dictatorship, Mariana continues her ascension as the ultimate symbol of superiority — modest and pure in her dress, powerful and never wavering in her Catholic womanhood. This image of Mariana would, however, be challenged by those leading a new artistic undercurrent in Portuguese society, a trend heavily influenced by the European artistic movements of the time.

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<sup>27</sup> Klobucka, p. 91.

In 1969 an elegant bilingual edition of the text was presented to the Portuguese reading public, translated by the canonical poet Eugénio de Andrade and illustrated by his friend the artist José Rodrigues. Mariana's representation in the 1969 edition is unique in the Portuguese history of the illustrations of the *Letras*. Mariana is displayed without clothes in a highly sexualised pose similar to those images presented by the French in the 1940s. Many books presenting such sexuality were banned during the dictatorship, but paradoxically the Andrade edition was not.<sup>28</sup> The reputation of Mariana as a patriotic symbol and the recognition of Andrade as a "great" Portuguese poet were perhaps mitigating factors that allowed the edition to escape censorship.

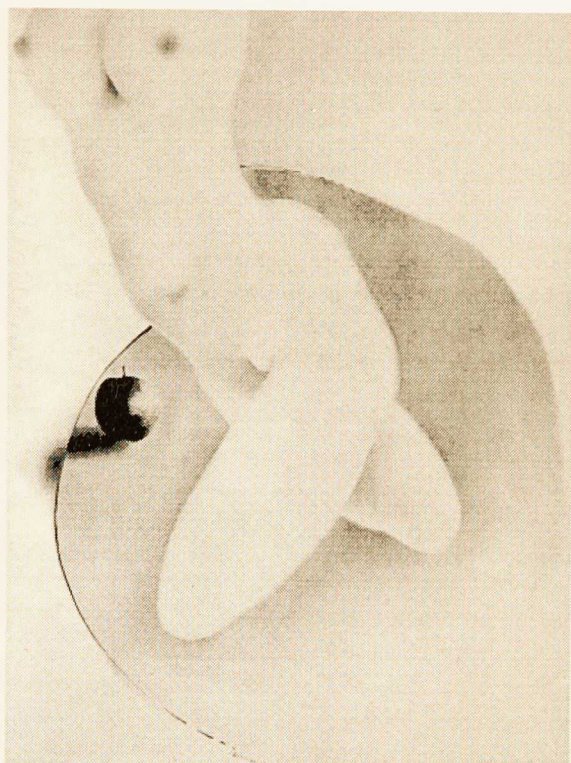
Andrade's book is decorated with five illustrations where Mariana's body and sexuality represent the focal theme of the compositions. The illustrations narrate the story of Mariana's predicament; however, the illustrated story departs from what is included in the text of the letters. The first drawing shows two legs, crossed and closed with an apple lying nearby, an obvious symbol of her temptation and future carnal knowledge.

The narrative continues in the second image as the viewer can see a naked Mariana approaching the apple, a symbol of Mariana's appropriation as a sexual object. It is interesting to note that Mariana's head is outside the frame, further emphasising the viewer's attention to her body. In the third image, the perspective is of Mariana from behind and we see a back view of the naked woman reaching for the apple, accepting the temptation. The viewer can see the back of her head and her long flowing hair. In the last image, the illustrator presents Mariana's body with a clear triangular drawing of her pubic hair, a symbol of Mariana's loss of virginity after she has succumbed to the temptation of the apple.

Andrade's edition brings the French sexualised tradition home to Portugal and places it in direct conflict with the conservative Portuguese view of Mariana. Andrade's prestige as a poet provided him with some artistic space to take risks, even with an icon of such national importance. Although this illustrated book was only released in a limited edition, intellectual circles of Portugal would receive a newly visualised Mariana, a highly sexualised depiction of a seventeenth-century nun, an image intended to be the object of the viewer's gaze.

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<sup>28</sup> It should be remembered that *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, written by the three Marias was banned by the dictatorship as late as 1972.



**Figure 10:** Second illustration in *Cartas Portuguesas atribuídas a Mariana Alcoforado*. Porto: Inova, 1969. Reproduced with the kind permission of José Rodrigues and the Fundação Eugénio de Andrade.

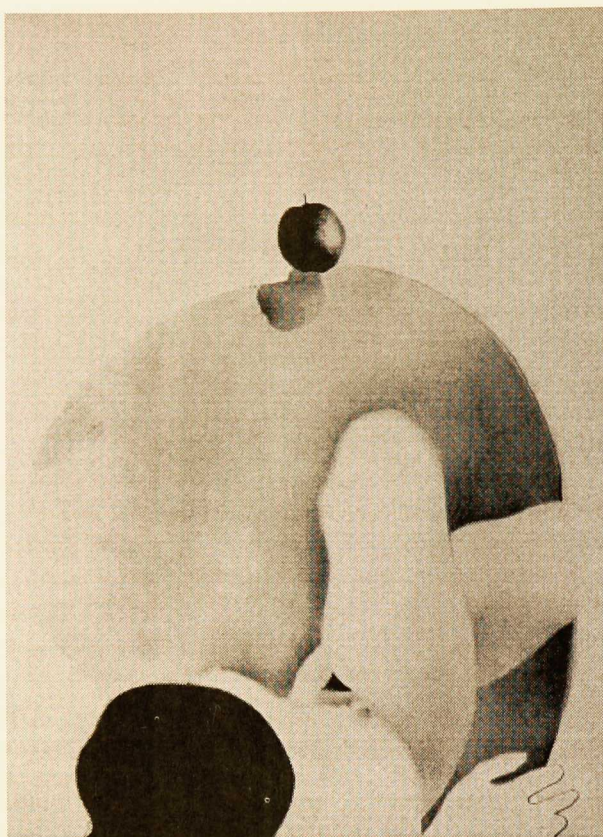
### **Final Thoughts on the Illustrative Life of Mariana**

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the mystery of the *persona* behind the letters attracted the attention of those critics, translators and illustrators who came forward to fill in the story of Mariana. In her recent book on Mariana, Anna Klobucka states:

Generation after generation, legions of *alcoforadistas* of the most diverse stripe have attempted to write Mariana into existence, to decipher the material reality of her female body and the cultural identity of her Portuguese voice in the rhetorical cadences of the letters.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Klobucka, p. 18.



**Figure 11:** Fifth illustration in *Cartas Portuguesas atribuídas a Mariana Alcoforado*, Porto: Inova, 1969. Reproduced with the kind permission of José Rodrigues and the Fundação Eugénio de Andrade.

Moreover, the uncertainty of Mariana's true identity until the nineteenth century gave illustrators the artistic freedom to create a persona for the nun. Marianne the *nun* became Mariana the *woman*, stripped of her habit and explicitly manifesting sexual desires. Boissonade's verification of her real existence in the early nineteenth century would intensify the French and English interest in the *Lettres*, but also bring to the attention of the Portuguese the history of their own cultural heroine, one who had been abandoned by her foreign lover. Mariana's life in illustration reflects the readers' emotional needs for the nun; on the one hand to see in her a forbidden love story that crosses boundaries of nationality and reaches into the most protected sanctums of the convent, and on the other hand to restore dignity to a Portuguese Catholic woman who wrote from her heart.



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